Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity

Jacqueline Rangel
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Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity

By

Jacqueline Rangel

Claremont Graduate University
2024
Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Jacqueline Rangel as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Education.

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Abstract

Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity

By
Jacqueline Rangel

Claremont Graduate University: 2024

In the United States, Latinas are underrepresented in obtaining PhDs that lead to high level professional careers and academia. This may be due, in part, to patriarchal academic institutions and approaches that have historically devalued the cultural experiences and identities of marginalized populations, including Latinas in higher education. However, research suggests that mentorship can support Latinas in successfully obtaining PhDs and disrupt institutional norms and practices. Framed by LatCrit, Mestiza Consciousness, and Mujerista Mentoring, this study sheds light on the experiences of twenty-four Latinas who earned PhDs-with or without mentors during their doctoral journeys. As such, the purpose of this study was to understand the role of mentorship for Latinas who obtained PhDs while negotiating their cultural or gender identities. A qualitative research design using Testimonio methodology was used to reposition Latinas with PhDs as central to the analysis. While each Doctora’s experience was unique, common themes across Testimonios included navigational barriers, identity through mentorship and scholar familia, cultural and gender assets, and feminist energy. These themes reflected tensions and barriers experienced through racism, sexism, classism, and ableism that guide normative academic research. These findings are less surprising if we consider the critical role of mentorship in these ways: funding, finding postdoctoral positions in higher education, providing emotional support along with cultural competency, and being in their scholar familia circle. The stories of these successful Latinas add to the existing research by exposing their experiences and how they claimed space grounded in their community and found the right “tribe” to maintain their cultural and gender identity while obtaining a PhD.
Keywords: Mentorship, Testimonios, Doctorate, Latina, Scholar Familia, LatCrit, Mestiza Consciousness, and Mujerista Mentoring.
Dedication

Para hacer realidad un gran sueño,
el primer requisito
es una gran capacidad de soñar.
el segundo es la persistencia.

CÉSAR CHÁVEZ

This work is a tribute to my Indigenous and Mexican ancestors.

First, I would like to honor my father with this dissertation. My courageous father left his small town and family in Texas at 18 to follow his dreams. Dad, your dreams and legacy will live on through my actions in life. Thank you for making me feel loved, wanted, and proud of who I am. I wish you could see how far your love has taken me. I carry you in my heart forever.

Secondly, I dedicate this to my husband for his strength and unconditional love. Rob, you have been the best life partner in the world. Thank you for loving me enough to support me as I pursue my dreams. The past thirtysomething years have been beyond my wildest dreams. Love is powerful. Cheers to our future. Team #Ranken.

Lastly, with love, I dedicate all my heart, soul, and scholarly work to my daughters/best friends, Brittany and Isabel. You both inspired my thoughts and actions through the tears and smiles and with every written word in this dissertation. I believe in both of you and pray that one day, we will no longer exist in the margins. Dream BIG, climb your mountain, and remember my failures eventually led to my successes. Make a difference for not only yourselves, but the next generation. Explore and find your voice in this world.
Acknowledgments

First, I would like to thank God for all the blessings in my life and for the capability to dream big. After my kids became adults and moved out, I knew it was time for me to earn a PhD. At this time, we lived in Claremont, CA, where I made an appointment to talk to the director of Urban Leadership, Dr. Matsui, which changed the trajectory of my life. Thank you, Dr. Matsui, for making me feel like I belonged in the doctorate program, answering my emails, and meeting with me after you retired.

To my amazing Chair, Dr. Reagan, you hold yourself to the highest standards with grace, elegance, and poise. I am profoundly grateful for your guidance, transparency, and encouragement to tell my story. I am honored to have you as a role model. Thank you to my dissertation committee, Dr. Bermúdez, I have had the great fortune to learn from you as the first Latina professor I have ever had. Your friendship and wisdom made me a far better researcher. Dr. Luschei, I appreciate the scholarly instruction. **Te doy mil gracias.** For my professor, Dr. Gipson, your concierge service at CGU was outstanding. Thank you to Professor Dr. Paik for solidifying my topic and giving me the benefit of the doubt.

Words of thanks seem inadequate for the extraordinary Latina PhDs in this study. To the Participants, my scholar familia, this dissertation would not be possible without you. Thank you for paving the way for those that follow. The impact your stories had on this dissertation was not only inspirational but also instrumental in helping me complete my PhD.

I want to acknowledge the collaborative experiences I have shared with my cohort, especially Camani, I am humbled to have you as a friend. A shout out to Maritza, who made me feel safe and respected. A special appreciation is extended to Rosemary for making time and giving me great advice during my doctoral journey. **Para mi mejor amiga,** Maria, during my PhD.
journey and in life, you were there for me to lend a helping hand when I needed it the most. Thank you for believing in me.

Fortunately, I had safe spaces on campus and Zoom during the pandemic, such as Doctorxhood Club, CSLA, and the Writing Center. The resources available for students made this study possible. To my cousins who have cheered me on, Ismael, I will never forget when you jokingly said that you would not croak until you attended the commencement ceremony for my doctorate. I wish you good health and hope you are here for much longer. To my younger cousin Jake, thank you for the calls, messages, and visits from out of state. Your determination to succeed will outweigh all else. I must mention my four-legged therapists, Stella and Rosa, for being by me throughout the pandemic and bringing me so much joy.

Lastly, to all the Latinas who are stuck at community colleges, I believe in you! I am proof of the possibilities that lie ahead. Find a mentor and be true to yourself, vamos adelante.
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The research topic of Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity is valuable to me because of my identity, personal and professional experiences, and academic research as a first-generation Latina student in a PhD program and not having a mentor. I am acutely aware of the multitude of challenges facing Latinas, such as the multiple maternal roles we carry as opposed to Latinos, as well as financial burdens, sacrifices that differ between a son and a daughter or a husband and a wife, space and race-shaped trials, and liabilities and assets within my community. Teaching high school for 26 years in public education is my professional experience, with an end goal to create higher education pathways for low-income and first-generation BIPOC, focusing on mentorship for Latinas in higher education. I learned the importance of connecting research to my past, present, and future through academic research.

I acknowledge my positionality as a Latina researcher and how it influences my academic trajectory. Considering the low representation of Latinas in doctorate programs, many successful PhD Latina leaders have indicated that their first mentors were family members, and most identified their mothers as their primary mentors (Méndez-Morse, 2004). Several significant differences exist in my experiences as a Mexican American woman, mother, scholar, teacher, and mentor. My childhood and innocent upbringing were based on both parents' full attention and love. My ancestors were born in Texas before the US annexed Mexico. My mother and father were born and raised in different parts of Texas. However, my parents' lack of education resulted in their absence of knowledge and guidance in my formal educational path. I empathize with my parents’ education, based on their negative experiences deeply rooted in Texas culture; they both attended segregated schools in the 1950s and 60s. In the Southwest,
states like Arizona, Texas, California, Colorado, and New Mexico institutionalized “English only” policies (Valenzuela, 1999). In Texas, this often meant that Mexican American students endured corporal punishment (Saldaña, 2013) for speaking Spanish in school. Discrimination in Texas schools generally accompanied the Latina/o elementary and secondary school experience, which included my parents’ experiences of being punished and slapped on the hand with a ruler when the teacher felt it was warranted, mainly when Spanish was spoken at school. Listening to these stories from my parents’ past inadvertently affected my career trajectory as an educator.

In contrast to my earlier years, adulthood is very different. My parents divorced when I was 18 years old. As a young mother, I left California with my three-year-old daughter and boyfriend to pursue an education at Indiana University. My then-boyfriend (now husband) had just served four years in the United States Marine Corps. We all returned to his home state of Indiana to pursue our dreams of obtaining a college degree. We were married after we moved to Indiana, and I began classes at Indiana University. I encountered unique individual and structural barriers without supportive family members or mentors during this scholarly journey. For example, I did not know about establishing residency in a state before attending a public college, nor did I realize what a “non-subsidized” loan meant. in 1998 I received my bachelor’s degree from Indiana University, I began teaching Spanish in Indianapolis’ public school system. During my teaching experience, I completed a master’s degree from Indiana Wesleyan University while pregnant with my second daughter. When I received my Master of Science in Education in 1998, I was in the 2% of Latina women in Indiana to have received a master’s degree—a true testament to the oppressive educational system in the Midwest. As a part of the 2% of Latinas in the Midwest to earn an advanced degree, I concur with bell hooks (2010), who wrote that we are bombarded too often by a colonizing mentality from which few People of Color
manage to escape. This mentality not only shapes awareness and actions but also provides material rewards for assimilation far exceeding resistance gains. A more humanizing experience is needed, such as experiencing a meaningful relationship with a mentor sensitive to the Latina culture.

When my master’s degree was completed, we returned to my birth city, Los Angeles. My teaching career in Los Angeles County began in 2000. In my experience of teaching in Los Angeles County in a district of 70% Latina/o student population, many students needed more study skills, social and cultural capital, and home support to prepare for college and develop their career goals. It was this realization that led me to the importance of mentoring. I had a Latina teacher for the first-time during year one in the PhD program. The lack of Latina representation in the educational system, combined with a lack of mentorship, negatively marks the educational trajectory for most Latinas. Representation and mentoring are vital in all fields, specifically in academia, for Women Faculty of Color who face marginalization, including the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, gender, and prejudice. Lloyd-Jones and Jean-Marie (2020) suggested that effective mentoring promoted the retention, advancement, and overall success of Women Faculty of Color in the academy. Furthermore, mentoring contributes to the success of all BIPOC students.

I began mentoring at Rio Hondo Community College through the Community Partnership for Teacher Pipeline three years ago. During this time, I met a student who walked away from a full-ride scholarship from the University of California, Berkeley. He felt alone and out of place with no one to turn to for emotional, social, and academic support. At this point, I was in my third year of the PhD program and desperately searching for a mentor to help me navigate the doctoral journey. This pivotal moment of realizing the importance of mentorship
along with assurance from Dr. Paik, prompted me to solidify my dissertation topic: to investigate the doctoral journey of Latina students with or without a mentor. Challenges like mine of being a woman of color, a first-generation college student, a mother, not having a Latina teacher/professor until my first year of PhD classes, and never having a mentor are among the many negative aspects Latinas face in academia; therefore, it is essential to establish effective countermeasures to create educational pathways for Latinas with mentors in doctoral programs.

As I think back to my parents’ educational experience, the significance of this project is more than a dissertation. My father passed away in 2004 in his sleep from a heart attack. After his death, I learned how to exist with a broken heart. My biggest cheerleader and supporter were gone, and I felt lost. My curiosity about his upbringing will never be known.

In my positionality as a Latina researcher and PhD candidate, I recognize where I stand with the participants in this study. Our experiences paralleled many commonalities in our lives and workplaces. In March 2020, I attended Coffee Hour with Dr. Daniel Solórzano, a networking reception through the Chicano Latina Student Affairs division at Claremont Graduate University. In a small group setting, I asked him several social justice questions. Dr. Solórzano’s answers influenced me to use Critical Race Theory as a framework. I took his advice to include this question in my research: “How prevalent is the cultural deficit?” Dr. Solórzano is a CGU alumnus and described the safe space on campus where he met other Latinos to think, nurture, and help each other. He recommended that we each find a mentor who believes in our work. His words have had a lasting effect on my research. In their article “Critical Race and LatCrit Theory and Method: Counter-storytelling,” Solórzano and Yosso (2000) focused CRT on the outsider, mestiza, transgressive knowledge and brought to light that if theory and expertise
have been used to silence People of Color, it can also be used to empower People of Color and give them a voice.

Furthermore, I used Testimonio as a methodological tool used to capture and empower the Doctoras’ essential stories in this study. Reflecting on the time spent taking extra courses in Chicano Studies and Women of Color Feminism, I feel deeply grateful for the lessons learned. In many instances, I reprimanded myself for not assimilating enough socially, academically, and religiously. After taking the extra courses, I realized my insecurity was rooted in class and culture. I am now free to be who I choose, and I hope to make a difference for Latinas in the deficit narrative we face in doctoral programs.

As I investigate the intersectionality’s of oppression, education, and the marginalized, I try to piece together the complexity of being a Mexican American student and the history of my parent’s education while disrupting the systemic oppressions for future generations. This study contributes to the limited literature on mentoring by investigating potential gender and cultural differences as told through twenty-four PhD Latinas’ Testimonios on their doctoral journeys.
Chapter 1: Background and Statement of the Problem

As a Latina parent, scholar, and educator for over three decades, I have experienced and witnessed the daily systemic barriers facing Latino students. The education of Latino students in U.S. public and higher education trajectory tends to be directly connected to racialized systems and deeply rooted in deficit-oriented educational policies (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). There is significant inconsistency in higher education regarding acceptance rates for marginalized populations within and across institutions.

Between 2000 and 2010, the Latino population in the U.S. increased by 43% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). However, as the largest minority group in the country, Latinos have not experienced equitable college access or completion outcomes. An example of inequitable college completion comes from the U.S. Census Bureau, which revealed that in 2019, 40.1% of non-Latina/o Whites, age 25 and older, held a bachelor’s degree or higher. During the same year, the percentage of African Americans, age 25 and older, with a bachelor’s degree or higher was 26.1%; Asians were at 58.1%, while Latinas/os were at 18.8% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). In higher education, Latinos are significantly underrepresented on university campuses, and those who overcome K-12 systemic barriers are tracked into community colleges (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Even within community colleges, Latino students have a slight chance of transferring to a 4-year university (Bernal & Alemán, 2017). Forty percent of community college students are

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1 One example is the historical background of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), which established the roadblocks that Latinos face in entering federal-funded higher education institutions. Neither the federal government nor missionary organizations created historically Hispanic higher education institutions (MacDonald & García, 2003). Since the surging Latino population of the 1980s and 1990s Latinos have been designated as an ethnically identifiable group. Developed in 1986, the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities enlisted Congress to formally accept Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) in 1992 and distribute federal funds for these institutions along with the reauthorization of Title III of the Higher Education Act of 1992 which secured eligibility for federal funds for HSIs (MacDonald & García, 2003), defined as postsecondary institutions with 25% or more Latinos full-time enrollment as well as 50% or more low-income students (MacDonald & García, 2003).
Latinos and remain clustered in 2-year Community Colleges, compared to 25% of White students (Fry, 2002).

Disparities exist for Latinas, particularly in other measures of educational attainment and professional success (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017; Paik et al., 2020). Inequities are apparent in Latinas earning the lowest number of terminal degrees, PhD, and EdD in the United States, compared to White, Asian American, and African American women. For example, in 2014-2015, White women earned 66.7% of doctoral degrees, Asian American women earned 12.7% of doctoral degrees, African American women earned 10.3% of doctoral degrees, and Latinas earned 7.3% of doctoral degrees earned by women (National Center of Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). Furthermore, in 2018-2019, of all women who completed doctorates, only 8.3% identified as Latina (NCES, 2019).

Previous research has also established that Latinas are among the most educationally disadvantaged and attend schools where teachers have little knowledge of their cultural or linguistic backgrounds; this reality leads to Latinas disengaging from school (Valenzuela, 2005). Due to the rapidly growing Latino population, scholars have pointed to the persistent educational achievement gap and income gap between Latinos and White Americans as serious concerns (Lechuga-Peña & Lechuga, 2018; MacDonald & Garcia, 2003; García & Henderson, 2015).

To this end, research has suggested that mentorship could challenge this oppression and transform educational spaces to support Latinas in navigating the doctoral journey more successfully (Saldaña et al., 2013). Cavazos (2016) testified that for Latinos and other students of color in academia to overcome challenges, they need mentors to negotiate their background successfully within academia. Figueroa and Rodriguez (2015) reported mentoring as a professional development relationship meant to demystify, enrich, and stretch one’s thinking
about being an influential scholar, model collegiality, and frame one’s work as a valuable resource to those outside the university. As such, mentoring may contribute to increasing the number of Latinas earning doctorates. Researchers have examined the role of mentoring for Latinas as they pursue undergraduate degrees (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005). However, more research is needed on the role of mentors in helping Latinas achieve their doctorate degrees (García & Henderson, 2015). Further, there is limited research on whether the mentors have supported Latinas in negotiating their cultural and gendered identities or how mentors have affirmed or denied the identities of Latinas before and during the doctoral journey.

**Purpose of the Study and Overarching Research Questions**

Using the frameworks of LatCrit (Solórzano & Bernal, 2001), Mestiza Consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1987), and Mujerista Mentoring (Villaseñor et al., 2013), I designed this qualitative study with a twofold purpose in mind. The first aim was to elevate the voices of twenty-four academically successful Latinas who earned their PhD and understand the role of mentors before, during, and after their PhD journeys. The second aim was to understand the cultural and gender identity of Latinas with a PhD and how they successfully negotiated their identities to navigate higher education. Therefore, the primary research questions based on the dual purpose of this study are:

- How do Latinas who earned PhDs describe the role of mentoring in supporting their degree completion in higher education?
- How, if at all, did Latinas who earned PhDs negotiate cultural and gender identities in academia with a mentor?

Throughout this dissertation, I use the term Latina, but I want to acknowledge that the singular-identity term excludes all Latino cultures. This study is meant to utilize the term “Latina” to include pluralistic identities of women with different pasts, different levels of social privilege, and who speak different forms of Spanish. As the author, my focus on the plurality of
The twenty-four Latina participants explore their historical oppressions, national identities, and linguistic practices. Audre Lorde wrote (1984/2007, p. #), “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.” In agreement with Lorde, D’Andrea, (et al., 2021) explained social hierarchies exist within the Latino culture that privilege light-skinned, heterosexual, cisgender, able-bodied, and middle-class over dark-skinned, Indigenous, transgender, disabled, and poor Latinos. Recognizing the Latina’s differences, I honor their ethnicities, of being Mexican, Puerto Rican, Costa Rican, Salvadorian, Colombian/Polish, and Chilean.

Furthermore, I honor their Lesbian identities, the wisdom of the older Doctoras, and the persevering younger Doctoras. Moreover, all Doctoras were allowed to voice their pluralistic voices in a dialogue with one another during the focus groups. The focus groups were online safe spaces where each Latina respected one another’s opinions, ideas, beliefs, and positions. This study is meant to embrace pluralism as a countermeasure to the monolithic term Latina and honor the lived story of each participant.

Significance of the Study

This research on the role of mentorship for Latinas in doctoral programs is significant, considering the need to increase the number of Latinas who obtained a PhD without losing their cultural or gender identities. Much available research on the experiences of Latina doctoral students has not included a focus on mentorship or the space for telling the stories of Chicana/x Feminism (Bernal, 1998). Generally, seminal research has explored graduate school access and persistence with Mexican American PhD students (Espino, 2014); academic socialization experiences of Latina doctoral students (González, 2006); educational pathways for Chicana/o students (Bernal & Alemán, 2017); the ideal graduate mentoring program (see also Mireles-Rios...
& Garcia, 2019); Chicana/Latina Testimonios related to the effects of and responses to microaggressions (Huber & Cueva, 2012); and Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (Anzaldúa, 1987). Extending the research, this current study contributes to the literature by challenging deficit experiences through mentoring relationships that have fostered relevant cultural and gender experiences for Latinas while earning their PhD. Anzaldúa (2012) reported that the oppressed experiences of Latinas are not only by their gender but also by their class, ethnicity, race, and sexuality in higher education. I consciously decided to focus on Latinas and not Latinos, partly due to my own lived experiences in the Latino Educational Pipeline. The research literature also provides extensive theoretical evidence of intersectional challenges facing Latina women in higher education (e.g., Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

The rationale for this research builds on the idea that men and women face different challenges during doctoral studies; the literature provides evidence of an “accumulation of disadvantages” that leads to an “unaccommodating culture” for women in academia (Mansfield et al., 2010, p. 728). In the same study by Mansfield et al., navigating the PhD program is compared to a “secret club” for men requiring a “magic key” to enter. Latina doctoral students may experience multiple realities of balancing their traditional gender roles as daughters, wives/partners, mothers, and caretakers, in addition to the role of a female doctoral student. In my own experiences, I often struggle with familial obligations and finding a balance as I divide my time among my husband, children, family, PhD program, mentoring, Doctorxhool on campus, entrepreneurship, household duties, and teaching.

In the United States, Latinas are underrepresented in the following categories: obtaining a PhD, professional careers, and academia (Peterson & Vergara, 2016). Since Latinas earn doctorates at a different rate than they grow in population (NCES, 2019), this country faces a
national urgency to increase the number of Latinas who earn doctorates. According to Fernandez (2020), a doctorate in the social sciences prepared Latinas to be part of policy discourses about essential issues such as income inequality, social equity, and migration. Especially beneficial was having Latina faculty mentors who respected and reflected the Latina culture of their mentees.

Higher education institutions have a history of devaluing the cultural experiences and identities of the marginalized population if they do not integrate into the dominant culture (Yosso et al., 2009). In higher education, ideologies of othering People of Color, meritocracy, and color-evasiveness camouflaged the disparities in access, resources, and outcomes, particularly for Latinas who completed a PhD (Huber, 2009). Being a PhD student is a privilege, even though I have felt marginalized in the educational system that reproduces hegemonic structures of power. As a first-generation PhD student, I desperately searched for insider information from other Women of Color. For example, I gained valuable information about different courses and graduate opportunities from other Latinas in their role as Teaching Assistants or staff in the Chicano/Latino Student Affairs office.

The drive and reasoning behind this study is to confront and eliminate institutional racism in the fight for educational equity for Latinas. With so few Latinas in doctorate programs and with intensifying faculty workloads, Latinas are caught between multiple constituencies, needs, and institutional demands; they become overworked, emotionally burned out, and inappropriately validated for their contributions (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). In addition, Latinas are often limited in patriarchal traditional academic approaches, which tend to aggregate, quantify, and reduce experiences to variables. Therefore, Testimonios were used in this study to reposition Latina PhD students as central to the analysis and give agency to the oppressed
(Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Testimonio moves beyond narrative, biography, or oral history, because it was born out of the speaker’s and not the researcher’s political agenda aimed at resisting oppression (Brabeck, 2003, p. 253). As Souza, editor of the Latina Feminist Group, commented, “We have to figure out how to talk across Latinidades rather than through disciplinary studies” (2001, p. 2). Some scholars have demonstrated the tensions inherent in confronting institutional racism and how having a mentor helped challenge the legacy system of educational inequity that negates equal educational opportunities for Latina students (Bernal & Alemán, 2017). Moreover, I have experienced the challenges of navigating the Midwest and Southern California educational pipeline. I recognize the systemic issues in education and the need for advocacy efforts for Latinas.

With this study, using an asset-based lens, I hope to shed light on factors contributing to the success of Latinas in earning terminal degrees in doctorate programs, as well as the types of mentoring needed to attract, retain, and support Latina doctoral students. Minimal published research is available on Latina’s experience with mentoring relationships in and out of an educational setting (Crisp & Cruz, 2009). In addition, most of the literature on Latinas has focused on undergraduate challenges as opposed to graduate challenges. The difference between undergraduate and graduate school is vastly different, as the need for support in researching and writing a dissertation brings along a unique set of challenges. Acevedo-Gil and Madrigal-Garcia (2018) acknowledged this gap in the research on mentorship for Latinas by revealing that the National Latino Program validates graduate scholars with mentorship in an effort to close the gap. In addition, González (2006) described mentoring student experiences by stating that most research about Latina graduate student persistence and academic success presented findings in terms of institutional recommendations rather than primary research questions.
Despite these highlights in the research, further examination was needed on how Latina doctoral students earned their PhD with their cultural and gender identity intact and whether mentors contributed to their success. While I explored the background of mentorship at the doctoral level to provide a larger context, my overall focus will be on the lived experiences of twenty-four Latina Doctoras in their journey of obtaining a PhD. This study adds to the literature by examining if one or more mentors have influenced the cultural and gender identity of Latinas before, during, or after obtaining their doctoral degrees. Although some Doctoras did not have a mentor during their PhD studies, I questioned all the Doctoras about persevering through navigational barriers, maintaining their identity, which cultural and gender assets were beneficial, and how they survived using feminist energy.

Organization of the Dissertation

Chapter 1 displays the broader context of Latinas in doctorate programs, disparities in earning a PhD, and research pointing to systems and structures, such as mentoring, that have the potential to support Latinas’ completion of doctoral degrees. Chapter 1 also introduces the study's research purpose, questions, significance, and key terms. Chapter 2 provides an overview of some salient literature, synthesizing research on Latina graduate students, the role of mentoring, and research on how Latinas navigate and affirm their gendered and cultural identities. Chapter 2 also introduces the framework for this study.

Chapter 3 presents the study's design and methods, including the qualitative method of Testimonio (Huber, 2009). Furthermore, Chapter 3 includes context and participants, recruitment, data coding, protection of human subjects, the pilot study, and my positionality. Chapter 4 discusses the four themes from the research study and the results. Chapter 4 presents the tensions and negotiations of the twenty-four Latinas and their cultural and gender identities in academia. While each Doctora’s experience was unique, common themes across Testimonios
included navigational barriers, identity through mentorship and scholar familia, cultural and gender assets, and feminist energy. These themes reflected tensions and barriers experienced through racism, sexism, classism, and ableism that guide normative academic research.

Chapter 5 interprets the results of the study and connects the findings to the existing literature about Latina PhD lived experiences, as well as adding to the existing literature about Latinas with a PhD. Chapter 5 offers implications for researchers, institutions, and policymakers to build better mentoring programs for Latina PhD students.

Overall, this study adds to the existing research on Latinas in doctorate programs by analyzing Testimonios, personal and collective stories documenting resistance against oppressive movements, histories of the Latina doctoral experience, and the different aspects of mentoring experiences throughout the lives of twenty-four Latinas who have a doctoral degree.

Definition of Key Terms

The following terms were used in this study:

**Latina** - Alemán and Alemán (2010) defined Latinas as persons born or who self-identify as having familial connections to countries in Central or South America or the Caribbean.

**Mentoring** - Acevedo-Gil and Madrigal-Garcia (2018) defined mentoring for graduate students as intimate relationships among students, peers, and faculty that consciously contribute to the scholarly socialization of students.

**Testimonio** - According to Brochin (2020), Testimonios are personal and collective stories, autoethnographic accounts, and counternarratives that document struggle and resistance against oppressive moments, histories, and violence. Testimonios differ from interviews by valuing experiences as “foundations of knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998) from Latinas.”

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2 Throughout my years in the PhD program, I have yet to find a common definition of mentoring in the literature. Each article, university, interview, database, etc. had its own definition or explanation of mentoring.
Mujerista mentoring - Mujerista mentoring stems from the work of Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2012) notion of mestiza consciousness. Mujerista mentoring is a model that connects the academic, professional, and personal in a culturally specific framework to create more meaningful and enduring mentoring relationships for Chicana/Latina student success.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This chapter synthesizes the literature related to the journeys of Latina graduate students that focus on their experiences of cultural and gender identity while working with (or without) a mentor, as well as the complementary frameworks that guide this study, as described in Figure 1. Given the limited research on Latinas in graduate education, the studies included in this chapter broadly focus on the experiences of Latinas in doctoral programs. To find these studies, I searched databases for relevant articles using the Claremont Libraries Online Resource; ERIC, JSTOR, Sage, and Taylor & Francis also offered a wide choice of high-quality research journals. Some of the critical terms I used included “Latina Doctorate,” “Latina Faculty,” “Latina Doctoral Studies Experiences,” “Latina PhD,” “Mentoring Networks,” “Mujerista Mentoring,” “Mentoring Latina Scholars,” “Influence of Mentoring,” and “Cultural & Gendered Identities of Latinas.” Most of the research reviewed included articles, books, reports, dissertations, and policy briefs, with most research in the form of empirical studies spanning 1987 to 2021.

Figure 1

Organizational Framework of the Literature Review

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3 The literature was organized using a literature review graphic organizer from a course taught by Dr. Emilie Reagan. The synthesis matrix made it possible to process how articles related to one another in structure, purpose, framework, methodology, limitations, gaps, implications, etc. By looking at the similarities and differences between the studies, themes began to emerge.
As a counter to damage-centered research about communities of color, this study will implement desire-based research to capture the desire of the Latina community within their oppressive experiences in academia. Desire-based research is meant to represent the hope in marginalized communities which aims to construct a fuller representation of the Latina’s lived experiences leading up to the successful completion of a PhD. It is crucial to recognize that our communities hold the power to begin shifting the discourse away from damage and toward desire and complexity (Tuck, 2002, p. 422). Using a desire-based mentality is an action toward change in the mindset of a researcher. The outcomes of this dissertation contribute to the asset-based mentality of positive meaning making within communities of color.

The meaning making from the body of literature, combined with Testimonios from this study, led to four themes across this review: (1) navigational barriers; (2) identity through mentorship and scholar familia; (3) cultural and gender assets; and (4) feminist energy. As such, the organization of this literature review parallels the four themes identified through the Testimonios, as presented in Chapter 4. Chapter two and chapter four organically parallel each other in being consistent with the Testimonio methodology.

Across the studies included in this review are themes of barriers, identity, culture, and gender that point to various obstacles experienced by Latinas in doctoral programs. This literature review provides a deeper insight into why Latinas are the lowest-performing group at the doctorate level and how to overcome obstacles to prevent Latinas from the systemic inequities of academia and society. These themes reflect the tensions experienced by Latinas in higher education, including the barriers and strengths.

Further, there were possibilities that research suggests supported Latinas through higher education, such as mentors, family, feminist energy, scholar familia, a network of peers, and
community. The evidence reveals that support systems and mentorship offer cultural support and assistance that may lead Latinas to achieve their academic goals.

Navigational Barriers

This section pertains to literature about Latinas in higher education, which includes undergraduate or graduate education. The literature on the first theme of navigational barriers is twofold. First are the systemic barriers faced by many Latinas, such as low socioeconomic status, familial obligations, and the effects of cultural and gender role stereotyping. Second are those encountered upon entering graduate school, that often include lack of educational preparation, financial concerns, social and cultural alienation, or cultural incongruity (Gloria et al., 2005, p. 163). For example, Yosso & Solórzano (2006) point out that despite the impossible odds, families help Chicanas nurture community cultural wealth, a host of knowledge and strengths learned and shared by marginalized groups and challenge the educational system that has continually failed them.

The literature presents several common denominators related to barriers experienced by Latinas in higher education, such as a sense of not belonging (Holloway-Friesen, 2021), absence of appropriate mentorship, constraints of gender roles, and social inequity (Rudolph et al., 2015; Villaseñor et al., 2013); segregation and discrimination (MacDonald & Garcia, 2003); and “token diversity” (Castillo-Garsow, 2012). For example, in a study of undergraduates, Orozco (2003) described the barriers she and other Latina undergraduates faced, including rigid schedules, competitiveness, individual achievement, and autonomy. Latinas may face barriers that differ from those who can dedicate their mental space and have the bandwidth to process readings, concepts, and write while trying to get by every day. Orozco’s negative experience shadows many other Latinas, including myself, who encounter systemic educational barriers. In
addition to these barriers, García & Henderson (2015) found barriers to demands within immigrant families, many of whom identify as Latina. These types of family demands can detract from academic achievement. García and Henderson (2015) found that despite having strong family support, the Latinas in their study lacked appropriate mentoring relationships to assist them in balancing familial obligations and their educational experiences. In harmony with García & Henderson (2015), Villaseñor et al. (2013) explained how insufficient opportunities for appropriate types of mentorships were another barrier to Latinas' retention and persistence.

Further, scholars have pointed out that women of color faculty in higher education⁴ are less likely than white faculty to be hired for tenure positions (Lloyd-Jones & Jean-Marie, 2020). This is unsettling because students enrolled in these institutions are less likely to have a professor or mentor of color, particularly in contrast to the record growth of Latinas in the overall U.S. undergraduate student population (Contreras, 2017). Given this finding and the dearth of research and practice related to mentorship for Latina PhDs, this next section explores Latinas navigating the educational pipeline, beginning with systemic oppression in the PK-12 schooling, and continuing with structural and systemic racism, which are often rendered invisible to those who are not people of color.

**Systemic Oppression in the Educational Pipeline: Exclusionary Educational Policies**

Systemic oppression refers to entire systems, such as educational, political, legal, health, and criminal justice systems (Braveman et al., 2022). Systemic educational realities commonly thread together oppressive experiences for Latinas. The Education Trust-West (2017) published “The Majority Report: Supporting the Educational Success of Latino Students in California” to chronicle the Latino educational pipeline along with the history of exclusionary policies that

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⁴ Given the limited research on Latinas in graduate education, the studies included in this chapter focus on the experiences of Latinas in higher education broadly.
have contributed to it. Federal, state, and local policies have limited educational systemic opportunities for California’s Latino students beginning in 1850 when California became a state. The state constitution viewed California residents with Mexican heritage as foreigners. In 1863, the California legislature legitimized school segregation, withholding funds to schools that admit non-white students. In 1998, Proposition 227 prohibited public bilingual education without parent waivers, directly affecting bilingual Latina/o students. In 2016, Proposition 58 passed in response to Proposition 227. Proposition 58 required English learners to be placed in English-only classes, which put an end to bilingual courses. In 2017, the state adopted an English Learner Roadmap articulating the state’s new plan to support English learners, the majority of whom are Latina/o. However, this resulted in the state’s 1.1 million Latina/o English learners being placed in classes with ill-prepared teachers, insufficient academic support, and social and emotional learning needs, in addition to academic isolation (Education Trust-West, 2017).

According to Gándara (2015), almost half of Latinas entering school speak Spanish as their first language. Often, these Latinas are placed in lower level “at-risk” programs (Hassinger & Plourde, 2005). Instead of promoting their native tongue as an asset to learning, Latinas are subjected to subtle, harmful messages that undermine the worth of their unique culture and history (Valenzuela, 2005). Without adequate systemic support, Latina English learners fall behind their counterparts in English proficiency and academics as a part of the educational system (Gándara, 2015). Unfortunately, a policy allowing bilingualism is a rarity, resulting instead in a loss of familial language and creating cultural boundaries between generations of Spanish speakers. Language is an integral part of identity. Anzaldúa shows the relationship between the oppressed language and oppressed peoples: Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic

English-only practices and policies purposely seek to devalue and punish linguistic capital and limit the educational trajectories of Latina/o students. Valenzuela (1999) argued that “subtractive schooling encompasses subtractive assimilation policies and practices designed to divest Mexican students of their culture and language” (p. 20). More than one language is an asset to education and the success of Latina students. When bridging across systemic oppression, white-male dominant ideology exists, yet it is still unknown how to navigate the system filled with oppressive policies and practices. According to the Education Trust-West (2017), despite progress across California, “the percentage of Latinas/os with college degrees remains low” (p. 8) due to the many barriers experienced beginning in pre-school.

**Structural Racism: Limited Structures and Policies to Support Mentoring**

Structural and systemic racism are often intertwined, yet there are subtle differences. For example, structural racism refers to the structures of the systems: educational norms, laws, policies, institutional rules, etc. (Braveman et al., 2022). In higher education, recent studies have indicated that Latinas require mentorship in doctorate programs, which is yet to be noted as an educational norm. In Westerband’s (2016) study, the Latina graduate experience was often characterized by perseverance against seemingly insurmountable odds. Additionally, Westerband (2016) found that Latina doctoral students required emotional support from faculty but did not know how to access a mentor. Evidence has suggested that mentors are essential for educational attainment and success for this population. Nevertheless, there was no mention of culturally relevant mentors, which according to Montgomery (2017) is “focused on and leverage[s] the
wealth of the culture in marginalized and minoritized communities” to improve academic success (p. 7).

The limited number of faculty of color mentoring in doctoral programs (González, 2006) has led to an expected behavior of assimilation, which negatively affects cultural and gender identities. Acevedo-Gil and Madrigal-Garcia (2018) revealed that mentoring efforts from faculty could support Latina doctoral students as they operate through higher education. However, research has shown that few faculty of color were mentors (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Further research suggests that pairing Latinas with appropriate same-race or same-gender mentors is frequently not possible due to the lack of Latina faculty members (McGee, 2020). In one study, Espino (2014) described the lessons that Latina graduate students learned to work their way through graduate school; they declared that Mexican American doctoral students did not have access to privileged knowledge, which generally occurs through faculty mentoring.

It was reported in the literature that the role of an academic advisor in doctoral education is assigned to students. Advisors are responsible for advisees meeting the academic program milestones and requirements and monitoring the advisees’ progress toward completing the degree (Williams et al., 2003). In this study, the terms advisor and mentor are not synonymous. Advisors meet academic program milestones and requirements with the Advisees (Santa-Ramirez, 2022, p. 125).
Rather than supportive mentoring some scholars have identified “troll models” (e.g., Reddick, 2015). Troll models (as opposed to role models) focus on individuals who mentor, guide, and model ways of succeeding in the academy but often are contradictory with one’s (e.g., the mentee/protégé) values (Reddick, 2015). Troll models can also dehumanize others’ *Testimonios*. Examples are those who advise students away from partaking in service or research that connects them with their communities (e.g., racial, socioeconomic, sexual, cultural, and gender identities). However, these associations were salient to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals’ personal and professional positionality and what initially attracted them to their academic institutions in the first place (Padilla, 1994; Reddick, 2015).

Incorporating troll models is not intended to slander anyone who is a mentor to Latina PhD scholars. However, the discussion of troll models is meant to bring awareness of the unintended abuse these individuals are causing to their doctoral students. I intentionally decided not to use this term because of the deficit connotation in the literature. Instead, I will use the term “inept mentor,” as mentioned in chapters four and five.

The different types of mentoring perpetuate ambiguity, which has created a research gap in mentoring definitions and their inclusion in any data collection process. In this literature review, I focus on cultural and gender identity connected to mentorship. The intersectionality of these concepts disrupted traditional paradigms and led to a better understanding of the rapidly growing culture of Latinas in doctoral programs.

*Institutional Racism*

Institutional racism refers to institutions and structures founded on race-based discrimination (Braveman et al., 2022). The institution of higher education emerged from white male supremacy based on eugenics, an early twentieth-century development that identified racial
stereotypes under the facade of science (Braveman et al., 2022). This rejected and biased scientific theory upheld discriminatory practices, such as educational policies, which are still effective today. Gould (1996) strongly critiques the belief in biological determinism, the deception that biological traits determine human behavior and intelligence. Justification of social inequities continues one century later.

Research highlights racism, sexism, ageism, and more as alive and well in U.S. graduate programs (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022). Phillips & DeLeon (2022) explored the experiences of ten Latinas in predominantly graduate experiences. Their study revealed that Latinas were often excluded from faculty interactions, a scarcity of culturally informed mentorship existed, and the Latinas felt isolated in predominantly white institutions (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022). A variety of institutional disparities were listed in the article, such as Trump rescinding the DACA program in 2017, soaring tuition rates, and decreased funding at state and federal levels.

Experiences from Latinas in higher education often include the loss of their ethnic, cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds (Cavazos, 2016). Changing educational practices by drawing from the academic value and contribution of students of color is necessary for all students' success in higher education. The school performance of Latinas compared to non-Latina students does not factor in any prejudices, microaggressions, or discriminatory disparities in educational systems. Consequently, many studies have been designed from a deficit perspective that fails to recognize the racist structures, systems, contexts, policies, and practices that influence the world in which Latinas grow and learn, from kindergarten to graduate school (Davila & Michaels, 2016). This study focuses on Latina scholars sharing their experiences to ensure the data collected acknowledges the impacts of the institutional racism they face.
Aiming to reduce institutional disparities, Latina scholars such as Acevedo-Gil and Madrigal-Garcia (2018) and Espino (2014) have used their voices to raise important issues affecting Latinas’ graduate school survival to resist macro and micro-oppression. According to González (2007), higher education has a history of exclusivity, racism, sexism, and elitism that works against people of color and women to preserve the status quo. Latinas, including myself, must often figure out how to survive in discriminatory institutions based on white standards. Further, González (2007) noted that many Latinas have familial obligations, and many times, children or parents depend on them, which creates a strong sense of purpose for Latinas to persist in doctoral programs as a way of improving socioeconomic status. Well documented in the literature is that Latinas face institutional racism and complex gendered power relations (Acevedo-Gil & Madrigal-Garcia, 2018). Furthermore, the literature states that only half of the Latinos in a doctoral program will complete their terminal degrees (Espino, 2014). The choice to research Latinas and their identities with or without a mentor result from my experience as a first-generation Mexican American female from a working-class family passionate about beating the odds of achieving a terminal degree.

**Only-ness**

Rudolph et al. (2015) expanded upon the literature on Hispanic female graduate students who reported cultural conflicts and a sense of alienation within academia. A reappearing theme in the literature by Latinas in doctorate programs typically began with “I was the only one…” The sentence was generally completed with a microaggression felt by the Latinas. A common factor was a lack of cultural understanding and bias against Latinas in academia. The literature about only-ness strongly suggested that it was difficult for Latinas to be alone while enduring negative experiences of bias (Moceri, 2014). García and Henderson (2015) described how
Latinas in doctoral programs often find themselves the “lonely onlys,” or only ethnic minority in a graduate class. Castellanos & Gloria (2007) initially used the term “lonely only” to describe Latinas who were being inappropriately challenged to give the “minority perspective” in a graduate classroom. Only-ness and not having a sense of belonging are often difficult to endure and may result in the attrition rates of Latinas in doctoral programs.

Some authors have also suggested that creating a sense of belonging includes Latinx-themed organizations like sororities and centers for Mexican American Studies (e.g., González et al., 2021). Valenzuela (2020) argues that what would be immeasurably helpful as Latinas begin a career and future in academic occupations is greater access to mentorship and internship opportunities, research opportunities, and smaller departments where students are less anonymous and relations with faculty are more intimate by design.

For the next section on identity and mentorship, we learned how lonely and isolating the PhD process is for Latinas. However, the literature addressed the power of being in community with other BIPOC scholars, peer mentorship as a dynamic entity, and the effectiveness of scholar familia. Still, Latinas must negotiate between institutional demands and cultural values. Frequently, this negotiation leads to dissonance, a conflict between educational and cultural values that led to questioning one’s identity (González, 2006). This study contributes to our understandings of the ways Latinas successfully overcame only-ness in their doctoral programs but continue to seek the key ingredients for doctorate programs to value the language and culture of Latinas and people of color.

Identity through Mentorship and Scholar Familia

Sista Scholar Familia (Ashlee et al., 2017) is a study that continues to extend this work of creating spaces in academia for BIPOC identities. The research states that BIPOC folks must
work together in the community as a way of resistance. The power of being in community creates new contributions of knowledge from woke women of color scholars. This unity of scholars is considered a Sista Scholar Familia. This familia carries power that has otherwise been denied (Ashlee et al., 2017) while, at the same time, empowering one another in the academic space. Along these lines, the term scholar familia was first presented to me by Dr. Claudia Bermúdez during a presentation in her class, “Becoming Equity Champions for Special Populations.” Dr. Bermúdez immediately cited Dr. Cynthia Villarreal’s scholar familia work with individuals who look out for her (Liera et al., 2023). Dr. Cynthia Diana Villarreal (personal communication, April 6, 2023) generously shared her definition of the term scholarfamilia:

Those individuals who look out for me, and I look out for them, who genuinely care for me, and I genuinely care for them. We want what's best for each other, even if that means supporting each other to get out of academia. We go through tough shit together and, as a result, are bonded for life. There is genuine love there. We might have overlapping research interests around equity, social justice, liberatory, feminist, anti-colonial, and critical ideologies, and our love for each other is an act of resistance in the academy.

Dr. Villarreal (personal communication, April 6, 2023) wrote in an email about citing the Black women who have been writing about Sister Scholars and Sisterhood in academia before she used the term scholar familia. There is an entire movement online called #CiteASista. #CiteASista is a movement providing ways to ensure that the scholarly contributions of Black women are not on the periphery but are instead centered (CiteASista, 2020). A shared social identity for women of color is a form of shared resistance against institutional barriers in academia.
Many first-generation Latinas, such as I, must operate between various roles: graduate students, wives, mothers, colleagues, and teachers. When mentoring programs are created for first-generation students, they should include a greater understanding of how Latinas persist through doctoral programs (Bordes & Arredondo, 2005). González (2007) argues that centering Latina culture in higher education, especially mentoring, is valid because it allows Latinas to use their unique identity to create agency throughout their academic careers. In line with this call, this dissertation extends literature by exploring and understanding how Latinas from New York to California have successfully earned a PhD with or without a mentor, focusing on cultural and gender identity.

Understanding how Latinas position their identity is crucial to obtaining a PhD successfully (Torres, 2006). According to Torres, achieving a doctoral degree result in a higher societal status, but difficult cultural choices often hinder the journey that can alter an individual’s identity. When choosing a scholarly identity, one must negotiate between institutional demands and cultural values.

In advocating for a Latina feminist approach to mentoring, non-Latina or male mentors developed a tolerance for ambiguity while mentoring and guiding Latinas through cultural “choques,” or cultural collision, within the academy (Bernal & Alemán, 2017). An example of a “choque” is an increase in pressure placed on Latinas by their families, society, and culture, as opposed to what is academically valued, such as individualism and competition (Villaseñor et al., 2013). Therefore, the non-Latina and male mentor should be inclined to dismantle any harmful preconceived notions or assumptions about Latinas (Villaseñor et al., 2013), such as tokenism. Most commonly, Latinas have learned to adapt to an Anglo and male-dominated academic culture, which indicates an educational problem. This logically suggests a need for non-Latina
and male mentors to share the responsibility of learning about the assets Latinas bring to doctoral program spaces.

Gender is often an essential characteristic of the nature of the relationship that develops between mentors and mentees. McKeen and Bujaki (2008) noted that both male and female mentors provide equal amounts of career support to mentees, regardless of gender; however, female mentors provided more psychosocial support than male mentors, particularly female mentees (p. 6). To answer their research question, “Are protégés in diversified mentoring relationships mentored differently than protégés in homogeneous mentoring relationships?” Smith et al. (2000) found that same-race and same-gender mentorships provided more psychosocial support than cross-race and cross-gender relationships. In addition, in another study, Sorcinelli and Yun (2007) found that some female mentees did not feel that male mentors would understand women’s issues because they do not understand women. In this study, Latinas have shared how gender issues emerged in essential ways throughout their educational journey.

**Mentors Determining the Pace**

Moslow-Benway (2020) states that mentorship should drive the mentor-mentee partnership by determining pace, route, and destination. The demands and stresses during PhD studies may harm students' personal lives (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006). For this reason, mentors determining the pace for mentees should be an agreed-upon reciprocal decision. A more comprehensive decision was found in Kurtz-Costes et al.’s (2006) study about gender and doctoral studies. In Kurtz-Costes study, a first-time father and male Ph.D. student in a predominantly male program, stated that his mentor/advisor allowed him as much time as needed when the baby was born. His male mentor supported familial demands with assurance that he could still finish a Ph.D. even with a newborn. The women in the study differed as they preferred
a female mentor who modeled a lifestyle of having a career and family. In contrast, men preferred male mentors who possessed power and influence in their field of study. Altogether, male and female students wanted a mentor who was respectful of their pace and lives and who helped them keep on track.

**Network of Peers**

When writing about Latinas in graduate education, peer mentoring relationships in graduate school sparked critical thinking and advanced academic and professional socialization. They added to ongoing personal and professional learning goals (Lorenzetti et al., 2019). Gloria et al. (2005) presented a plausible cause that implementing formalized peer-mentor faculty programs by collaborating with student organizations that are Latina/o specific would assist students in developing strong internal and external university connections, thereby enhancing their sense of *familismo*, self, and educational efficacy. Less adequate is their discussion of other types of mentors, other students, co-workers, and peers, and there is a need for more discussion of instrumental factors contributing to Latinas' linguistic and cultural identities. Recent research also suggests that institutional investments in graduate peer mentorship yielded substantial rewards for student retention, skills development, and degree completion (Lorenzetti et al., 2019, p. 570). Therefore, peer mentoring in doctoral programs is regarded as a practical intervention to the success and retention of Latinas.

**Cultural and Gender Assets**

Research confirms that Latinas feel alienated due to cultural and language barriers, patriarchy, and other identity markers (Phillips & Deleon, 2022). Phillips and Deleon (2022) highlight gender inequities for Latinas, such as household duties, childcare, and socioeconomic issues. Furthermore, due to the changing gender norms in the United States during the last
decades, it is imperative to recognize the role of gender in educational institutions, particularly in doctoral programs, where gender equality is not yet the norm. Regarding gender, little is known in the research on gender status and how gender influences mentoring effectiveness. Mullen and Klimaitis (2021) stated that females experience fewer benefits than males in traditional mentoring relationships. Rudolph et al. (2015) pointed to limited research on gender in graduate education that did not reveal any gender-influenced mentoring outcomes. In this study, cultural and gender identity plays an essential part in facilitating survival experienced by the Latinas. The *Testimonios* of the twenty-four strong-minded Latinas is a form of activism that challenges the patriarchal norms in doctoral programs.

Studies suggest that Latinas who achieved a doctorate did so using their cultural and gender assets. For example, Castellanos (1996) agrees with Anzaldua’s (1997) research findings that being grounded in our cultural background and identity is necessary to succeed in graduate school. Culture, identity, and race are relative to a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (2017): Intersectionality. While intersectionality is about the intersection of an individual’s identities, mestiza consciousness studies the lived experiences of marginalized social positions, such as females, LGBTQ+, People of Color, outcasts, and marginalized individuals (Anzaldúa, 1987). When the intersectionality of a marginalized population joins forces, they can share stories of harm and prejudice that unite them and give power that has been otherwise denied (Ashlee et al., 2017). Perez Huber (2009) and Yosso (2005) concluded that community cultural wealth had been well documented by Chicana feminists who argue that communities of color draw from various forms of assets such as aspirational, familial, linguistic, navigational, resistant, social, and spiritual and resources to navigate institutions, such as higher education.
**Latina Assets**

With a focus on graduate school, Phillips & DeLeon (2022) tell us that Latinas carry cultural importance, such as linguistic practices and ethnic and racial variety, which influence how they perform their intersectional identities in academia. The component of cultural and gender identity with mentorship should offer guidance towards maintaining an appreciation for Latina’s cultural assets while facing challenges in doctoral programs. According to McKeen and Bujaki (2008), the role of gender and mentoring must be addressed to ensure that individuals and organizations understand the issues surrounding mentoring relationships. Determining the different types of mentoring relationships may promote development in understanding effective mentoring programs and direct Latinas to greater levels of achievement.

The lives of Latinas are essential to understand, not only because they are a rapidly increasing population but also because they are legitimate producers of knowledge (Hernández, 2020, p. 304). Hernández (2020) contends that the way forward is to face oppression utilizing the Mestiza Consciousness of Latina’s strengths of language, culture, gender, race, sexuality, and community. Utilizing Anzaldua’s theoretical framework of mestiza consciousness is critical to understanding the Latina experience and the lived realities of marginalized and minoritized people in all contexts (Hernández, 2020, p. 312). The Latina assets in this dissertation include linguistic, family, aspirational, cultural, and social capital as told through their Testimonios.

Latinas use the assets of collective stories and counternarratives to explain the struggle against oppressive systems, histories, and violence (Brochin, 2020). However, in unpacking the experiences of Latinas in education, Villaseñor et al. (2013) called for a collective commitment to mentoring young Latinas in higher education that captures their assets of race, ethnicity, and gender. Villaseñor et al. (2013, p. 50) define mujerista mentoring as a more holistic approach,
bridging the academic, professional, and personal to create more meaningful and enduring mentoring relationships. Mujerista mentoring was used as a tool to help Latinas navigate conflicts, as mujerista mentoring strongly contrasts with traditional Anglo and male-dominated academic practice. This dissertation adds to the research by informing traditional doctoral programs about Latina cultures and the assets Latinas bring to the academy. To address the needs of Latinas in doctoral programs, I extend the current body of research by promoting alternative mentoring approaches to promote cultural understanding and strategies for Latinas to experience general success in academia (Lloyd-Jones & Jean-Marie, 2020).

**Collective Experiences**

González (2006) revealed how to secure a pipeline for the production and success of Latina doctorates, a group of women whose scholarship was essential to the Latina/o community, increased diversification of university environments, production of new knowledge, democracy, and social justice in American society. Research has provided evidence that collective experience is a way of documenting academic success. For example, recent research by López et al. (2020) suggested that when vulnerable Latinas share collective stories, this process strengthens the collective experience and confianza (trust) with each other. The Latinas in López’s study learned about and honored each other’s stories and their relationships as members of the institution strengthened. The Latinas honoring each other in López’s study mirrored this study and the focus group meetings which took place after the Testimonios

Seminal contributions have been made by the Latina Feminist Group (2001) about the need to collectively share life experiences among Latinas to create a sense of community for underrepresented Latinas in academia. The Latina Feminist Group is considered a collective meant to confront contested norms, practices, identities, frameworks, and Eurocentric ideologies
that have emerged in higher educational contexts. To be visible, the literature on collective experiences strongly suggests that Latinas reposition themselves in academia by theorizing and writing about their experiences (*Testimonios*) to create their own social spaces (Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 6). Chicana feminists use counternarratives, such as *Testimonios*, as a collective form of resistance to document Latina’s experiences that were erased by colonial and hegemonic discourses (Latina Feminist Group, p. 200). This dissertation uses *Testimonios* to honor counternarratives and add to the existing literature about Latina collective experiences in graduate school.

Previous research by López et al. (2020) strongly suggests that a learning space where research and theory were often discussed resulted in collective conversations about the mutually beneficial relationships between mentors and Latinas. My experience is similar to López et al.’s (2020) work on identity exploration and the desire to contribute to initiatives that improve the collective educational experiences of Latinas. I consider this study a Latina-centered collective research space meant to serve and improve the Latina population in doctoral programs.

**Community**

Studies on Latina communities in graduate school have centered on the importance of relationship and community building. For example, Ochoa (2022) has had several community successes that surfaced from relationships in the community she grew up in. Ochoa explains what it was like to be in community after the November 2016 election:

Manuel Maldonado, whom I met when I returned to La Puente in the 1990s, invited me and two other community members to his home to plan a local response to the president-elect Donald Trump’s damaging rhetoric and policies. Given the racial/ethnic demographics of La Puente, we were especially concerned with how Trump’s anti-immigrant, anti-Mexican, and anti-Central American statements and actions were impacting community members’ sense of safety and belonging.
The community of activists presented sanctuary status resolutions to the City Council and School Board members in support of BIPOC community members. Although the elected officials refused their resolutions, the community activism and building of awareness and relationships created a stronger community in sustained organizing and activism (Ochoa, 2021).

Community was successfully established in the literature as described by Ashlee et al. (2017), who inspired other Sista Scholars to give voice to their truths, to build community with one another, and to reject the toxicity of dominance and oppression inherent in the academy. The cultural asset of being in community is one solution for Latinas who feel they do not belong in doctoral programs. Burciaga (2007) presented the concept that being in community ameliorates equity and social justice issues in the male-dominated field of academia. Being in community would allow Latinas to safely express fears, doubts, and anger encountered in their experiences as PhD students. Negotiating academia in the same ways as white counterparts is nearly impossible, which created a gap in the research.

Burciaga’s (2007) belief about communities of color needing to bond to form a coalition echoes the Testimonios of the women in this study, as detailed in chapter four. Like Burciaga (2007), this study parallels the power in community. In the study by Figueroa & Rodriguez (2015), Latina doctoral students utilized family and community members as support systems, particularly for emotional support when navigating hostile graduate school experiences. The cultural asset of being in community is one solution for Latinas to combat imposter syndrome in doctoral programs. Imposter syndrome for first generation Latinas adds self-doubt and fear of rejection and failure (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In the article by Pagan et al. (2022), effective mentoring can be a powerful moderator to the inequity Latinas face as assistant professors on their trajectory to a tenure position. Pagan et al. (2022) also advocates for structured mentoring
programs that address the needs of People of Color emphasizing Latina’s perception of being hired for their racial background and not their ability, leading to feelings of being alone or not belonging, also known as imposter syndrome. The next section provides a possible counter to imposter syndrome.

**Feminist Energy**

From my experience as a Latina, Latina feminist energy is defined as the intertwined positive and negative energies within us. Latina feminist energy is nurtured and grounded, not easily influenced. Prior research from the Latina Feminist Group (2001) suggests that telling our stories, *Testimoniantando* generates renewed energy and deeper trust with otherLatinas in academia. The initial energy is often depleted due to a neglective environment toward the racial and ethnic identities of Latinas in academia. The Chicana/o studies course I took functioned as a space within academia where Latinas used most of their energy to deconstruct Eurocentric discourses to validate their presence and experiences in doctoral programs. Each Latina contributor in a class uniquely felt the energy of reclaiming space in academia. A similar energy was used during this study’s *Testimonios* of the Latinas.

As previously reported in the literature by Peterson (2018, p. 99), self-care is a privilege not afforded equally to all; activists find it more critical to focus their energy on dismantling oppressive structures rather than focusing on self-care because the undoing of oppressive systems will halt subsequent experiences of pain. At times, we focus more on improving our resiliency strategies than questioning why we must be resilient in the first place. The Latinas in this study successfully spent their energy addressing how they maintained their ethnic identities while resisting the oppressive system of graduate schools.
According to Maturana & Varela (1987), the inherent principle/mechanism of living systems is autopoiesis, the “self-producing” drive to exist and preserve/conserve one’s energy. How did Latinas exist successfully in an oppressed academic environment? One solution for Latinas in academia was collaborating through the processes associated with developing learning experiences with similar autopoietic properties within living systems. The rationale was created from experiences responding to unpredictable and ever-changing educational sociocultural conditions (Maturana & Varela, 1987). Feminist energy is creating life, self-producing love, compassion, and peace in the context of increasing equity in doctoral programs nationwide.

**Double Strength**

The intersectional identity of Latinas produced an experience of double alienation, which transformed into double strength as the Latinas surpassed oppression in academia. Anzaldúa’s (2015, p.207) words capture the double alienation most Latinas experience:

> It is difficult for me to break free of the Chicano cultural bias into which I was born and raised and the cultural bias of the Anglo culture I was brainwashed into adopting. It is easier to repeat the racial patterns and attitudes, especially those of fear and prejudice, that we have inherited than to resist them.

Anzaldúa (2015) explains double alienation as double colonization. First, the Spanish colonized the Indigenous people in the early 16th century. The second colonization was annexing what is now the U.S. Southwestern territories in the mid-19th century. In other words, the United States became the dual power to colonize mestizos and rate them as second-class citizens—the treatment of second-class citizens threads itself through the educational system in the form of oppression.

Latinas not only tend to repeat the racial patterns but face further oppression in a multitude of ways, including gender inequities and second-shift labor, where women take on the
lion’s share of household duties, childcare, and uncompensated domestic labor, which impacts graduate students, faculty, and administrators (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022, p. 200). Valenzuela (1999) gives a first-hand account of how Latinas were treated in the K-12 system. Valenzuela’s study (1999) occurred in Texas, yet we assume the same happened throughout the southwest. In the book *Subtractive Schooling* (Valenzuela, 1999), Mexican American high school youth faced discrimination from their white teachers and white counterparts. Rather than an asset-based approach in the Latino pipeline, students were placed in a hierarchy based on their language skills and ability, placing Mexican American females at the bottom and white male students at the top. It is disturbing to learn that this double alienation continues in higher education for the Latinas who beat the odds and made it to the PhD level. This dissertation extends the discussion of double strength by using *Testimonio* data to reveal Latina’s successful accomplishment of earning a terminal degree. Latinas used counterstories, and through their voices, they explained how they advanced through the academic environment, hidden curriculum, and the norms of a doctoral program.

**Painful Feelings**

This section refers to the literature on the painful feelings Latinas in academia face. The research was successfully established as described by Ashlee, Zamora, & Karikari (2017, p. 98), who explained that wokeness is protective-like armor in that our critical consciousness served as a tool for survival by providing the power to name and actively contest our lived realities of oppression. The dissonance of being woke is both painful and healing.

According to Yosso et al. (2009), the epistemological experiences of Latinas in academia include feelings of devaluation and discrediting of language, academic performance, sense of value, and the use of cultural resources. The damaging experiences will affect a large population,
as Latina women and girls represent “one in five women in the U.S. and will comprise nearly one-third of the country’s female population by 2060” (Gándara, 2015, p. 2). Latina doctoral experiences are influenced by their identities as women of color in higher education, where they are the overwhelming minority and are ranked at the lowest levels of educational attainment, with less likelihood than non-Latinas to pursue graduate degrees (Espinoza-Herold & González-Carriedo, 2017). For Latina students from communities traditionally excluded from higher education, academia was alienating and incompatible with their culture or values (Méndez-Morse, 2004). The Latinas in this study based their success on the values of hard work, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. Painful feelings matter to document the strength and cultural pride in the narratives of the Latina PhDs and how they used their heritage to overcome obstacles faced in graduate education.

**Daunting Experiences**

Salient across Latinas in higher education were daunting experiences. Huber and Cueva (2012) explored the experiences of twenty self-identifying Chicanas or Latinas who shared their struggles with microaggressions as Chicana students in the educational pipeline (p. 397). Microaggressions are part of the equation of injustices in academia. Anzaldúa (2015) straightforwardly explains the oppressive roles:

> I see Third World peoples and women not as oppressors but as accomplices to oppression by unwittingly passing on to our children and friends the oppressor’s ideologies. I cannot discount my role as an accomplice, that we all play as accomplices, for we are not screaming loud enough in protest.

The epistemic oppression must first be recognized, followed by protest. Few Latinas know how to navigate oppressive institutional systems because of a lack of representation of Latinas in academia. In the article written by Cavazos (2015, p. 18), the participants claimed to identify with faculty on a deeper level in the master’s program than in the doctoral program due to a lack
of Latina scholars. In my educational trajectory, I have had one Latina teacher/professor from Kindergarten to the PhD program. The lack of Latina representation contributes to the lack of belonging for many Latina doctoral students, including myself.

In Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (2022) *Decolonizing Methodologies*, she grounds her research in such a way to recognize epistemic injustice: when someone is wronged in their capacity as a knower: (1) they do not reinforce our values, actions, customs, culture, and identity; (2) they say that we do not exist; (3) they write untrue things about us; and (4) they say negative and insensitive things which tell us that we are not good (Smith, 2021). As previously reported in the literature by Kamimura-Jimenez & González (2018, p. 151), the role of mentorship not only creates the most successful graduate experiences but addresses many of the research issues from Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s Decolonizing Methodologies. However, many Latina students face additional obstacles because, many times, academic mentors do not have the expertise within the “diaspora of Latinx culture and literature” to help the Latinas in doctorate programs. If there is a lack of Latina representation in faculty, and the existing faculty does not have the Latinx cultural expertise, who will mentor the Latinas when they face unfavorable moments in academia?

The themes discussed address how culturally relevant mentorship is crucial to Latina success in doctoral programs. Together, the literature has suggested that mentorship is essential for educational attainment (Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Holloway-Friesen, 2021; Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Villaseñor et al., 2013), but the literature does not specify what type of mentor is most suitable for Latinas. For example, is peer mentoring more effective than faculty mentoring, or does gender and ethnicity matter, or should mentors be assigned or chosen by a mentee? The different types of mentoring in literature perpetuate uncertainty, contributing to a gap in the research about mentoring.
Synthesis and Gaps in the Research

Research suggests that many Latinas do not have mentors in graduate school (García & Henderson, 2015). According to Rudolph et al. (2015), a definitional agreement on mentoring has yet to be created due to different influences and contemporary mentoring practices. Rudolph et al. (2015) validated the need to deal with the dynamics of academic mentoring. Dynamics in any relationship change over time and create ambiguity around the meaning of mentoring. For this reason, I researched mentorship in various forms by exploring currently evolving resources and multiple definitions of mentors, which vary according to classification or type of mentoring alternatives. Empirical findings on mentoring included but were not limited to formal mentoring, informal mentoring, traditional hierarchical mentoring, diverse mentoring, collaborative mentoring, group mentoring, peer mentoring, multilevel mentoring, e-mentoring, and cultural mentoring (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). In addition, Weiston-Serdan & Sánchez (2017) introduce the idea of critical mentoring to the mentoring field. Critical mentoring challenges the field to question the status quo, to counter the negative and dehumanizing narratives about youth who are placed at the margins in our society, and to address the structural inequities they face (Weiston-Serdan & Sánchez, 2017, p. x).

A fundamental critique of much of the existing gender and mentoring research is that they persist in recognizing masculine definitions of success (McKeen & Bujaki, 2007). Lindén et al. (2013) verified the variability of mentoring definitions used in different studies. Further, the literature is limited in how it addresses success for women of color, particularly Latinas. Furthermore, a clearer understanding of how mentoring differs for women and men was required and how mentoring is defined for both women and men (McKeen & Bujaki, 2007).
According to Torres (2006), Latina faculty mentors are vital in combating identity challenges. However, the gap in the research on Latina faculty mentors in doctorate programs can contribute to possible identity issues for Latina PhDs. According to Pagan et al., (2022, p. 817) same-race mentors can instill hope in their mentees by showing that success is possible without having to abandon one’s cultural identity. Specifically, what are the benefits of having Latina mentors? How would Latina mentors promote more significant gains for Latina doctoral students than non-Latina mentors (Torres, 2006, p. 19)? These questions will further be answered in the Testimonios of the twenty-four Latinas in this study.

The literature on Latinas with a mentor in graduate education is less developed than research on undergraduate Latinas with mentors (Bañuelos, 2011; Villaseñor et al., 2013). In graduate education, Latinas are crucial because their educational attainment is usually lower than other groups, while the Latina population is the highest among non-white groups in the United States. Throughout literature, having a mentor is the most salient contribution to academic success (Kamimura-Jimenez & González, 2018). However, mentorship fails to be inclusive of a standard definition, and often, mentors lack knowledge about the Latina culture, leading to daunting experiences for Latinas in doctorate programs.

Therefore, this dissertation contributes to the literature by distinguishing between a mentor and advisor, focusing on mentoring experiences in doctoral education while adding to the feminist definition of a mentor for Latinas in doctoral programs.

**Frameworks**

This study brings together three qualitative theoretical frameworks that connect based on the social, cultural, and historical realities of Latina PhDs. Bridging together the fields of education and women’s studies resulted in the following frameworks: LatCrit, Mestiza
Consciousness, and Mujerista Mentoring. I will begin with LatCrit. The central goals of LatCrit and Chicana feminist frameworks are dismantling the institutional systems of power that cause oppression and injustice (Anzaldúa, 1987). The frameworks are essential to understanding the Latina PhD experience and the realities of marginalized women in doctoral programs. The Doctoras’ Testimonios communicated a collective struggle for readers to bear witness. Some of the stories allowed us to share painful recollections of oppression. Other stories paid tribute to the role of mentoring in supporting their PhD completion while maintaining cultural and gender identities in a patriarchal environment.

The premise of this framework strongly connects to LatCrit theory, which derives from critical race theory (CRT) research. According to Fay (1987), CRT is an attempt to understand the oppressive conditions in society to create transformative change. The difference between CRT and LatCrit is that LatCrit critiques the sociolegal constructs of sex, gender, and sexuality, combined with race, ethnicity, national origin, language, culture, and class as interlocking systems (González et al., 2021). CRT allows researchers to focus on communities of color; LatCrit narrows that lens to focus on Latina communities (Huber & Cueva, 2012, p.394). On the institutional level, the LatCrit framework prevents the story of a Latina student from being forgotten. Solórzano and Bernal (2001) envisioned LatCrit as part of a social justice research agenda that eliminates racism, sexism, and poverty while empowering marginalized groups (p. 313). Solórzano & Yosso (2002) further argue that critical race methodology, using counter-stories, responds to Anzaldúa’s challenge of “if we have been gagged and disempowered by theories, we can be loosened and empowered by theories” (p. xxvi). Counter storytelling is based on the narratives, Testimonios, or life stories of people of color— a story that white educators do not hear or tell (Delgado, 1989). Lat Crit pertains to immigration, language rights, bilingual
schooling, and internal colonialism (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Lastly, LatCrit focuses on the lived experiences of Latinx people and the intentional move toward social justice (Alcalá et al., 2022, p. 778).

**Figure 2**

*Theoretical Framework Model*

My dissertation is interdisciplinary because I utilized LatCrit in education, a theoretical framework from the discipline of Women and Gender Studies and Mujerista Mentoring from the Chicano Studies. Women and Gender Studies advocates for cross-gender mentoring by employing mujerista strategies coupled with a feminist architecture for helping Latinas navigate doctoral programs. Mestiza consciousness will be used to frame the *Testimonios* of the lived experiences of my participants, as seen in Figure 2. Figure 2 describes this study’s theoretical frameworks reflecting three foundational theories: LatCrit, Mestiza Consciousness, and Mujerista Mentoring. The following section will illustrate how mestiza consciousness will serve as a powerful theoretical framework.
Some elements of LatCrit work well but need to recognize gendered analysis; therefore, the mestiza consciousness theoretical framework will fill the deficiency in LatCrit and spotlight my focus on the PhD Latinas in this study, who may or may not have had a mentor. The presence of culturally aware mentors was crucial for the academic future of all Latinas. The basis of this type of mentoring is the understanding that many Latinas learn tolerance for ambiguity in more than one culture, which, according to Anzaldúa (2012), is the new mestiza. The culture was a combination of Mexican, Indigenous, or Spanish mixed with the United States culture in which we are educated. Anzaldúa used *mestiza consciousness* (p. 102) to describe how we perceive reality, see ourselves, and behave. The struggle of mestiza consciousness is a feminist one. The struggles have always been internalized yet played out externally, such as committing to a doctoral program to understand one challenge. Awareness of the situation must come from the inner change before societal changes can happen (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 109). Integrating mestiza consciousness into my theorizing is essential to claim any kind of feminist scholarship in this dissertation.

To address the educational attainment of Latinas, nontraditional mentoring models must prevail and expand the Latina educational pipeline if future generations of Latinas are to succeed. The lens of mujerista mentoring as an alternative mentoring model for Latinas is empowering and necessary to combat traditional approaches to mentoring. Mujerista mentoring is particularly pertinent by addressing the relationship between structural (cultural values in society) and systemic (racist principles) inequalities in education (Villaseñor et al., 2013). The inequalities pose several barriers that have challenged experienced mentors who shared strategies and experiences with mentees about addressing inequities and making informed decisions. The feminist framework also allows for an understanding of the systematic oppression of Latinas and
analyzes how they have responded to oppression to heal, resist, and become empowered (Huber & Cueva, 2012). The following section on mujerista mentoring is the final link in the feminist theoretical framework.

Villaseñor et al. (2013) defined mujerista mentoring as an asset-based model that collectively values the lived experiences of Chicanas/Latinas, centers the building of communities, and uses reciprocal mentoring relationships while challenging traditional hierarchical mentoring between mentors and mentees. Based on the essence of mestiza consciousness, mujerista mentoring aims to guide and support Latinas as they work through “choques” and cultural collisions (Bernal & Alemán, 2017) and learn to develop a tolerance for ambiguity. The tenets of mujerista mentoring contribute to academic success and personal development; they offer guidance and support as mentors share their experiences. The intersectionality of mujerista mentoring includes race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and gender of mentors. Furthermore, it is culturally relevant mentoring, a process of inner healing from systemic marginalization and outer change that creates bridges for others to enter academia (Acevedo-Gil & Madrigal-Garcia, 2018).

These theories align with Latina and Chicana Feminist epistemologies and methodologies, allowing flexibility in ideating mentoring. The theories also lead to the concepts of behavioral characteristics of resistance and the transformative change Latinas use in obtaining a PhD, which is an impetus toward social justice. Specifically, I present mujerista mentoring to develop a race and gender-conscious framework using the Testimonios of PhD Latinas with and without mentors and their struggles while completing doctoral degrees. The Testimonios I collected include attention to cultural and gender identity. Although the research has been somewhat limited for Latina doctoral students, I cited literature based on Latina experiences in
higher education that emphasized mentorship. I utilized Testimonios as a liberatory tool to produce new knowledge and thought (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Testimonios have captured the lived experiences and authentic narratives of oppressed communities. According to Yúdice (1991), “testimonial writing may be defined as an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays their experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of collective memory and identity.” (Yúdice, 1991, p.17). In addition to Yúdice’s ideas of Testimonio, Cienfuegos and Monelli add, “The mere idea of remembering the experience produced fear and anxiety, but at the same time "telling" was the only possibility for release from painful and humiliating memories” (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1983, p.50).

Historically, Testimonio contradicts traditional literature, as nonprofessionals communicate their oral history and become writers, affecting publication rules. Testimonio discourse has worked its way into the publishing world and professional institutions by strengthening the worth of marginalized people. The roots of Testimonios derive from the personal experience of the collective account against oppression from oligarchy, military, and transnational capital (Yúdice, 1991, p. 26). A prime example is Rigoberta Menchu, Nobel Prize Winner (1992), who uses Testimonio in Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchu. She captivates the reader with her history of resistance against Guatemala’s 36-year civil war. Her Testimonio is the voice of the voiceless, the voice of the people, contradictory to the theory that the subaltern cannot speak (Gugelberger, 1998). Rigoberta Menchu’s book parallels this study with Latina’s Testimonios, serving as the voice of the voiceless as they each walk the readers through their PhD journey filled with challenges and mishaps.
Application to My Research

A call exists for more qualitative research on Latinas who experience social injustice (Denzin, 2017). Mujerista mentoring aligns with my research on mentoring Chicanas/Latinas in doctorate programs, specifically within social, cultural, and gendered contexts. Mujerista mentoring is an effective tool that recognizes the assets and challenges Latinas face in the academy. This study’s framework is rooted in a critical feminist analysis integrating counternarratives, such as Testimonios, to document experiential knowledge of Latinas removed by imperial, colonial, and hegemonic feminist discourses (Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Additionally, Testimonios are a way for Latina researchers, such as me, to record and write about a “social witness account” (Huber & Cueva, 2012, p. 393) of the twenty-four Latinas’ experiences, human struggles, and injustices that are often eliminated by dominant discourses. Huber and Cueva (2015, p. 392) recommend that Testimonio be used in educational research to expose oppression within academia, observing the “powerful efforts” that students of color engage in to “challenge and transform those spaces.”

In my theorizing, I view the union of mestiza consciousness and mujerista mentoring with parts of LatCrit as a tribute to feminist scholarship and a celebration of my exploration of this subject.

Chapter 3: Design and Methods

Research Design

In line with the frameworks of LatCrit, Mestiza Consciousness, and Mujerista Mentoring (see Figure 2) for this study, I utilized the qualitative method of Testimonio (Huber, 2009) to gather and interpret personal reflections of Latinas who completed their PhDs experiencing
academia with or without mentors on their journeys and negotiating their cultural and gendered identities in the process. Thanks to previous scholars who have challenged methodological approaches and hegemonic epistemologies, there have been important transformative approaches that have affirmed and enabled additional methodologies in the past several decades (Ochoa, 2022). The methodology of Testimonios is most appropriate for exploring Latinas’ lived experiences of mentoring as they obtained their doctoral degrees. For decades, Testimonio as a genre has been used as a liberatory tool across Latin America and for People of Color in the United States (Bernal & Alemán, 2017). Learning from Chicana feminist epistemologies has taught me how to acknowledge Chicana ways of knowing shaped by the Latinas' experiences to elevate their community knowledge to advance social justice (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Chicana feminists have engaged in Testimonios as an epistemology to create new knowledge and thought (Latina Feminist Group, 2001), as a methodology to theorize a research process and analysis (Burciaga et al., 2012), and as a method to collect data from research Doctoras’ lived experiences (Brochin, 2020). In addition, Testimonio has been used to censure the injustices experienced by a marginalized group of people with roots in the oral heritage of the Native American culture, African American slave narratives, and the transfer of oral family history (Booker, 2002).

Similarly, a Testimonio is a methodological tool to support critical reflection, healing, and collective memory by giving a Testimonio (testimoniendo) (Huber & Cueva, 2012). Through the Testimonio methodology, I addressed the following research questions:

- How do Latinas who earned PhDs describe the role of mentoring in supporting their degree completion in higher education?
- How, if at all, did Latinas who earned PhDs negotiate cultural and gender identities in academia with a mentor?

This chapter presents the research design and considers the overarching themes that emerged throughout the development of data collection and analysis. The following sections explain the
research design, context and participants, Testimonios, recruitment, data coding, protection of human subjects, and the pilot study.

*Testimonios'* methodological approach is essential for understanding the realities of Latina lives within educational institutions by supporting critical reflection, healing, and collective memory integration (Huber & Cueva, 2012). The most important aspect of a *Testimonio* is to center the knowledge and experiences of the oppressed; therefore, not everyone can have a *Testimonio* (Huber, 2009). When used in educational research, this methodological approach builds from Women of Color scholars who use *Testimonio* as a tool of the oppressed, not the oppressor. Documenting *Testimonios* is an asset-based method drawing from the strength of Latinas with a PhD to pass knowledge from one generation of scholars to the following through documentation of struggle, survival, and resistance within the context of oppressive educational institutions (Huber & Cueva, 2012). Anzaldúa (1987) modeled *Testimonio* as a political act of resistance through methodology informed by us for us.

**Participant Recruitment**

For this study, I recruited Latinas with a PhD from social media, specifically a private Facebook group named Latinas Completing Doctorate Degrees (LCDD). LCDD was created nine years ago and currently has 9,000 members. Dr. Sofia B. Pertuz, the Dean of Students at Hofstra University, maintains the site. All Doctoras on the private page are asked to post positive announcements, advice, and resources geared toward research and scholarly writing that is affirming and motivating to other Latinas. First, I posted a flier on the Facebook group page (Appendix I), then sent an email (Appendix B) to each potential research participant once I received approval from IRB.

Twenty-four qualified participants volunteered to give their *Testimonio* and attend a
focus group meeting from April 2023 to May 2023. Fifteen participants from LCDD were eager to tell their stories for social change and contacted me immediately after the flier was posted on Facebook. Five participants were referred to me by faculty members at Claremont Graduate University. Three participants were referrals from my husband and neighbor, who posted the flyer on LinkedIn. One participant was recruited from an advertisement through AAHHE, a referral from Dr. Paik.

**Participants of Study**

For this study, twenty-four participants who identified as Latinas were women of Latin American origin or descent, had earned a PhD from an accredited University, resided in the United States, and were willing to discuss their PhD experience with or without a mentor and the elements that contributed to their academic success. For this research, I only considered Latinas who completed their PhD studies in the United States. Another choice was to find Latinas with a PhD and not an EdD or other practice-based doctorates because a PhD is research-based, contributing new insights to the field. For example, one potential Doctora learned mid-interview that a DNP (Doctor of Nursing Practice) was not part of the inclusionary requirements and was removed from the data set. A PhD’s in-depth empirical research requirements made the terminal degree more difficult to obtain. With Latinas already facing complex challenges, my desire to research the trajectory of Latinas who have attained a terminal research degree was a priority.

Latinas face many deficit factors as doctoral students in doctorate programs. An assortment of factors has to do with their culture and linguistic identity. The goal of this study was to offer insight into mentorship, culture, and gender identity to discover the ways that few Latinas have completed a PhD through their lived stories.
I chose Latinas over Latinos for this study because the “Latina population has grown faster than Latino men, with 24% of Latinas making up the total population compared to a 22% growth for Latino men (Gonzales, 2023).” The demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) was designed to learn about the Doctoras’ families, gender associations, linguistic identities, PhD areas of study, financial literacy, and current educational positions. Table 1 encompasses information from the demographic questionnaire of the twenty-four Latinas in this study.

In total, 24 Latinas participated in this study. Each Latina earned a PhD from an accredited university in the United States. The age range is twenty-seven years old to sixty years old. Seven of the Doctoras are professors, three are assistant deans, five work in higher education, one Doctora is a principal in K-12, four Doctoras work in the medical industry, one Doctora works with policymaking, one Doctora is a research analyst, one Doctora is in business, and one Doctora graduated in May 2023. Twenty-three women identified as cisgender/heterosexual, and one Doctora identified as queer (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Self-Identity/Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
<th>PhD Field &amp; Focus</th>
<th>Gender Orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Dean of Student Success</td>
<td>Education: Persistence of Latino/a students at</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Position</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Gender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>Mexican-American</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Assistant Professor in Elementary Mathematics Education</td>
<td>STEM Education</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Program Director</td>
<td>Medical Anthropology</td>
<td>Cis-gender female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Teresa</td>
<td>Mexican-American</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Assistant Professor, Clinical Mental Health Counseling</td>
<td>Counselor Education and Supervision</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Salvadoran-American</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Assistant Professor of English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Mexican-American</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>Clinical Associate Professor</td>
<td>Teacher Education</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lina</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Instructional Coach/Teacher &amp; part-time Professor</td>
<td>Curriculum &amp; Instruction</td>
<td>Cis-Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariana</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>CEO, Elevate Latinas LLC</td>
<td>Human and Organizational Systems</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>Latina</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Director of Accreditation, CA Association of Independent Schools</td>
<td>Voices of Success: Narratives of College Bound Latinas</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luz</td>
<td>Chicana</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Research Analyst</td>
<td>Higher Education Administration</td>
<td>Queer Woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Boricua</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Director of Stem Learning Communities</td>
<td>Higher Education - Diversity and Social Justice</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>Chicana</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Recent Graduate</td>
<td>Political Science</td>
<td>Woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Mexican-American</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Adjunct Professor</td>
<td>Organizational Leadership</td>
<td>Straight</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Across all twenty-four Latina PhD’s, three Doctoras grew up with English as their primary language, with both parents born in the United States (See Table 2). Table 2 incorporates linguistic literacy data extracted from the demographic questionnaire. Nineteen
Doctoras are fluent Spanish speakers, as outlined in Table 2. This number may be attributed to the fact that the number of people in the United States who spoke a language other than English nearly tripled from 1980 to 2019 (Dietrich & Hernández, 2022). Since the Latino population is the largest minority group in the U.S., Spanish is the most common non-English language spoken in the U.S. at 62% in 2019 (Dietrich & Hernández, 2022). Many Latina PhDs faced an additional barrier of being a first-generation student. As shown in Table 2, thirteen Doctoras are first-generation students, three are not first-generation, and eight Doctoras did not address this question.
**Table 2**

*Linguistic Literacy Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Language Spoken at Home</th>
<th>Primary Language</th>
<th>Fluent Spanish Speaker</th>
<th>Mother’s Country of Birth</th>
<th>Father’s Country of Birth</th>
<th>First Generation Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sandra</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aurora</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Vietnam</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Teresa</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Did not respond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lina</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Did not respond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariana</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Did not respond.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luz</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Spanish/English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>Puerto Rico</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Language 1</td>
<td>Language 2</td>
<td>Can Understand</td>
<td>From Country</td>
<td>Responded?</td>
<td>From Country Responded?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juana</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Did not respond.</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nene</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Did not respond.</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graciela</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Spanish/English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>Did not respond.</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lupe</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>El Salvador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malory</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceci</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Mexico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camila</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>Spanish/English</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>Did not respond.</td>
<td>Chile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatriz</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>United States</td>
<td>Did not respond.</td>
<td>United States</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Data Collection**

I collected my data according to the following steps: (a) demographic data questionnaires, (b) one-on-one *Testimonios*, (c) a focus group setting, and (d) field notes and member checking.

I received IRB approval on April 13, 2023, and immediately began to contact each participant via email using a letter of recruitment (Appendix C). In this email, I asked participants to sign a consent form (Appendix H), complete a demographic questionnaire (Appendix A), and participate in a *Testimonio* and a focus group. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire about their families, backgrounds, and self-identification. They also signed and dated the consent form. Once their participation was finalized, I confirmed the dates and times of the *Testimonios* and sent each participant the interview questions in advance. When the first five participants completed the first *Testimonio*, I conducted focus groups for all participants to collaborate on themes I identified in the first *Testimonio*. This was one way to uphold member checks. Using a Chicana Feminist Standpoint changed the process of *Testimonio* from a method to methodology by asserting a co-construction of knowledge through collaborative data analysis. The employment of a focus group provided member checking and a richer understanding of the *Testimonios* from the participants. A total of four focus groups were held on Zoom. Twenty of the twenty-four women participated in focus group meetings to clarify and add to the data.

Huber (2009) conducted a three-phase process for data collection and analysis of *Testimonios* as a methodology. The first phase of Huber’s (2009) process for data collection consists of a *Testimonio* from each Latina. See Appendix A for the demographic questionnaire and Appendix D for the interview protocol and the list of questions for this first phase. This
preliminary data collected was separated into categories that emerged from the data on the women’s lived experiences and counternarratives. The categories created reflections for the next phase, collaborative data analysis. This second phase utilizes a “reflection exercise” during focus groups with three-four Latinas (Huber, 2009; see Appendix E) to theorize possible explanations for the racism, nativism, sexism, and classism that Latinas have experienced (p. 647). Huber and Cueva (2012) extended this effort by creating a space for Latina researchers to use Testimonios to document the collective experiences, political injustices, and human struggles often erased by dominant discourses (p. 393). The third and final data collection phase creates a knowledge production process from the lived experiences of the Latinas. See Figure 3, which describes the three-step process adapted from Huber (2009).
Although they are related, *Testimonios* differ from interviews in three ways. First, *Testimonios* aim to witness experiences reflecting political injustices, human struggles, and collective accounts often ignored by dominant discourses (Huber & Cueva, 2012). A second difference is that the *Testimonio* is explicitly based on reciprocity, coalitional action, and social justice initiatives critical to the field (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022, p. 198). A third difference is that *Testimoniando* denounces racial injustice, is nontraditional in the role of researcher-subject (Cruz, 2006), and was a co-constructed process between the researcher and subject. Furthermore, *Testimoniando* was conducted in a safe space on Zoom between the Latina and me. Collecting *Testimonios* was a way to listen to the Doctoras to understand the collective phenomenon (Perez Huber, 2009).
My research derives from the experience of conducting interviews in a pilot study. However, I no longer conduct interviews; I use Testimonios individually and in groups. Using the Testimonio methodology differs from interviews by listening and reflecting with the Testimonialista to build community and demonstrate relational support (Phillips & Deleon, 2022). I used cultural intuition in the process of listening to the Testimonios. According to Bernal (1998), cultural intuitions draw from Latina feminist epistemology and base forms of knowledge on personal, professional, and academic experiences. Testimonial as a methodology grants women the power to construct knowledge from their lived experiences (Huber, 2009) and serves as a counternarrative that challenges deficit educational discourse about Latina students (Huber & Cueva, 2012). Using my narrative inquiry with the Doctoras established a meaningful relationship to co-create knowledge about their experiences with or without a mentor. While respectfully writing about this new knowledge, often untold and unheard in academia, I aim to connect human beings to the Testimonios of Latinas and learn of their challenges (Huber, 2009).

The voices of Latina PhDs are specifically meaningful for women in higher education and to be taken seriously in spaces dominated by Anglo culture. Anzaldúa (2015) warns us:

We must remember that one of the most insidious ways of keeping women and minorities powerless is to let them only talk about harmless and inconsequential subjects or let them speak freely and not listen to them with serious intent. (p.35)

Using the lens of Chicana feminist epistemologies, I detailed the Testimonios of the Latinas to build on the research of past scholars who have acknowledged critical race-gender epistemologies to construct the cultural knowledge of Latinas (Bernal, 1998). I was careful in choosing Testimonios as a methodological design because traditional approaches would not accurately collect the power of the women’s experiences (Pérez Huber et al., 2006).

The aim was to conduct 24 Testimonios of Latinas with a PhD to “bring the method of
Testimonio to life” in educational research (Burciaga, 2007). During Testimonios, I asked open-ended questions in either English, Spanish, or translanguaging, the fluid use of two languages in one utterance to capture the depth of meaning (personal communication with Dr. Claudia Bermúdez, January 8, 2024), where the Doctoras reflected on and described personal details of their lived experiences. Once the Doctoras completed Stage One of Testimonios, I continued to small focus group sessions and collaborated on the shared experiences. Before giving their testimonies, the Latinas completed a demographic questionnaire (Appendix A) about their families, backgrounds, and self-identification. As this is a qualitative research study using Doctoras’ Testimonios, it is vital to have demographic details rather than generalize about the women participating in this study.

The data collection for this study focused on Latinas with a PhD and lived experiences of their journeys with or without a mentor, including how they maintained their cultural and gender identities. The Latina’s stories explained the challenges and triumphs of being in the 8.3% of Latinas with a PhD (NCSES, 2023). The wisdom of the Latinas added insight to the existing research to find ways for other Latinas to have the same destiny. All twenty-four Latinas gave perspectives through their Testimonios and confirmed the information in focus groups of two to five Doctoras. The same fourteen questions guided the Doctoras during each Testimonio. Approximately three Doctoras did not require guiding questions, using question #1, “Describe your doctoral journey,” as the basis for the entire forty-minute Testimonio.

Data Analysis

My data analysis was grounded on and adapted from Huber’s strategy for data collection. Huber and Cueva (2012) drew data from focus group interviews based on the Testimonios of 20 students engaging in collaborative data analysis through reflection and theorizing about their
experiences. The data are meant to unite readers and the Doctoras to understand the Latinas’ struggles. I have done the same but with twenty-four Latinas.

In addition to *Testimonio*, I used tenets of Saldaña’s (2021) research, specifically when working with multiple Doctoras in a study. Saldaña recommended coding one participant’s data first, then progressing to the second participant’s data. The second data set influenced and affected the recording of the first participant data. Data transcribing resulted in construing common categories. Topics were grouped, and the groupings relating to the categories showed interrelationships. The categories developed codes/themes. A researcher should then assign emerging codes/themes to three groups—expected, surprising, and unique (Creswell & Creswell, 2017)—to ensure that the qualitative findings represent diverse perspectives.

The *Testimonios* and focus groups were recorded during the Zoom meeting. Immediately following the Zoom meeting, I wrote copious notes in an analytic memo. My colleague in the PhD cohort, Camani, observed and noted the Doctoras’ emotions in the focus groups. Soon after, the *Testimonios* were transcribed using Otter AI. I emailed the transcript to the Latinas themselves for member checking. I kept succinct communication records with the Latinas (Appendix J). The *Testimonios* and Focus Groups data were thematically coded in three cycles to obtain the overarching themes. Figure 4 provides an example of how the data was hand coded. Appendix F outlines the codes, categories, and themes.
I used evidence to support the overarching themes through the power of the Latinas’ stories. During the coding process, I used analytic memos to confirm how emotional I felt and cried along with many Doctoras during their Testimonios. The majority of the Doctoras faced institutional barriers during the PhD process. Although the barriers share similarities, the Doctoras’ stories differ. Many of the quotes from the Latinas were a reflection of racism, sexism, classism, and ableism that guide normative academic research. Using the methodological approach of Testimonios “acknowledges and draws from funds of knowledge which exist outside of the academy and within Communities of Color” (Huber-Perez, 2009).

The first coding cycle consisted of three hundred and twenty-nine yellow post-it notes of data. The yellow Post-it notes of data were then placed under fifty-three codes labeled on pink-colored Post-it notes. The fifty-three codes extracted from the data set are considered the first iteration of code mapping. According to Saldaña (2016), the second iteration of code mapping now categorizes the initial codes (p. 220). Twelve main categories surfaced during the second iteration of code mapping. The third iteration of code mapping was categorized further, from twelve categories to four overarching themes; see Figure 5.
According to Saldaña (2016), coding aims to develop codes from data, categories from codes, and themes from categories. The purpose of coding is to condense the data, not reduce it. Coding began after all the Testimonios, Analytical Memos, and Focus Groups were transcribed, and member checked. I developed 14 questions to guide me through the Testimonios. I separated the questions into the following order: Questions 1 & 2, 3, 4, & 5, 7 & 8, 9 & 10, and 11, 12, 13, & 14. During the first cycle of coding Testimonios, I wrote the Latina’s name on an index card with the Latina’s number. Then, I would write important data points on yellow Post-it notes and attach the note to the index card. I repeated this for the clusters of questions. For the second coding cycle, I grouped the yellow data points (Post-it notes) into a pattern of codes to create categories. All the categories were written on a blue Post-it note. I clustered the blue Post-it notes in the final coding cycle to develop overarching themes. The themes were written on larger pink Post-it notes. The themes related to the research questions are represented in Table 3.
Table 3

*Themes Related to Research Questions*

**Research Question 1:** How do Latinas who earn Ph. D.s describe the role of mentoring in supporting their degree completion in higher education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Navigation Barriers</td>
<td>Educational institutions maintain racism, sexism, and classism (Solorzano &amp; Yosso, 2001).</td>
<td>“I got into several schools for my PhD. Some of them were at Ivy League institutions. I went to a public school with less money, partly because I had a Latina who was a PhD mentor. And then, over half of the graduate students were Latinos, too. It was primarily for women, whereas all the other programs were for men. But there were costs associated with that and graduating from a less prestigious university to have made that choice. But I was not the only one. I would have been the only one at the other four schools.” Laura</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question 2:** How did Latina doctoral students negotiate cultural and gender identities in academia with a mentor?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Identity Through Mentorship and Scholar Familia</td>
<td>Seek to inspire other sista scholars, to give voice to their truths, to build community with one another, and to reject the toxicity of dominance and oppression inherent in the academy (Ashlee, Zamora, &amp; Karikari, 2017).</td>
<td>“My mentor was an engineering graduate student who was a little ahead of me, but he paved the way and said, “I wish you could see the way that I see you because you're amazing.” That was very meaningful to me. He shares my cultural background, and he's Latino, from the valley in Texas.” Aurora</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cultural and Gender Assets

The assets make life valuable and worth living. The assets can be material, immaterial, emotional, or even spiritual.

“"I'm the only Latina in my department. And I work at an HSI. And so, for my students, it allows us to have connections and create a deeper meaning. In the classroom, many have said they feel like they can talk to me over talking to one of their other professors.”

Mallory

Feminist Energy

Feminine energy is soft, nurturing, and grounded, not easily influenced. She is soft on the outside but strong on the inside and exercises her boundaries. This strength comes from knowing who she is and what she wants and not being afraid to meet her shadows. She feels that broad spectrum of emotions and looks for the lessons underneath. And this soul work allows her to rise, each time, stronger than before.

“I am more than my gender and your expectations of me as a female.” Maria Teresa

The twelve categories are institutional change needed, systemic inequities, systems of oppression, mentors and the pace of a PhD, network of peers, sense of belonging, Latina assets, cultural gender experiences, scholar familia, gender & culture, painful feelings, and daunting experiences. As mentioned, the four themes created from the categories are navigational barriers, identity through mentorship and scholar familia, cultural and gender assets, and feminist energy.
**Ethical Protection of Participants/IRB**

Several steps were taken to protect the Doctoras and their privacy from harm during or after the study. Before conducting personal *Testimonios*, I received approval from Claremont Graduate University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) to conduct *Testimonios* on a volunteer basis. I have included a copy of the IRB approval (Appendix G). To protect the identity of the Doctoras, I chose a pseudonym for each person.

I honored the stories of the participating Latinas while at the same time contributing to the existing research about mentoring Latinas on a doctoral journey. At the beginning of each *Testimonio*, I introduced myself, discussed the purpose of the study, explained the demographic survey, provided an overview of the *Testimonio*, and asked the Doctora if they had any questions. Next, I informed each Doctora that the study and *Testimonios* were voluntarily completed, and each Doctora could choose not to answer any of the questions. If the Doctora wanted to withdraw from the research at any time, there would be no harm or penalty. Furthermore, the Doctora did not have to divulge information if she felt uncomfortable or nervous.

All perspectives on the Latinas’ privacy are protected in this study's papers, books, talks, posts, or stories. I have an ethical duty not to share raw or identifying data with others. I assigned a pseudonym to each Doctora. Furthermore, to protect the confidentiality of responses, I secured the collected data in a locked file cabinet and destroyed the original data after I had completed the research project. After the interviews, I provided my email and cell phone number, where the Latinas could reach me with any concerns. The contact information for my Chair was also included in the consent form.
Key Experiences and Positionality

As I explain key experiences and positionality, I must take this opportunity to pay homage to my Indigenous ancestral community that made this research legitimate in higher education. The Latinx community must honor the indigenous community and culture on this land and reposition themselves as visitors instead of “from” that land (López, 2023). A land acknowledgment is crucial because it de-centers a unifying Latinidad and centers the Indigenous lives that coexisted with the land before the violence of settler colonialism. Acknowledging community is a precursor to unity among Latinas and other BIPOC folks.

My research topic was solidified in the fall of 2020 during Dr. Paik’s ED 608, Research Methods & Design for School Leaders class. Dr. Paik encouraged me to focus on mentorship and higher education with a focus on Latinas. Her assistance in narrowing my topic to key points was the assurance I needed to continue researching Latinas with a PhD.

If Latinas and other Students of Color are to overcome challenges embedded in academia, they need multiple mentors who guide them to succeed. Having a mentor who looks like the mentee, is part of the same culture, and values similar funds of knowledge is imperative for academic success (Mireles-Rios & Garcia, 2019). In the spring of 2021, I began a pilot study that granted access to participants from IRB and found six participants, each of whom I interviewed three times. During the pandemic, I conducted eighteen 30-minute semi-structured interviews via Zoom with Latinas aged 18 or older with a PhD from an accredited doctoral program in the United States. The pilot study gave me experience for my future research by receiving approval from the IRB, practicing interview protocol such as trial and error with interviewing techniques, being introduced to coding, and becoming familiar with the formalities of conducting research.
The focus of the pilot study informed my future research in the following ways: finding a more extensive participant base, possibly researching Latinas who have dropped out of a PhD program, and inquiring if a mentor could have made a difference. The following questions were developed for the dissertation study: Does the higher quality of mentorship determine the pace of completing a PhD? Does it matter if Latinas attend a high research-intensive university compared to a low research-intensive university? Are interviews sufficient to honor successful Latinas’ stories with a PhD, or would counterstories or Testimonios be a more powerful resource tool?

Emerging recommendations from the pilot study’s participants suggested adding questions about financial responsibilities, including parent perception, and more about “scholar familia.” Dr. Bermúdez introduced “Scholar Familia” in her doctoral classes, Socially Just Leadership, Becoming Equity Champions for Special Populations. I learned that being part of a scholar familia is a safe space to share with people you trust and hold dear to your heart, like family. Cynthia Diana Villarreal from USC used the term in her work concerning the intersectionality of culture, class, gender, and race in higher education. The term “scholar familia” was coined by three women of color enrolled in a PhD program in the Midwest. They called themselves “Sista Scholar Familia,” which is a foundation for them to share their most intimate experiences on becoming and staying authentically woke (Ashlee, Zamora, & Karikari, 2017).

After the pilot study, I audited two courses in Women and Gender Studies and one course on Chicanas in Education through Pomona College. Through this coursework, I realized some of my limitations from the pilot study, such as failing to include the gender and ethnicity of the interviewees’ mentors, which might have prevented further scrutiny of the mentor-mentee
relationship. My future dissertation should review the influence of mentors’ race on Latina graduate academic success factors. Another limitation centered on the type of mentoring (formal or informal) on a student’s academic success.

In these additional courses, I learned about *Testimonios* and their power on those who engage in them. *Testimonios* allow Latinas the space and time to explain experiences in impossible ways. Reading article after article, I realized the process of *Testimonio* was exact and painted a complete picture of the systemic oppression women experienced in the Chicano Pipeline. Huber and Cueva (2012) explained it best: "through the stories of Latina participants who addressed a collective struggle bearing readers to witness and providing a means to reflect, engage, and theorize.” *Testimonios* gave Latinas the power to be vulnerable by sharing the pain of oppression and rejoicing in struggles overcome. Perez Huber (2009) describes how *Testimonio* is a powerful way to document and theorize the struggle, survival, and resistance to oppression in graduate school. The pilot study altered my dissertation research in a way that honored and respected the stories of the participating Latinas.

My positionality of living in the Midwest for almost eight years has given me a deep understanding of the lived experiences of six Latinas in this study. They described a “sink or swim” experience. I remember the isolation of People of Color in that part of the country. Yet being born and raised in Southern California and experiencing the Chicano Pipeline, different trajectories guided me in different pathways, with all paths lacking mentorship. Using the model of *Testimonios*, along with living in the Southwest region for over forty years combined with past relationships with friends, neighbors, and community, inform how I have interpreted the Doctora’s stories. As an insider to the population, I identified familial gender role expectations from parents. I could understand why some mothers and fathers did not value the worth of an
education. I related to the six Doctoras who did not have a mentor to guide them, as I never had one. I understood seven of the Doctora’s from the Southwest regions of the US when they explained their reasons for obtaining a PhD and whether or not they had a mentor. Like many of the Doctoras, I never saw myself in the data of doctorate studies. I entered the education profession due to my parent’s school experience in Texas and from my internal desire to be a mother while having a career.

My approach to this dissertation was informed by critical work from Latina authors such as in *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987), along with feminist authors offering their own stories (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001), and being a student in higher education. Six of the Doctoras are now employed in higher education in Texas. Alongside most of the country, Texas continues to cater to the white middle class. Five Doctoras on the East Coast had similar stories to the other Latinas in the study; they all tread carefully in their doctorate programs, navigated by code-switching, and felt a lack of representation.

The doctoral program was a challenge for all twenty-four motivating Latinas in this study. The fact that the Doctoras have achieved success at earning terminal degrees is not only heroic and motivating but they are seen as pioneers for other Latinas in doctorate studies. The Doctora’s scholarly contribution to academic society is stated in the next section of this dissertation.
Chapter 4: Presentation of Results and Interpretation of Findings

This chapter provided insight into a mentor's role in making a difference for eighteen of the twenty-four Latina participants to complete their doctoral degrees. The four themes in this study surfaced from twenty-four Testimonios, four focus groups, and twenty-four analytical memos. The emerging themes from the Testimonios are navigational barriers, identity through mentorship and scholar familia, cultural and gender assets, and Latina feminist energy, all providing insight into mentorship at the institutional and personal level. The Doctoras in this study generated amazing strengths separated from the barriers in which they needed to navigate. An asset-based focus about the strong-minded Doctoras in this study did not negate the need to address inequality in doctoral programs. This dissertation was written with an asset-based approach by focusing on the strengths, culture, and diversity of thought from the twenty-four Latinas rather than a deficit-based approach which focuses on the participants inadequacies. For example, an asset-based approach focused on a professor building relationships and getting to know students such as Anna, who had to pump breast milk in the back of the class during a lecture. A deficit-based approach would have seen pumping breast milk as a distraction not only to the class but overall, as a negative to females having babies during the PhD experience.

Twenty-three of the twenty-four Testimonialistas faced serious tensions of navigational barriers in doctorate programs. Daisy shared her struggle with the faculty not wanting to be on her committee because they disagreed with her writing and what she was doing for the LatinX community. Ceci felt silenced when her Caucasian female professor did not want to be her chair. Bella explained the hardening of the immigration experience and shared that most people have not seen a tenth of the hardship she has experienced. Despite the continuous tensions faced, the Doctoras were persistent in overcoming navigational barriers and finishing their PhD.
Eighteen of the twenty-four Testimonialistas felt that their mentors created spaces for them in academia, guided their decisions, felt safe with their mentors, and felt supported and connected to their mentors. Angela commented about having a friend for mentorship. After briefly pausing, she added, “...but maybe it is just a kind of survivorship.” The six Doctoras who did not have a mentor described their academic experience as traumatic and difficult to navigate while dealing with hidden curriculum and assumptions that they come from highly educated families. Further, many reported being the only Latina in the program, which was a challenge. All six of these Testimonialistas highlighted the complexity of not having a mentor and felt it was an isolated experience.

All twenty-four participants used cultural and gender assets when experiencing tensions in the newfound academia platform. Maria Theresa proudly said, “I am more than a Latina.” Stella had a deep desire to increase the representation of Latinas. However, Luz’s tensions increased because the three people she applied to work with had left the university, and she had to pick up the pieces and find a new mentor. She kept searching for community and did not give up. Angela revealed a long-hidden history of her experience in higher education. The intersection of culture and gender persisted throughout her story:

It's still painful 30 years later, and it's an opportunity for me to share it beyond my inner circle. The sharing part is done with the intent of not necessarily healing, although that can be part of it. But to change things to bring awareness.

Many Doctoras proclaimed living with constant tensions in pursuing a PhD while feeling disconnected from their family. The twenty-four Latinas often maintained strong ties and commitment to their culture and family. Ceci, a first-generation student, described her painful feelings about navigating higher education without family support. It was quite a challenge. Camila felt she defied the expectations of the traditional Latina culture. Theresa used her Latina
feminist energy to describe how the family dynamics are gendered. Caregiving is inappropriately given to women. Juana had similar feelings and said, “As women in our culture, we face machismo in a patriarchal community. We are the backbone of our families. We have gendered roles embedded in our culture.” Anna described how she struggled with her culture not being represented in higher education spaces and shared, “We must ‘embrace our culture.’ There are not enough of us in doctorate programs. We need representation!” Overall, the majority of Latinas often maintained strong ties and commitment to their culture and family.

Using the framework of mujerista mentoring paved the way to understanding how Latinas who earned a PhD described the role of mentoring as helping them stay on track, guiding them to follow the path of their mentors, or influencing them to rely on a classmate for peer mentorship. The Doctoras described their mentors as “seeing the full me” or “giving opportunities for growth.” The commonality among the Doctoras with mentors was a shared feeling of caring and understanding, trustworthiness, and emotional availability, as well as using the word “cariño.” “Being my champion” was a phrase that Doctoras used to describe their mentors. However, there were limitations for some of the first-generation Doctoras as they described the difficulty of finding a mentor or any kind of Latina representation in academia. Access to mentorship was a deciding factor that influenced the completion of the PhD for many of the Latinas as they faced imposter syndrome, only-ness, first-generation experience, and the daily intersection of racism, classism, and sexism. The results of this study have elevated the voices of Latinas with a PhD and emphasized the critical need for mentors in doctorate programs.

Having a mentor was crucial to the Latinas in this study, but they routinely mentioned honoring their cultural values and beliefs. What was clear was that culture plays a role in the
everyday decisions and choices made by the Latinas. Family is essential to their lives, and with family comes community. Community is what the Latinas found in their mentor(s). Most of the Latinas drew upon their mentors as part of their community to negotiate cultural and gender identities in academia, which explicitly addresses how Latina’s experience mentorship in relationship to their gender identity in academic contexts. The Latinas in this study described the need to be in “familia” with their mentors to understand academia as an outsider. The mentors the women most admired treated them with respect and dignity, guided them in financial literacy, and, as Maria Teresa from the south described, were “doing what we want to do and being who we want to be.” The Latinas often expressed how frequently they felt alone, that is, until they had a mentor to help combat internal noise, self-doubt, and racial bias. Almost all Latinas mentioned mentorship being “crucial” to help find their genius, power, and strength. Further, they indicated that mentorship was important for understanding how to use this power and strength to navigate doctoral programs.

The central theme of mentorship emerged from the research on Latinas with a PhD. According to Saldaña et al. (2013), having a mentor could be the transformational change needed to support Latinas along their doctoral journey. Across the twenty-four Doctoras, eighteen Doctoras had a mentor through the PhD journey. Six Doctoras did not have a mentor. The majority of Doctoras seemed to agree that mentors are crucial. Ceci, explained, “I believe mentorship is so important in a society where our culture, language, way of knowing, and existence are not valued.” Ceci’s point represents the Doctoras' overall feelings regarding the role of mentorship for Latina doctoral students, as the elements of culture, language, and Latina epistemologies, paired with historical racism towards Latinas, create barriers that are better addressed with a mentor.
This chapter presents themes from the *Testimonios* with the twenty-four Doctoras. As presented in Figure 6 below, although the theme of navigational barriers directly responds to research question number one, how Latinas describe the role of mentoring, it relates to the other three themes by associating with the struggle to maintain the Latina identity in academia while upholding cultural values. Another struggle that the Doctoras reportedly faced was how often they felt alone, yet, as many Doctoras shared, they found solace through mentorship. The coping strategies reported by the Latinas will be further discussed within the categories under each theme. Figure 6 includes green titles representing one of the four themes that emerged from the data, including navigational barriers, identity through mentorship and scholar familia, cultural and gender assets, and feminist energy.

**Figure 6**

*Organization of Themes*

Making sense of the research questions, themes, and categories was made possible using Anzaldúa’s theory of mestiza consciousness, a gendered analysis intertwined with mujerista
mentoring, which values lived experiences. The Latinas’ experiences led to many stories of navigational barriers they faced in higher education throughout the United States. Like navigational barriers, the Latinas used their feminist energy to combat deficit-based feelings in academia. On the contrary, the Latinas shared an asset-based frame of mind, using their cultural and gender assets and values from finding comunidad to drawing on communal backgrounds as a source of strength. Both asset and deficit-based framing work together to publicly communicate the participants’ lived stories. Identity through mentorship and scholar familia were ways to face academia with a culturally relevant mentor. Having an appropriate mentor often determines a faster pace of completing their PhD. Furthermore, having a network of peers and mentors saved many Latinas from dropping out of the PhD program.

As presented in Figure 6, the commonality of strong-minded and strong-willed Latinas is highlighted in pink. The Doctoras faced affirmative as well as negative experiences in doctorate programs. For example, the Latinas' strength was leaning on their cultural community and realizing they were an asset to their small community in higher education. The Latinas suggested having a network of peers and mentors to obtain institutional change. The mentors with the Latinas in an affirmative experience mirrored their importance in the negative experiences. Mentors were needed to counter only-ness, alienation, and painful and daunting experiences. The power of the negative experiences derives from systemic inequities and systemic oppression, which is not always visible and contributes to the structural racism embedded in doctoral programs. As a result, the Latinas in this study make it clear how these unwritten policies and practices perpetuate oppression in communities of color.

The findings from this study begin with the theme of navigational barriers experienced by the Doctoras, which elucidated how the Latinas described the role of mentoring. Next, the theme
of identity through mentorship and scholar familia is presented. Third, the theme of cultural and gender assets is described. Finally, a theme of feminist energy provides context for how the Latinas countered systemic oppression in academia to earn a PhD.

**Navigational Barriers**

As described in chapter two, research suggests Latinas face different navigational barriers, such as rigid schedules, competitiveness, individual achievement, and autonomy (Orozco, 2003). In this study, Latinas shared that the navigational barriers they faced began before entering a PhD program and highlighted additional navigational barriers during the PhD program.

Before entering college, all twenty-four of the Doctoras described suffering from cultural and gender stereotyping. For example, Maria Teresa stated, “Gender is all tied to our culture. I was raised that the woman should have children, stay home, and do things I am not good at, like cooking and cleaning.” However, women have many other talents but are often not allowed the opportunity to prove themselves in a democratic society. During the PhD program, the Doctoras suffered from alienation. For example, Beatriz, who took seven years to complete her PhD due to the dysfunction of the program, explained, “I was pleading for help from my advisor saying, this is my experience.” When he said I had to ask questions, I took that to heart, but he repeatedly mentioned, “If you are not enjoying it, it is okay to quit.” This Latina felt frustrated and was not worth the professor’s time. The importance of these types of barriers function as reasons why Latinas are not completing PhDs at the same pace as white women or other women of color.

The various navigational barriers experienced by twenty-three Latinas ranged from institutional change needed and systemic inequities to systemic oppression. The navigational

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5 One participant said she did not face any barriers during her coursework and advocated for herself for funding.
barriers identified in this study foreshadowed why mentorship was crucial to the Doctoras. This study’s findings include the Doctoras’ feelings about having difficulty finding a mentor, being the only Latina, and the humiliation they faced in academia. The Doctoras discussed different types of oppression, such as never having a Latina faculty member, being underrepresented in doctorate programs, facing a hidden curriculum, and navigating a set of rules that were never discussed. Other oppressive instances were peers who did not recognize Latinas, making them feel invisible in academia. Some Doctoras never had an official mentor, solely an assigned advisor. For the Doctoras that did have a mentor, a few felt that the mentors needed to value the culture, language, ways of knowing, and our existence in academia. If a mentor had the same values as Doctoras, they would flourish as a student. If they had an inept mentor, a term I would rather use instead of a troll mentor, the PhD would take much longer to complete than it would have with an effective mentor.

As synthesized in the literature in chapter two, several Latina scholars such as Espino (2014), Acevedo-Gil & Madrigal-Garcia (2018) used their voices to raise important issues affecting Latinas’ graduate school survival to resist macro and micro-oppression. Similarly, eighteen Doctoras in this study shared examples of resisting oppression with their mentor’s help. The Doctoras reported that the combination of resistance paired with the role of mentorship was attributed to the successful completion of their PhD.

Camila pointed out that a culturally relevant mentor made a difference in her experience in higher education. Camila also explained the barriers from society to the academic classroom setting. The literature presents several common denominators related to barriers for Latinas, such as the absence of appropriate mentorship, constraints of gender roles, and social inequity (Rudolph et al., 2015; Villaseñor et al., 2013). These barriers continue into the present, as
evidenced by the data collected from the Doctoras, especially for the six Doctoras who did not have a mentor during their PhD studies. In this section outlining the theme of navigational barriers, I delineate four categories: institutional change, systemic inequities, systemic oppression, and only-ness to show how the Latinas from the sample explained their struggles in obtaining a PhD.

**The Need for Institutional Change**

Higher education has been resistant to change. Equitable access, sustainability, and the cost of academia are a few of the existing barriers embedded in the culture and systems of higher education. Tenure track teachers, traditional alumnus groups, and the governance of higher education are not incentivized to push for institutional change. The following narrative is an example of how the current institutional norms have affected Latinas in their PhD journeys.

Through the framework of LatCrit, this study examined how the intersection of culture and gender unfavorably affected the experiences of the twenty-four Doctoras during their PhD programs. Daisy, the only Latina in her PhD program, describes her feelings of not being validated:

That we are not valued hurts; it makes me want to cry. Because I think, in many of the institutions that I've worked at or where I've been a student, my value there is a quota. It always feels that way. My value to them is that “We have a Latina in this cohort.” And that's it, that's so sad. I don’t want to talk about it anymore...I never had a Latina teacher. It should be diverse, and the University should be diverse. Now, I'm teaching at the State University. And honestly, I'm the only one. And so, it makes a difference. Because when you don't see us in these jobs, you think that they're not for us or unattainable.

Daisy was not the only Latina participant to echo her feelings in her PhD program. In the conceptual model of Latina doctorates navigating through higher education, González (2006) lists the following challenges for Latinas to overcome: financial support, discrimination based on class, gender, race, and ethnicity, institution-wide stigmatization, lack of a mentor, tokenization,
marginalization, and low expectations from professors. The evidence from González supports Daisy’s *Testimonios* by reiterating the discrimination and tokenization in academia she faced while in the doctoral program.

The Doctoras in this study eventually negotiated their identities to navigate doctorate programs, knowing they had the support and experience of a mentor to give them the confidence to be themselves. An example is Juana, who never had a teacher or professor of color. She carefully explained that academia is built for the white male person. Frequently, she felt exoticized, minimized, or overlooked in academic spaces because Latina’s brilliance was not appropriately recognized. Her most powerful quote was, “As a Chicana, I show up on my campus daily as an act of resistance. My existence is my resistance. I show up daily in the spaces that do not expect us to be here.” Juana’s counter-narrative exemplifies how the Doctoras achieved success while identifying as a Latina. Juana’s perseverance was attributed to her best friend/mentor, who guided Juana through the biased, racist, and sexist systems of academia that exist in this nation.

*Systemic Inequities*

In some doctoral programs, mentors are valued, but creating spaces for mentorship also carries the demands of assigning a mentor that aligns with the needs and professional goals of the mentee. The unanimous perspectives from focus groups indicated there is danger in assigning a mentor before exploring the needs of Latina PhD students in doctoral programs. Elena believes understanding cultural differences between mentors and mentees enhances mentoring relationships. Elena shared the risk of assuming homogeneity in mentorship because her experience differed completely from her Latina mentor. Her mentor was Puerto Rican, born and raised in the US. Elena was born and raised in Puerto Rico. The university assumed she needed a
Latina mentor instead of exploring and understanding cultural differences. They had completely different experiences and very little to share.

Cultural differences exist between a Latina from Latin America and a Latina from the US. Elena felt that Latinas in the US do not ask for help as steadily as in Puerto Rico. The Latinas in the US are afraid of asking for help, as they already have a sense of not belonging in academia and do not want to add to the inferior feeling of discrimination. Many times, Latinas in the US indicated contentment with not knowing. Elena stated, “We need each other.”

Collectivism in Puerto Rico means helping one another, whether we know each other or get along. Collectivism in the U.S. is different, according to the Doctora’s experience. During her PhD, she would share her work in order to help other students of color. Her thoughtfulness was not reciprocated. Others would be isolated and then show up in the classroom and say, “I am a person of color.” The Doctora felt that people in the US are individualistic and have a dual identity. According to Elena, some behave in one way at home and another in institutions that oppress them. This explanation may be due to cultural incongruity that contributes to the Doctora’s ethnic identity being incompatible with the scholarly identity in academia (Espino et al., 2010).

Six of the twenty-four Latinas described not having but needing a mentor. Among the six mentorless Latinas, all mentioned the importance of funding. Having a mentor would have made a financial difference in the PhD trajectory due to the high cost of doctoral programs. Lupe, an English language learner and the only Latina in her cohort, expressed her feelings:

I went to grad school, where I got the funding to attend. I thought they made a mistake because I could not produce what I was supposed to, or it would take me longer. Moreover, in my case, the longer it took to get done, I was fulfilling my prophecy. A lot of thought processes and negative self-talk, and obviously, not having a mentor to bounce those ideas back and say, “Hey, is this happening to you? Is this normal?” I always felt like an imposter.
For some participants, the priority is to be in a safe space with people who look like us and have a mentor rather than getting fully funded in a place where we do not look like anyone, and there needs to be more support.

Aurora, who chose a University in the South over the University in the Midwest, mentioned, “I stayed local for my PhD even though the other institution offered me guaranteed funding. Staying close to family and around people that look like me mattered more.” On the contrary, Maria Teresa chose to receive the funding, “The funding was the driving factor.” The trade-off was being the only Latina and needing mentor support, even from her faculty advisor. Maria Teresa strives to be able to mentor someone thinking about obtaining a PhD. She would tell them, “Be intentional about what type of support you need (mentorship) and choose a school that aligns with you.” Rosa, who was educated in the Midwest and continues community work in the Midwest, is straightforward in saying she did not have unlimited funding for extra semesters. Lina, a teacher in Chicago Public Schools, often had to remind herself that professors are there to help and be mentors, even if they do not see it that way. Lina felt that the system of higher education is steeped in white supremacy and is about enacting white middle-class norms. Lina was asked to complete multiple revisions for her qualifying exams when most other PhD students did not have any revisions to complete. Lina commented, “I felt imposter syndrome, although somebody in the class said you do not have imposter syndrome, you have been pasteurized. Nevertheless, that was hard. There were a lot of delays and mind blocks along the way.”

The Latinas who did not have a mentor had amplified feelings of paranoia and imposter syndrome. Theresa, a Ronald E. McNair scholar, had an entirely different point of view. This individual's experience did not reflect the preponderance of the Doctoras. Theresa shared, “I
went through coursework, I did not have any barriers, and I advocated for myself for funding, which was above the normal allotted for students.” While this Latina was not like the other twenty-three Latinas in this study, she voiced how she successfully obtained her PhD.

**Systemic Oppression**

Systemic oppression emerged in several ways throughout the educational trajectories of the Doctoras. González (2006) explains the multidimensionality of oppressive structures such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity that exist for Latinas. Latinas experience these oppressive structures through their complex consciousness that is simultaneously informed by the hegemonic power structure, history (US and Mexican), and human agency. According to Anzaldúa (2012), this consciousness allows Latinas to simultaneously live in multiple worlds, analyze them from various perspectives, and initiate resistance.

Drawing from CRT and Chicana feminist frameworks helped to explain the effects of systematic oppression on the Latina body and support the analysis of how women respond to this oppression to heal, resist, and become empowered with the help of a mentor. Laura is a first-generation student who left Costa Rica at age 20 when she received a full-ride scholarship to the US. She had never been to the US but was admitted to several universities nationwide. She noticed that male graduate students largely dominated the university system. Ultimately, she chose a university of two-thirds women and with a Chilean woman on the faculty. She felt very much at home when faculty were as comfortable speaking Spanish as English, as Spanish is Laura’s first language. Laura explains, “The cultural shift of dealing with microaggressions at the doctorate level has been exhausting.” Laura continued explaining that she did not want others who came after her to experience what she has experienced, “There were moments of profound discomfort or feeling like an imposter, just stuff that's really profoundly disquieting.”
The critical part of the Doctora’s mentorship straddles professional and personal situations. She went through a very messy divorce, and her mentors kept her going through challenging years. They are the godparents of her kids. Laura briefly warned about invisible labor as a red flag for future PhD students who want to enter a professorship. Invisible labor is often considered systemic oppression in Women of Color Feminism literature (Toole, 2019). Invisible labor is defined as heavier service burdens placed on women and people of color rather than their white male colleagues to perform diversity-labor work (Toole, 2019). Labor is often divided along gender and race, existing in an environment dominated by male graduate students. Laura felt that invisible labor gets woven into us, “One of the key reasons why there aren't as many women from marginalized identities in those ranks has to do because of all these things that aren't recognized.” The type of experiences from Laura are reason enough to choose race-based frameworks that are tied to educational inequality such as LatCrit.

LatCrit is a framework that deconstructs oppressive conditions by delegating communities of color to strive for social justice (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) in doctoral programs. Stella, who completed her undergraduate in New York and her PhD at an Ivy League college, revealed a concept of “Mesearch.” Mesearch is a current term that is synonymous to autoethnography, when a researcher uses personal experiences in academic writing. She describes Mesearch as the bias of others questioning her research based on the Latina culture. The Doctora said, “There's no questioning why academics are researching white academics. Why is that the case for me when researching my people? I think it is a blatant fallacy in their logic.” The Doctora’s experience is a prime example of epistemic oppression when community members systematically suffer some form of epistemic injustice (Toole, 2019). Epistemic injustice is a form of discrimination. In other words, someone receives less epistemic good, such
as education (Fricker, 2017). The example shared by the Doctora maintains oppressive systems by centering the needs of dominant groups.

Stella had mentors who provided her with written support on her dissertation, yet she had an overwhelming sense of loneliness. However, these same mentors were not able to give her emotional mentorship. Stella admitted, “I wanted to be seen for who I am. Not just as an academic but as a Latina woman of working-class descent, as a queer woman of color.” She recognizes the mentorship as limited because she received no emotional mentorship. Stella felt isolated due to being the only Latina in her cohort and the only Latina in a program of sixty people. She had one white male mentor and one mixed-race male mentor, leading her to outsource support outside her program. Stella asserted, “There was much emotional turmoil for me, like the stereotypes and microaggressions as a woman, especially in STEM discipline.” Stella commented about observing male scholars of color and their way of communicating with one another like brothers. Stella added, “Clearly, it was very much like a boys club, and so I think my gender contributed to my feeling alone, as well.” The Doctora defines mentorship as “...someone who helps you think differently. The mentor is wiser and has more experience, which allows for mistakes but also allows you to make your own choices.” Stella’s definition was not in line with the mentorship she received during the doctoral program.

Not only did mentoring definitions vary from each article used in this study, but also from each Doctora. For example, mentoring definitions increase rapidly as trends change and mentorship expands in modern times (Mullen & Klimaitis, 2021). Rudolph (Rudolph et al., 2015) suggests that a definitional consensus on mentoring does not exist. Next, is an emotionally visceral story that provided a rich understanding of the PhD experience with a mentor.
Lupe completed her PhD in ten years. She describes her experience as lonely because she was the only Latina in the cohort. Having a mentor played an essential role in completing her PhD. She had to fight to find a mentor, which was challenging but worthwhile. Lupe shared:

If I did not feel safe with my mentor, I would not… I could cry in my mentor’s office, complain about what was happening, and think they would not be mad at me. So, safety was essential to me. And that they validated me, validated by experience. There was no questioning or wanting me to change.

The Doctora did not pass her qualifying exams due to a Spanish language barrier. Her mentor advocated for her to take the exams in Spanish, and she passed.

Research confirms that Latinas feel isolated due to cultural and language barriers and face patriarchy in doctoral programs, which leads to feelings of marginalization and being othered (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022). Lupe was a Fullbright student for her master’s degree, but the finances were insufficient for the PhD. Therefore, her mentor found an assistantship teaching undergrad. She was married and had the trauma of miscarriages from 2006-2009. Her sacrifices are essential details to contextualize further this study’s goal to elevate the voices of Latinas to center their experiences. Furthermore, the Doctora had to leave her husband and the US for two years to return to El Salvador with her kids to establish residency for her Visa. Lupe’s experience profoundly impacted how her mentor was the key factor in completing the PhD. Her experiences further support the examples of navigational barriers the Latinas faced in this study. Solórzano (1998) challenges the dominant discourse on race by stating that critical race theory recognizes women’s experiential knowledge and is vital to analyzing racial subordination in education. The experiences of the Latinas in this study have proven that doctoral programs across the US might appear to be equal to all still, the layers of inequality are subtle.

Only-Ness

In this study, the Latinas explained the need for a sense of belonging in doctorate
programs. Eight of the twenty-four Latinas’ experiences emerged from the Testimonios as evidence of who felt they belonged and did not feel they belonged in academia. Causing a sense of only-ness or being alone and feeling lonely in academia for eight Latina PhDs. The other sixteen Latinas might have felt the same but did not willingly admit to not belonging to their PhD programs or as described in this study, as being alone or the only one. Taffel (2020) defines this feeling of loneliness as “only-ness.” Three of the Latinas immediately spoke of not belonging. Lupe shared that she had internalized being the only Latina in the program. Malory expressed that she did not have a mentor in the PhD program, making it feel like survival of the fittest. Beatriz shared that she did not feel validated and was gaslighted by faculty, which served as constant reminders that the Latinas did not belong.

Some Doctoras’ memories were repressed during the third focus group until specific topics were mentioned. The Ivy League college Stella attended had a policy of professors evaluating students at the end of each course instead of students evaluating professors. Stella had evaluations by her professors and always felt like an imposter. She thought they would kick her out of the program at any time. It was not based on her ability but on her false sense of belonging. She said, “I was too scared and did not feel worthy enough.” She shared that self-doubt set in, and the lack of sense of belonging led to imposter syndrome and an unwillingness to reach out for help.

Ceci had never had a Latina professor/teacher for her classes. She mentioned that her family did not understand higher education, nor did they value her degrees. Her parents would ask her why she worked so hard. She is a first-generation student, so navigating doctorate programs without family support was challenging. Ceci said:

The professor who would be my dissertation advisor left the university. Furthermore, now, I need a dissertation advisor. I went to the department chair, really panicked. What
should I do? My chair is gone. She said, “Well, you need to find another one.” And I said, “Well, can you be my chair?” And they said, “No, I already have my advisees that will be asking me.” I said, “Wait, they have not even asked you to be your chair?” And she said, “No.” Moreover, I said, “Then why do you say no to me when I am here in front of you asking?” She said, “Because I know that they’re going to. They just haven't come around to it.” And I said, “So now what do I do?” She replied, “You need to find somebody else.”

Ceci felt she did not belong, was silenced, and was shocked. Once again, the Testimonios of the Doctoras described feelings of only-ness.

In the article by Phillips & Deleon (2022), the authors reported that the Testimonialistas shared feelings of isolation and shame that arose when a sense of belonging was absent. The Testimonios in the article highlight experiences of first-generation Latina graduate students with results that run parallel to this study. The results from Phillips & Deleon (2022, p. 208) and this study are similar in the following ways: the Testimonios highlight experiences of first-generation Latina graduate students, illustrate how a sense of familismo aids success, reveal the need for culturally responsive mentorship, and show tactical skills that circumvent oppressive behaviors. As a clarification of mentioning the literature, the Testimonios methodology organically parallel the results with the literature review in chapter two.

Rosa adds a feeling of tokenism to her not having a sense of belonging. She explained what disturbed her, “…the tokenism and how it was beneficial for someone to see you as this Latina who was a student in the doctoral program made you the poster child, yet you were the only one.” She never found a mentor or advisor in the Midwest remotely interested in what she wanted to do: focus on the Latino community. So, she never received an invitation to participate in a research process. In Rosa’s Testimonio, she returned to the sense of belonging. She said she felt like an imposter because she never had a sense of belonging, which placed her in a marginalized position within her doctorate program.
Beatriz is the tenth doctoral student in this study to comment about being the only Latina in the program. This created a sense of academic self-doubt in addition to questioning the Latina’s abilities. In focus group four, Beatriz commented that the program was taking a toll on her and her mental health. She was in survival mode and said, “Really trying to prove them wrong is why I persisted. I realized how much these people make no sense. They are perpetuating the system of oppression.” At the time of this research, Beatriz reported continuing her healing journey out of the toxic environment of academia.

Anna also felt like an imposter, even in a major city in Texas. She shared, “Even though I live in a predominantly Mexican city, my institution was predominantly white, and when I spoke up, I felt like an imposter.” The Doctora did not have a mentor during her graduate school experience when navigating the doctorate program and the dissertation process. She was considered a nontraditional student because she worked full-time, went to school at night, had two children, and gave birth to her third child during the program. Not every student comes from the same educational, cultural, and economic background; all have different viewpoints and experiences that carry various levels of expertise and knowledge (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022). Her journey is very different from that of someone deemed a traditional student. Anna’s response is a direct answer to research question #1: How do Latinas who earn PhDs describe the role of mentoring in supporting their degree completion in higher education? The following sections are responses to research question #2: How, if at all, did Latinas who earned PhDs negotiate cultural and gender identities in academia with a mentor? The sections included are Identity Through Mentorship and Scholar Familia, Cultural and Gender Assets, and Feminist Energy. The following sections also presents an asset-based view of the Latina culture and gender while highlighting the Latina community.
Identity Through Mentorship and Scholar Familia

This section as well as the following sections of Cultural & Gender Assets, and Feminist Energy, are direct answers to research question #2: How, if at all, did Latinas who earned PhDs negotiate cultural and gender identities in academia with a mentor? Eight Doctoras claimed peer mentorship was like family, and five considered their professors as mentors and family. I resonated with the literature by honoring and labeling the familial relationships “scholar familia.” The term was coined by three graduate student women of color who gravitated to one another for survival in a predominantly white institution in the rural Midwest. The reflective and liberating process of authors Ashlee, Zamora, and Karikari (2017) was to write collectively, influence other graduate women of color, validate their presence in doctoral programs, and applaud their persistence. The three writers have upheld a lens using a feminist standpoint and critical consciousness toward systems of domination and cognitive liberation (Anzaldúa, 1987). Identifying common themes such as Brown scholars being invisible, classes that do not represent people of color, imposter syndrome, and minimizing the presence of People of Color reproduces the same oppressive feelings the authors felt. The following narratives from the Doctoras in this study contextualize their respective stories within a system of oppression through the categories of mentors determining the pace and a network of peers.

Mentors Determining the Pace

The significance of the findings of identity through mentorship is attributed to the Latinas’ PhD experiences of maintaining a strong identity with the guidance of mentors. Mentors both guided women in their academic identities, and they sped up the pace of PhD completion for some women. Eighteen of the twenty-four Latinas agreed that mentors determined the pace of PhD completion.
For example, Daisy is a writer. She was the only Latina in her PhD program and a first-
generation student. Her PhD was an eight-year journey. Her mentor kept encouraging her in a
way that did not feel pushy. Daisy describes herself as easygoing. Her mentor was considerate
and kind and would tell her, “If you need a break, you take a break, but you do not stop.” Daisy
was often discouraged. She described an event that often occurred in the Writing Center, where
her class was held. The receptionist, who was a fellow student, would act like she did not
recognize Daisy and asked, “Are you here for an appointment?” Daisy’s response was, “And it's
like bro, I’m in your class like, just because I look like this doesn't mean that I need help with my
writing, which I ended up publishing an article on that situation.” Daisy stated: “They think I'm
on campus because I don't speak English, I need help, or I'm lost. And they're in classes with me,
and they don't see me. And it just, I felt very lonely in that, in that environment. In the end,
Daisy’s mentor influenced her not only to finish the PhD, but to prove that she belonged there.
Lupe describes her experience during her PhD as heartbreaking.

She said: I was crying all the time, and my marriage ended. My mentor said, you do not
need to write right now; you can just grieve and take care of yourself and your son, and
you do not have to be productive right now if you cannot be. I am going to cry. Because
when my marriage ended, I thought, “Well fuck him, I will show him, and I'm gonna
finish my dissertation.” Then I took some time off, my mother got sick, and I couldn't
write. She would check in with me and my mom to see how we were doing. She was
present, in the background, but still checking in on me and encouraging me, which I
needed. I would have never finished if I didn't have her.

Lupe attributes her PhD completion to her encouraging mentor, who pushed her through the
program in an accommodating way to her timeline yet respectful of Lupe’s cultural and familial
duties.

The Latinas across the sample experienced a multitude of challenges. In contrast to the
eighteen Doctoras who described who benefited from mentorship, six Doctoras said something
different. Ceci was on her own, navigating higher education. Ceci shared, “I cannot truly say that
I had mentorship within my graduate program doing my PhD.” Malory, who attended the only program in Texas that is entirely online, had similar feelings and said, “But unfortunately, the consensus was nobody was mentored. It was survival of the fittest.” During the Testimonios, the six Latinas revealed many strategies to pursue a PhD, such as counterstories, asking copious questions to alums, attending retreats and seminars, and having a supportive Chair. Counter storytelling is based on the narratives, Testimonios, or life stories of people of color—a story that white educators do not hear or tell (Delgado, 1989).

For example, Lupe did have a mentor to help her negotiate the challenges of academia, yet she did not feel as if her mentor pushed the pace of completing a PhD. She shared:

She honors my timeline. She honors my space. And so, I would have quit if she had pressured me. She knew I was going through a lot at that time. And so, it's not like the high quality of mentorship means you finish faster or on time. No, I think it was just because she knew what I needed. And so, she just supports me.

Another example presents why some Latinas needed to have the luxury of a mentor determining the pace of PhD completion. Some mentors maintain the status quo of gatekeeping and discourage students rather than show support for the mentee’s goals and aspirations (Montgomery, 2019). For example, Nene, who completed her PhD in ten and a half years, commuted at least six hours one way to attend her university on the weekends. She had an advisor/mentor who offered occasional advice. Nene also mentioned the lack of diversity in higher educational institutions. She knew “the less diverse the institution, the more likely it is that I'm going to be invisible.” She describes her experience:

Before taking [my final course], I wanted my professor to review my assignments during an audit class. She told me she did not have time. I was upset and emotionally hurt. Nevertheless, I folded my arms and walked away. I enrolled for about three more years without being able to bring myself back to work emotionally. And then, in year five, I went back to it. In year six, I went back to it again. Finally, in year six or seven, I realized I had made so many modifications to my topic that I ended up duplicating the topic that had already been done, which was the one that got me interested in doing the topic. And I
realized this is supposed to be original research. So, that took about another year of holding back, and I was still upset. Finally, in the last couple of years, I was able to get rid of that bad feeling and needed to make this decision for myself. I continued life without having a doctorate. But then I remembered the work and the struggle and the pride of being able to prepare for the GRE and being accepted to the PhD program. I've done all this work for a doctorate and decided to pull forward to get more extensions, complete the dissertation successfully, defend, and publish.

The Doctora recalls the summer of 2013 as challenging, not because she had five classes, but because somebody came to her and told her that one of her friends in the same PhD cohort commented that she had no business at the university, being a Mexicana. Nene never dared to confront them. Hesitantly, she admitted, “That just broke me down. I did not have anybody to go to.” This marked the rest of her experience. “This was part of why I was sentimental when the professor was not accepting my topic. Because that message was there. I don't belong here.” The idea of recalling a hurtful experience produced fear and anxiety, but at the same time "telling" was the only method for release from painful and humiliating memories (Cienfuegos & Monelli, 1987). Imposter syndrome was a common thread throughout the Testimonios of the twenty-four Latinas.

Many Doctoras included the word “crucial” when describing mentorship. In previous years, Nene had a leadership position in a school district with a mentor who valued her expertise. When describing her former job mentor, Nene became emotional, “I have not been able to find many others that treat me with such respect and dignity. Yeah. Oh my God, I am going to cry.” Nene’s experiences suggest that having a mentor reduced stress promoted learning and was instrumental in a student's well-being and mental health in academia or as an employee. Lorenzetti et al. (2019) noted that mentorship could provide graduate students with access to essential procedural knowledge, reduce academic anxiety, create a sense of being part of the university culture, and advance career skills.
Peer Mentorship

Four of the twenty-four women giving Testimonios attributed successfully navigating doctoral programs to their peer mentors. Elena considers herself a Boricua, as she explains, “I was born and raised in Puerto Rico. I am not used to being marginalized. I was part of the racial and ethnic majority.” While working on her PhD, her experience of merging cultures was challenging. She had a lot of support from her peers. In terms of mentoring in her doctoral journey, she said, “My peers were my mentors because they were in different stages, or they had more knowledge about navigating education as a person of color in the US.” Elena’s peers were integral to finishing her PhD in four years in a hybrid program.

Aurora adds to the conversation by highlighting peer mentorship in her trajectory as a member of the Hispanic Professional Engineers. Her male peer mentor told her to join. After she checked it out, it felt like a home away from home. Aurora said:

And they always said familia, which resonated with me because it felt like family. I remember there were conversations I could only have with that group of people I do not think I could have with my classmates and peers from more privileged backgrounds.

Aurora felt her peer mentors were her community within a doctoral program’s community. Aurora and her peer mentors created writing groups for accountability, let each other vent when needed, and had confianza in one another.

Mariana had two children during her PhD journey and considered her peers like family. She mentioned she was the only Latina in her cohort. She had a bond with her peer mentors, a Filipino woman, a Greek woman, and a white woman who grew up in Spain. They would attend residential meetings together and sign up for standard classes. For the Doctora, peer mentorship was about creating a community and spaces where you could be yourself and be challenged and pushed to learn. Mariana recalled:
Peer mentorship is beneficial because even today, I am one of the few Latinos I know with a doctoral degree. And I am still one of the very few people in my family who has graduated from college. So, to have that circle around me of people I can converse with at that level is highly impactful.

Mariana felt that even though she found her “tribe,” she did not ask for help soon enough. She waited until her coursework was completed. Mariana contributes to the Latino value around community building, which was key to her success.

Laura’s commonality with her peers strengthened as the years passed. She describes her understanding of peer mentorship as the one that has been the strongest in terms of its effect across her career. She had the commonality of being a first-generation student. She did not feel alone. She shared that there were four of them, “two were Puerto Ricans, me from Costa Rica, and then a token Canadian.” Peer mentorship was fundamental and established in graduate school. Their relationship has been going on now for about 25 years.

Peer mentorship relationships ameliorated feelings of isolation and possibly replaced attrition rates with completed degree requirements. Preston (Preston et al., 2014, p. 132) states, “Peer mentorship is an under-utilized resource with great capacity to foster human and social capital within and between cohorts of graduate students.”

The following section is about how the Latinas navigated academia with their culture and gender while highlighting the Latina community.

**Cultural & Gender Assets**

This section contextually highlights the tensions faced by some Latinas on the topics of culture and gender, which are other areas of oppression. It also examines how the Latinas pursued a PhD using cultural and gender assets. Luz describes herself as a Covid-PhD. During the pandemic, she felt extremely isolated, left to rely on her McNair mentor, a white woman who
was “woke” from college. Luz’s struggles stemmed from being thirty years old when she completed her PhD and being of Mexican descent. She passionately explained, “So I grew up with the values that we need a community to be successful, and we are our community. Many inherent morals and values stand to the success that was put on me.” She recalled, “Having a village-type mentality, co-creation, and pro-developing communities that root from our Indigenous culture, is important to overall success, which, unfortunately, in a capitalistic society, is not very accepting.”

I resonated with Luz, recalling scholarly work assigned in classes that never pertained to my family roots nor resonated with my past. I am a fourth-generation Mexican American. My ancestors were born in Texas when Texas was Mexico. I never came across this information in the history books. As women in academia, the struggle to claim space is difficult. Building on González’s (2006) work and commitment to using Testimonios as a culturally relevant approach to contest the injustices in academia is necessary to become assertive against academic discrimination based on race, class, and gender.

Testimonios were coded from multiple participants’ views that pertain to culture at an intersection with gender. Gender has also affected the educational experience for Latinas. Research has implied that high-achieving Latinas may feel pressure to attend college closer to home instead of taking better scholarly opportunities, reporting family tension and parental disapproval as a typical response when they choose to move far to attend college (Hurtado et al., 2020). Amelia stated, “I think Latinas, unfortunately, face gender issues within their gender from Latinos who are white, black, or Asian. It is almost like women subdivided into their power

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6 Ashlee and colleagues (2017) define wokeness as understanding “Critical consciousness to intersecting systems of oppression” (p. 90). To be woke is to hold some sort of capital against an oppressive system by rejecting the injustices the system carries.
structure.” Graciela had a different experience. She had her first child during the PhD program. She expressed, “Pregnancy during the PhD became something that stood out to me because of my gender.” Graciela was a full-time PhD student who felt “very alone.” She did not have anyone at the University to help her figure out insurance or health care for an infant. Through this experience, we are now aware of the gendered dynamics of being a mother during a PhD program, the necessity of affordable health care, and future policy topics that allow expecting PhD students flexibility.

The perspectives on cultural assets highlight how Latina PhD students search for community but often encounter loneliness. In Juana’s Testimonio, she described how we come from a collectivist community and culture and how doctoral programs is built for individuals. She shared, “We must adapt to a sink or swim mentality here.” Graciela reported feeling that the PhD journey was isolated, mainly when writing the dissertation. She did not feel it was normal and said, “It flies against how culturally we were brought up to collaborate.” The Doctoras’ stories are a collective of lived experiences. Brabeck explains, “Unlike autobiography, which relates an individual life story, Testimonio is an expression not of a single autonomous account but of a collectively experienced reality” (Brabeck, 2003, p. 253). Community and collaboration are an integral part of the Latino culture as explained in the following sections which contain the Doctora’s narratives about desire-based research, such as Latina assets, courage to share, and community.

**Latina Assets**

Latinas share a wealth of social, cultural, and intellectual assets as they seek to eradicate barriers in higher education (Villasenor et al., 2013). Maria Teresa contended, “I am more than my gender and your expectations of me as a female.” She revealed her strategy, “My ethnic
identity provided me with many cultural values for navigating higher education and togetherness with others at the university.” The Doctora always knew she would complete a PhD. Everyone in her family has an undergraduate degree: her abuelos, her parents, her siblings, her cousins, literally everyone, mostly in science. Out of her six cousins, five have doctoral degrees.

The framework of Mujerista Mentoring is a lens through which to view how many participants revealed oppression. Anna highlighted her experiences with her advisor, whom she considers her mentor and an asset in her doctoral program. She felt the system was not created to support Latinas in doctorate programs because if it were made that way, it would be a similar experience for everyone. Her advisor/mentor was her champion and an asset, compared to some Latinas who had to go through trial and error in finding a mentor, while some Doctoras never had one. Anna felt that Latinas were lucky if they found an advisor/mentor not embedded in the system.

Daisy recognized the value of a good mentor. She felt her mentor was an asset because “They want you to succeed.” In the end, her mentor kept imagining and saying, “I am going to hood you. “She felt as though her mentor had a positive impact on the people around her at the university. Daisy thought of herself as an outsider. She confesses, “Even now, I am always peeking through doors. My mentor did not just open doors for me; she helped them open and let me peek in to see if I felt comfortable. Then I could step back or step through the door.”

A mentor also made a difference for Camila; for example, Camila came to this country as an undocumented immigrant from Chile. She did not have a bilingual education. She had to attend Spanish school on Saturdays. The Doctora shared that Latinas have a timeline and need support. She defied the expectations of the traditional Latina culture, not following the rules or expected pathway of having children, being married, and staying home. She stated, “If we are to
go against the grain, we need the help of mentors who have been there.” The only people she had something in common with were women who identify as Latinas.

Camila also went through a divorce when she was in graduate school. Her mentors checked in at the time, asking, “How are you doing in your classes? Emotionally? Are you going to see your therapist?” When she met the director of the bilingual program at college, this person became her mentor and is still one of her mentors for life. She elaborates that many of the doctoral students were working full-time and trying to make things work and complete their postgraduate responsibilities while also trying to pay bills. Camila, a Latina who went against the cultural norm of being married and having children, had a mentor who encouraged her to enroll in a PhD program. Camila’s mentor supported her through navigational barriers presented in the doctorate program:

It was compelling for me to be mentored by a Latina, an immigrant who was a parent. I spoke to the different generational complexities in my own life. Moreover, that, for me, felt important when there were certain expectations. How do you have conversations with your parents about this? How do you navigate academia while taking care of an elderly parent? It was more wholesome in that kind of mentoring relationship. That experience was powerful because it saw me facing issues, not just checking off the box to ensure we get a PhD.

Latinas need guidance and assistance to serve as assets in supporting their competencies and confidence. Mentors are a crucial asset for all women of color in academia.

Anna had her mother as an asset. She gave birth to her third child during her PhD program. Anna recalls one Halloween during a weeknight when she had class. She tried not to miss the holidays because of school. Her instructor assigned a test on Halloween. She wanted to take her kids trick or treating. The professor told her she had to choose between the kids and the test. She was outraged and in tears. Her kids missed Halloween due to her class. She commented, “What am I doing to my children? I have faced mom guilt more often than not.” She felt gender
was an issue and said, “We are trying to break through the Adobe ceiling.” With the glass ceiling, one can see through it to reach the next level. With an adobe ceiling, the color is opaque and does not allow the next level to be seen. Anna explained:

Latinas have never been to the other side. We are still determining what it looks like. It's scary. We are trying to get through that ceiling of barriers, boundaries, and setbacks. And we are still determining what lies ahead of us. We're trying to get there.

Some Latinas became mothers during their doctoral journey, also known as the power of motherhood. Anna breastfed in the back of the classroom during lectures and pumped breast milk on breaks during class. Motherhood gave her the incentive to finish the PhD while at the same time being a role model for her children. Anna described how her mother cared for her children while she was in class or working on her dissertation. Her mother fed her children, helped with homework, and had them ready for bed when the Doctora was in class. This extends the literature in the article by Phillips & DeLeon (2022, p. 202), which states that family dynamics sometimes supported Doctoras’ efforts to complete their degree programs.

The Doctora faced gendered issues regularly. Oppression, such as financial constraints, patriarchy, isolation, and rejection. At one point, all the Doctoras experienced these facets of oppression, yet they used their Latina assets and intuition to successfully complete a PhD. A quote by Robert T. Kiyosaki states, “The single most powerful asset we all have is our mind (Kiyosaki, 2017, p. #).” Discussed next are the foundational experiences of the Latinas in this study.

**Courage to Share**

The courage to share painful and challenging experiences stems from overcoming cultural boundaries. Some Latinas had to overcome the glass ceiling mentality of starting a
family immediately and foregoing a career in lieu of taking care of a husband and kids. Maria Teresa shares her parents’ expectations for her as she was raised in a traditional Latino home:

We were raised that the woman’s supposed to have the children and stay home, and all the things that I’m not good at, like, cooking and cleaning and supporting a husband, I support my husband 100%. But you know, we each have our careers. My mom was a stay-at-home mom, and my dad was a provider. It was a message from various Latino folks.

The Doctoras shared challenging and sometimes painful experiences about the tensions of being a Latina and a female in majority white-male institutions of doctoral programs. The diversity of experience was a valuable asset as the following explores the participants’ experiences and how their struggles with academic dominance caused feelings of isolation and invalidation. Isolation is quite the opposite of the Latino cultural norm of interdependence and collaborative learning. In the following section, the Doctoras passionately spoke of their deficit-based stories transformed into an asset-based experience.

Aurora validates the importance of collective experiences. Aurora stated, “It's something we value, acknowledge, and honor because it's not just one Latina experience. It's very heterogeneous. And all those different experiences matter.” Testimonios allowed the Doctoras to remember their feelings of being ignored, isolated, devalued, and even shamed. Aurora expands on her struggles in academia. Her family did not understand why she had not visited home, read and wrote so much, and struggled at the university. Furthermore, she did not know what to do when it came time to write chapters one through five of her dissertation. The Doctora joined gender-specific groups like Latina doctoral pages on Facebook and sought advice from her mentor. Her PhD program expected students to know how to progress, and she did not. Aurora felt that she was the only one who did not know how to complete the dissertation. She completed her PhD in seven years and credits the collaboration between her and her mentor. In this
instance, Aurora’s Testimonio counters the deficit mindset by intentionally focusing on the experiences with a mentor which contributed to success of the PhD completion.

In Amelia’s *Testimonio*, she looked forward to building a coalition with other Latinos at the PhD level. She later realized systemic inequity affects the students and the male faculty of color. The Doctora explained that in doctoral programs people do end up retreating. They end up isolating themselves and not being seen for the research they produce nor as contributors to the overall culture and community. Amelia worked with a well-published Latino professor and looked forward to working with him. But that door was closed right away. He never contacted her to write to him. It wasn't until years later that she realized this is how he survives. Amelia learned to consciously focus on her strengths and turn to other professors who welcomed her as an asset to their learning environments.

Elena felt her strength lay in practicality. In her *Testimonio*, she shrugged and stated, “I don't have a mindset of struggle.” Elena’s asset is obvious in her confident attitude and choice of words: “We need to change the system.” The next section shows Latinas' sense of community as an asset.

*Community*

The significance of identity through mentorship findings is attributed to the Latinas’ PhD experiences of having familial experiences with mentors, labeled in this study as a scholar familia. *Testimonialistas* described their families' lack of knowledge of academia as more reason to turn to a scholar familia to guide them through their journey (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020). For this reason, the Latinas' search for a scholar familia came out of necessity. If a mentor is identified as scholar familia, they motivate the Latinas to persist in the PhD journey. For
example, many Latinas felt that having a scholar familia supported them in completing the PhD journey.

Rosa found an alternative family, also known as her “scholar familia,” that served as a support group. Rosa’s work is with the Latino Community at a public college in the Midwest. What she experienced compared to her white colleagues, who she felt had an unrealistic perspective of life, was a different point of view. Her colleagues did not experience the hidden curriculum, being a first-generation student, or the comforts of community over individuality.

As a graduate student, she received a small grant to look at interdisciplinary practice in urban schools and then at the development of community schools. She recalls a professor who told her that “wasn’t real research.” The Doctora also dealt with harassment, especially from single males who commented about Latinas. She recognized the sexist behavior and dealt with the microaggressions by creating spaces in her community of support. She stated, “The madrina is the mentor. She will guide, support, and tell you when you are wrong. Sometimes that could be la tía.” Mentorship is the camaraderie of having a social network that will support you. The Doctora and other Latinas decided to develop a sorority. They did not need to be a part of a white sorority because they would not receive the support required. Her university comadres, tias, and the madrina were all her mentors. Since they went through everyday experiences like being born in this country, they knew the ropes would guide Rosa in specific directions and would expose her to things that helped build her social capital.

Many Latinas are accustomed to prioritizing their parents, children, and other family members before themselves or their educational commitments. Two Latinas mentioned that leaving home due to financial awards to continue their studies heightened their feelings of isolation and made it difficult for their families to let go of their daughters. The next section will
explain how some of the Latinas turned inward toward their unique energy to face doctoral challenges.

**Feminist Energy**

Latinas who felt lost in academia mentioned using all their energy by working much harder than their white counterparts and having to assimilate, leading to their marginalization and isolation. Some said they did not have scholarly support or validation. Others lost confidence in their academic abilities and potential for success and discussed rethinking their educational career desires. Most Doctoras have faced epistemic injustices when their expertise was invalidated or overlooked among people who did not share their knowledge. The Latina feminist energy is a source held within the Latinas of this study that is unique to this study. Feminist energy is a coping strategy for creating future supportive spaces and challenging the current educational system, which adds to the existing research about mentorship. Rosa stated, “It is essential to understand that we work within a system that defines success through Eurocentric values. Furthermore, you will never succeed if you do not play the game. It will take you longer to do your research.” During her PhD studies, she was told not to do anything remotely related to Latino issues because people might assume it is biased. They felt they knew the work enough to dismiss it. She was pulled away from doing that work, and it was painful for her to exert energy towards researching a topic she had not chosen.

Juana revealed the barriers she faced as a Latina student and her isolation in a predominantly white institution. However, she achieved her PhD with a mentor and her feminist energy. She would tell her mentor, “I am experiencing some severe racial bias, some severe imposter syndrome.” Her mentor would constantly reassure her that she was not crazy. Her mentor would say, “Yep, that happened to me. Okay, so here is what you do to combat it.” The
unwritten rules revealed by her mentor and her energy to persist and continue her PhD studies were prevalent in the *Testimonio*. Juana testified that there was not a single person who looked like us, nor who taught us, and that we were victims of this messed up educational pipeline from K-12. She explained her analysis of higher education:

Latinas are tracked into the non-college prep curriculum, and Latinas are tracked into needing to complete associate degrees or bachelor’s degrees and higher. When a few Latinas go against the tracking system and make it through several degrees, Latinas find themselves alone in these spaces, with mentors being the only ones to count on.

Lupe conveys her experiences of epistemic injustices and how she used her feminist energy to stay true to herself. Through the pain and the reflection in her eyes, she uttered, “I need to be seen as who I am as a Latina, with my values and my own culture.” She expressed that Latinas try to adapt to the system and behave as the majority because one must survive and get it done.

The Doctora declared that she plays the game. The internalization of the Latina identity of looking different and acting differently caused her to stand her ground and embrace her Latinidad. She added, “I stay true to myself when I play the game.”

The overall sense for these Latinas was to give all their energy to work harder than other classmates. Bella mentioned that her classmates came from well-off or middle-class families and had support systems. She had nothing like that. She lived under the pressure of, “I cannot screw this up. Because if I do, there is no fallback. It was that sense of anxiety that everything had to go according to plan. There is no plan B.” Many Latinas had mentors who believed in their capacity and resilience. The Latinas without mentors had tough decisions, such as resigning from their workplace to finish their PhD.

Malory reached out to other Latinos at other universities to get help with the Internal Review Board (IRB), an administrative body that protects the rights of human subjects. Even though Malory successfully defended her dissertation, she felt the PhD process was complicated.
and did not make sense. At the end of her PhD program, Malory felt depleted entirely from stress and frustration.

The Doctoras shed light on their epistemic injustices and how they employed their feministic energy to manage the demands of academia. In order to improve equity for Latinas in doctoral programs, there exists a need to balance between deficit-based approaches and asset-based strategies to increase the number of terminal degrees for not only Latinas but all marginalized communities. The following sections will explain the intersection of double strength, painful feelings, and daunting experiences as the female Latinas narrate their experiences.

**Double Strength**

To confront the multiple forms of daily and structural oppression, Women of Color feel that sharing narratives creates many possibilities to provide empowerment and hope for the future (Anzaldúa 2002). Hope for the future is key as Latinas in academia face double alienation in that they are both alienated from doctoral programs and family. During focus group two, Maria Teresa explained how we, as females, are the backbones of our families. Her feelings were strong about having gender roles embedded in our culture. Maria Teresa stated, “When going against the grain, it alienates us from our families.” Some Doctoras created a resistance network with similar-minded Latinas across the U.S. through cultural institutions and national conferences. Juana exemplifies a network of resistance and a testament to strategically using feminist energy and changing double alienation to double strength. She had to commute seventy miles for her PhD. She was married, had just moved, was working full-time, had a new dog, and a horrific boss. She took out the maximum student loans and quit her job to be a full-time PhD student. She never had a single person of color as a teacher/professor to guide her or be a role
model and instead faced binary decisions with family and academia. The Doctora was fortunate enough to have her best friend as a mentor during the PhD process, as she was experiencing severe racial bias and feelings of imposter syndrome. Her mentor would constantly reassure her that she was not crazy. Her mentor would recommend ways to combat racism and tell her, “There is no guidebook, especially for Latinas, about how we are supposed to succeed.” The Doctora attributes her mentor's help in assisting her in persevering through biased, racist, and sexist systems in doctoral programs.

Women often negotiate careless boundaries and have the burden of creating new meaning in environments with an expectation of submission and keeping to gendered scripts (Hernández, 2020). Laura elaborates on her experience in academia, and like the other Doctoras, she was struck by how many folks had preconceived notions of what the Latina experience is all about in terms of ethnic and gendered implications embedded in the intersectionality of academia. The Doctora had to explain notions about identity that were relatively pedestrian. Educating others is a form of epistemic oppression in which marginalized knowers are expected to educate dominantly situated knowers about their oppression (Toole, 2019). Attending to the interest of the dominant group has emerged as a pattern from this study. Maria Teresa also had to explain and educate faculty members about Latino culture. She had to justify why her dissertation focused on the Latino culture due to push back from her committee about educating them on why this is important and the gaps in the literature. Once again, using mestiza consciousness as a framework is an appropriate lens to examine Latinas who navigate contradiction in their everyday work. Mestiza consciousness is a framework used to analyze the lived experiences of those who are a part of oppressed communities.
Some Latinas were unwilling to sacrifice their values and beliefs for the sake of a tenured faculty position, and if they did, it may have resulted in burnout or conflicts in values and beliefs. Elena spoke of a tireless work ethic in academia. As a PhD student, she has seen career-driven mentorship from other Latinas with a traditional mentality, which she associates with daughters of immigrants. They are hardworking, and they cannot take a break. They do not take a sick day. They do not rest. She admires these professionals but wants to be different from them. She would like to enjoy work and not be burnt out.

Research on educational fulfillment, tenure status, and promotion consistently shows that mentoring is an urgent component of success, especially for females and underrepresented faculty (Cavazos, 2016). Thirteen of the women in this study are first-generation students. First-generation Latinas face more challenges in navigating doctoral program fields due to the differences between their families and Eurocentric, middle-class values (Valenzuela, 2020). In the following section the Doctoras describe their values through the pain endured while completing a PhD.

**Painful Feelings**

The Latinas in the study integrated successful resistance to the academy when collaborating with similar-minded scholars who supported and encouraged their resistance (González, 2006). Many Latinas spoke in Spanish to express their thoughts, communicate their ideas, and make known their cultural beliefs, which were antithetical to the academy's unwritten rules. Beatriz had to learn without similar-minded scholars in the Midwest. She described the university as the system and felt that none of it was made for her. She realized she had to be stronger than everyone else to survive. Beatriz describes the Midwest university as a toxic environment. Faculty of color were nonexistent. If she could change anything about the system,
it would be to improve faculty hiring where more ethnically diverse people are recruited. The PhD program and faculty did not want to take accountability for the systemic issues that Beatriz faced. Beatriz’s *Testimonio* is further explained in the *Daunting Experiences* section.

Magnifying multiple experiences and intersectionalities of Latinas in doctoral programs spotlights how Latinas resist oppressive experiences so that other women of color identified how to use more equitable practices (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022). Angela has suppressed her painful lived expertise since the 1980s. Her bravery in telling her story is meant to bring awareness of the injustices Latinas experience in doctoral programs in hopes of change in academia. Angela explained similar painful feelings of being offered a scholarship in a top seven-ranking university in the country. There was a semester when she could not pay the outrageous tuition, and a miscommunication occurred in funding. She attended classes, and at this point in the *Testimonio*, she begins to sob and reiterates the 1980s as the time, evidence of how deep the pain remains. Through tears of pain, she admitted that the professor said she could not ask questions in front of the entire class because she had not paid her tuition. Not only was she hurt and humiliated, but it was wearing on her emotionally. She connected more with the janitors and the house cleaners than students and faculty. She could only afford to go home once a year. During Thanksgiving and Christmas, she was on campus alone.

Furthermore, Angela was also accused of plagiarism. When speaking to her advisor about it, he responded, “Oh, I can no longer be your advisor. I am stepping down.” She wanted to participate in this study because she feared I might not get many Latinas from her generation. These experiences are still painful for her 30 years later. In *Testimonios*, once you tell it, it is out in the world, and you no longer control it. After thirty years, she was ready to tell her story to bring change and awareness.
Bringing awareness to the Testimonios of the participants was an honor for me to validate and learn from their lived experiences, like the Doctora’s stories. Being offered a fully funded scholarship at a top university would benefit any student. However, the lack of mentorship, contending with university politics, miscommunication, and bureaucracy, harmful and hurtful experiences with faculty, unsupportive environments, and oppressive behaviors led to the demise of Angela completing her PhD at a top-ranking university. Instead, she transferred to the West Coast and finished many years later. The Doctora’s Testimonio shows the lack of compassion and support for women of color during the 1980s. This study, hopefully, will influence those in positions of power and privilege in academia to recognize this type of oppression and work toward equity for students who have been historically marginalized.

**Daunting Experiences**

Oppressive systems diminish the physical, mental, emotional, or spiritual health of people of color, directly connected to the struggles of depression, anxiety, and hopelessness, or threaten an individual’s ability to succeed in any educational setting (Peterson, 2017). Many Latinas in this study mentioned how many years of their lives took and how much energy it took to obtain a PhD. This seems to coincide with a disturbing experience from Beatriz, who took seven years to finish her Ph.D. in the Midwest. The Doctora struggled financially; her grandmother passed away, and Beatriz was hospitalized for health reasons. She felt numb through the PhD and began therapy. She faced many microaggressions from professors, such as when a professor told her, “You speak good English.” At that time, she did not have the bandwidth to self-reflect. The Doctora described the faculty as “Almost threatening to kick her out.” When she pleaded for help from faculty members, they said, “It is okay to quit.” The Doctora’s daunting experiences include never feeling validated, invalidation, and gaslighting, which all contribute to an abusive
environment. The faculty perpetuated the system of inequality by saying, “Well, you do not belong here.” If something was wrong, they said, “You are not working hard enough. You do not meet the standards.” The faculty never admitted to or took any responsibility for anything. This Latina called it the “waiting-to-fail model.”

**Conclusion**

The findings of this study highlighted the tensions the twenty-four Latinas faced while attempting to complete their PhDs while maintaining their cultural and gendered identities. The common thread throughout the themes was the negotiation of their identities in academia. With an identified mentor, eighteen participants navigated barriers and painful experiences to complete a PhD. Without a mentor, the six participants felt the tensions and hesitations to push forward to pursue a terminal degree. In conclusion, the experiences of the twenty-four participants shed light on the tensions and negotiations, and they felt that a mentor was crucial while pursuing a PhD through an accredited college in the United States.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The relationship between academia and communities of color should be mutually beneficial, with an emphasis on positive outcomes in academia for communities of color. Tuck and Yang (2014) remind us that desire-centered research does not deny the experience of the struggle, trauma, and pain, but positions the knowledge derived from such experiences as wise. This should not be misconstrued as seeing the bright side of misfortune. Utilizing desire-based research as an asset is about working inside a more complex and dynamic understanding of what one comes to know in lived experiences (Tuck & Yang, 2014). Desire-based research is the antidote for damage-focused narratives (Tuck, 2009, p. 416). Tuck offers an alternative to damage-based research. Tuck (2009) advises drafting research focusing on desire instead of damaging communities. An example of desire in the Latina community would be to embrace the plurality, complexity, and entirety of Latinas instead of a binary system that denies their language, family, and values. Tuck has had a profound influence on my research by her asset-based ideology replacing the traditional deficit-based mentality planted throughout higher education.

This chapter presents a summary of the findings from the study, “Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity,” connecting to the small amount of existing literature about Latina PhD lived experiences (Espino et al., 2010; Fernandez, 2019; Gándara, 1995; González 2006; Solórzano, 1998). This study focuses on mentorship, specifically with Latinas during their PhD experiences. The theoretical framework of Mujerista Mentoring was the lens used during the Testimonios to “carve a space within academia to recognize sources of knowledge that are often ignored and delegitimized” (Pérez Huber, 2009, p. 640). Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) Mujerista Mentoring served as the analytic lens to address the
two research questions: 1. How do Latinas who earn PhDs describe the role of mentoring in supporting their degree completion in higher education? 2. How did Latina doctoral students negotiate cultural and gender identities in academia with a mentor? For this study, the methodology of *Testimonios* was a continuous process of listening about hurtful lived experiences from Latinas with PhDs in academia. Following *Testimonios*, focus groups were conducted as a critical component of member checking, adding to the data, and reflecting on the excerpts of the Latina’s *Testimonios*. Additionally, this chapter offers implications for research, policy, and practice.

**Summary of Findings**

The Doctoras demonstrated powerful energy and strength while dealing with a range of emotions, sometimes negative, as a result of asset and deficit-based thinking working hand-in-hand with the Latina’s experiences. Deficit thinking encourages deficit populations. Yet, the focus in this dissertation is to counter the deficit mindset to more of an asset-based approach. In pursuing answers to the research questions, *Testimonios* from twenty-four Latinas with a PhD kindly shared the often-emotional lived experiences of their PhD journeys. Figure 7 below delineates the themes described in Chapter 4. The first theme that emerged across the Latinas was navigational barriers, which directly addressed the first research question on the role of mentoring in supporting doctoral degree completion. Three other themes addressed the second research question and described how Latinas negotiated cultural and gender identities in academia with a mentor. These three themes are 1) identity through mentorship and scholar familia, 2) cultural and gender assets, and 3) feminist energy. The four themes in Figure 7 are in the inner circle. The outer circle connects the *Testimonios* of twenty-four Doctoras to some of the existing literature on Latinas in higher education.
Research Question #1: How do Latinas who earn PhDs describe the role of mentoring in supporting their degree completion in higher education?

Theme 1, navigational barriers, extends the existing literature conducted by Gloria et al (2005) who found that, “for Latinas, it is well documented that factors such as a lack of finances,
lower familial support, few mentors, cultural stereotypes, inhospitable campus climates, and a sense of cultural misfit influence their college navigation” (p. 162). Six of the twenty-four Doctoras did not have a mentor during the PhD journey. Navigational barriers occurred across all the Latina’s stories. One Doctora who did not have the help of a mentor extended her time frame of completing the doctorate to eleven years. Examples of what these Doctoras experienced are professors telling them in front of the class, “*You did not pay your tuition yet; therefore, you do not have the right to ask a question.*” Someone in their cohort overheard someone else saying, “What is the Mexican doing in this program.” Another English-only Doctora did not know who to turn to for help or validation when a professor told her, “You speak good English.” These microaggressions were common in the lives of the Latinas. As stated in Chapter Two, there exists a lack of cultural understanding and bias against Latinas in academia.

The Latinas in this study unanimously felt that having a mentor was crucial in completing a PhD and facing navigational barriers. However, the lack of representation and cultural competency made it difficult for eighteen Doctoras to find a culturally competent mentor. Having Latina representation in faculty would most likely enhance cultural capital for these Doctoras. Yet, many Doctoras stated they never had a Latina professor. Others testified that their first exposure to a Latina professor was in the PhD program. The need for higher Latina representation in PhD programs was consistent with how the Latinas felt in this study.

The Doctoras consistently reported several barriers: alienation, patriarchy, cultural conflicts, feelings of imposter syndrome, lack of a sense of belonging, being a first-generation student, and marginalization. In the conceptual model of Latina doctorates navigating through higher education, González (2006) lists the following challenges for Latinas to overcome: financial support, discrimination based on class, gender, race, and ethnicity, institution-wide
stigmatization, lack of a mentor, tokenization, marginalization, and low expectations from professors (p. 351). Navigational barriers are the foundational roadblocks in the Latina pipeline. For many Latinas, the negative moment was pivotal in securing a mentor with guidance and realizing the representation of Latinas in academia was scarce. When describing what was needed from a mentor, the most common answer from most Latinas was “guidance.” The Doctoras reflected on time spent with a mentor. They attributed the mentor’s guidance to the success of completing a PhD González’s (2006) study revealed how to secure a pipeline for the production and success of Latina doctorates by identifying a group of women whose scholarship and guidance could be essential to the Latina/o community while recollecting that Latina academic advancement continues to move at a snail’s pace. This study extends the prior research from González (2006) by exposing Doctoras’ negative experiences, lack of representation, and attempts to seek mentorship and guidance from a culturally competent faculty member. In addition to González’ (2006) research, only-ness refers to a commonality felt across the Latinas: how isolated and alone they felt while pursuing their PhD. They coped with the isolation by seeking community with mentors and peers. Mentorship proved to be a significant factor for the Latina PhDs.

Having a mentor described how the Latinas with a PhD faced navigational barriers by embracing their cultural values, validating experiences, learning from mentors acting as role models, and challenging doctoral programs with a mentor, which directly answers research question one. The research suggests that mentoring reduces only-ness, builds connections, and helps mentees with the complexities of doctoral programs, which is based on patriarchal structures (Inman, 2020). Using the mujerista mentoring lens empowers not only the individual Latinas with mentors but all the collective Doctoras. The power of mujerista mentoring faces
gender and racial barriers. The PhD Latinas described mentoring as a force that creates a space for Latinas by becoming an agency of transformative resistance within the academy (Ek et al., 2010, p. 540).

**Research Question #2: How did Latina doctoral students negotiate cultural and gender identities in academia with a mentor?**

This research question is explored in themes two, three, and four in Figure 7. In theme two, identity through mentorship and scholar familia, the Latinas experienced different challenges while maintaining their Latina identities with the help of a mentor and scholar familia. The unnurturing culture of doctoral programs assumes that all students work independently and ceases to address the intersectionality of under-represented students, especially Latinas from a culture based on community. In this study, being grounded in community with a mentor was an intertwined notion of a shared identity, culture, religion, values, and a sense of place. The research supports this notion that institutional investments in graduate mentorship yielded substantial rewards for student retention, skills development, and degree completion (Lorenzetti et al., 2019, p. 570). Luz, one of the *Testimonalistas*, points out that Latinas have a village-type mentality with co-creation and pro-developing communities rooted in the Indigenous cultures that we come from, which she believes is important to the overall success of doctorate Latina students. She adds, “It is difficult to be our authentic selves when we are navigating our personal racial and ethnic morals and values in a community within a white supremacist population.” Scholar familia could be one solution to bridge the gap by providing the support that Latina students need to complete PhD degrees at the same speed as their white counterparts (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022).
Furthermore, the Doctoras shared their experiences searching for a sense of community with their peers to help negotiate their cultural identity, eventually leading to peer mentorship. This finding relates to the literature because peer mentoring relationships in graduate school sparked critical thinking, advanced academic and professional socialization, and added to the ongoing personal and professional learning goals (Lorenzetti et al., 2019).

The findings in this study validate those of Preston et al. (2014) in that “Peer mentorship has a great capacity to foster human and social capital within graduate programs for both local and international students” (p. 52). Lina beamed with pride, noting that her entire cohort had women only, a strength of gender identity. The cohort created a female bond that helped all the members succeed, and many years later, they are still friends and keep in close contact, forecasting not only a life-long friendship but lifetime mentorship. Peer mentoring was consistent with findings from Preston et al. (2014); peer mentorship took place among a group of students who shared their knowledge, experiences, and support in a trustful environment, thereby enhancing the individual and collective learning of the group.

Other participants described their mentors as “best friends” or “Comadres.” These types of relationships could last a lifetime in the Latino culture. In this study, four of the twenty-four Doctoras discussed their peer mentors as essential to their doctoral journey. Peer mentoring enriches students’ academic well-being through increased support, shared experiences, exposure to multiple worldviews, and higher-level thinking. My experience in a doctoral program involved turning to peers, former colleagues, teacher assistants, Preparing Future Faculty, and the Chicano Latino Students Affairs services, who have had a lasting effect on pursuing my PhD. The CLSA invited me to present my research in a Brown Bag Series on a Zoom call during the third year of the PhD program. I felt confident because I was in a community with other Latino PhD
candidates, family, and friends. Being in the community was a powerful experience that assured me that I had chosen a worthwhile topic for my dissertation. I am determined to improve the mentorship process in doctoral programs for future PhDs. With appropriate data supporting my topic and my position as an insider in this research, I hope to make a difference for future Latina scholars.

Other Doctoras felt as if their mentors were part of their family. Though they did not use the term “scholar familia,” I transcribed the term reflecting the feeling of having a mentor be as important as a family member or “familia.” In the article by Ashlee, Zamora, and Karikari (2017), they speak of their fierce sista scholars being committed to being woke and staying woke. To be woke is the remedy that enables healing from systems of oppression (Ashlee et al., 2017, p. 99). As noted in the next section, mentorship was not the only asset learned from the Doctoras.

The third prevalent theme identified was cultural and gender assets. The Doctoras held on to their cultural assets of being proud of their heritage, being a proud mother, and finding the right tribe during their PhD journey. The Latinas’ connection to their heritage was prevalent during the Testimonios. For example, Ceci described when she was offered a job and negotiated the pay to be equal to her male counterpart. She was negotiating pay, not her identity, as she had to explain to the Caucasian woman interviewer: “I cannot change my roots. I cannot change my heritage.” The person offering the job asked her, why do you feel it must be a fight? Ceci declared, “It is not a fight. It is called advocacy.” Ceci concluded that people were trying to tell her how to be. She decided, “I am just going to be 100% who I am genuinely and have no apologies for it.”
Phillips and DeLeon (2022) tell us that Latinas carry cultural importance, such as linguistic practices and ethnic and racial variety, which influence how they perform their intersectional identities in graduate school. The Latina assets and experiences shed new light on negotiating cultural and gender identities in academia with a mentor. Castellanos (1996) agrees with Anzaldua’s (1997) research findings that being grounded in our cultural background and identity is necessary to succeed in graduate school. Anzaldua’s findings are consistent with the scholarship of other researchers such as Kimberlé Crenshaw. Culture, identity, and race are relative to a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (2017): Intersectionality. While intersectionality is about the intersection of an individual’s identities, mestiza consciousness is used to study the lived experiences of marginalized social positions, such as females, LGBTQ+, People of Color, outcasts, and marginalized (Anzaldúa, 1987). For this reason, mestiza consciousness is a connection to Latina consciousness that I have recognized as the basis of mujerista mentoring and how it has shaped the theoretical framework to include the research questions in this dissertation. Being connected to their heritage helped many Latinas find their tribe with others who had similar strong ties to their heritage.

The theme of cultural and gender assets is consistent with the notions of identity through mentorship and scholar familia in the following way: to give voice to the Doctoras, “to build community with one another, and to reject the toxicity of dominance and oppression inherent in the academy” (Ashlee, Zamora, & Karikari, 2017, p. #). In other words, to find the right tribe. For example, Rosa in the Midwest proudly created a Latina Sorority with the idea that you must have those sisters, the scholar familia, or the right tribe. In her case, she called them “university comadres.” She did not need to be a part of a white sorority because she was not going to get the support necessary, particularly when other marginalized people were struggling to publish, build
social capital, or even be acknowledged in academia. She did this to create space in academia for mentorship and the camaraderie of having a social network to support herself and the other few Latinas in the Midwest.

Aurora’s twin sister was her cheerleader in graduate school and her lifetime mentor. Theresa dealt with PhD life by leaning on her family. Stella had emotional turmoil during her PhD studies but was able to persevere because of a supportive family. These Doctoras explained the PhD experience with their families to elicit support for their academic goals. On the contrary, Laura was the black sheep of her family, mainly for her feministic views that collided with traditional gender roles in the Latino culture. Daisy had to choose between being a stay-at-home wife or completing her PhD. She chose the PhD. The educational system is based on a white male middle-class cultural model (Westerband, 2016), often forcing the Doctoras to choose between family or a future. As mentioned in the literature review, some families are the allies the Latinas needed to challenge the educational system that has continually failed them.

However, in this study, to best represent Doctora's stories, they had families that did not understand doctoral programs most of the time. In some instances, the families supported their daughters, but nine Latinas felt that doctoral programs distanced the relationship with their families. For these nine Latinas, the biggest hurdle was being a mother in academia. Mom guilt was an emotion often felt by these Latinas. Many described the feeling of being a failure to their babies and children. The overall feeling of not spending enough time with their children was the kind of burden that weighed heavy on their shoulders. These findings added to the existing research on being a mother during the PhD experience. Phillips and Deleon (2022) highlight gender inequities for Latinas, such as household duties, childcare, and socioeconomic issues. The
mothers in this study used their feminist energy to pursue doctoral programs with newborns, families, and jobs.

Elena, whose experiences differed from the other Doctoras in this study, was a third-generation PhD, which differs from the existing research on having a family who does not understand Latinas in academia. Her family expected her and her cousins to complete a PhD as part of her educational trajectory. This diverges from the existing research as Latinxs have one of the lowest college completion rates in the United States. Only half of the doctoral students complete terminal degrees (Espino, 2014).

Some Doctoras shared painful and daunting experiences that differ from being a mother. Through anguish and tears, one Doctora described working at a bar on weekends to help pay tuition and eat a hot meal. She would serve the same white students who mocked her in class. Another Doctora felt she experienced a university model of “waiting to fail” and was told by several professors that she could drop the program anytime. Another issue felt by the Doctoras was invisibility in PhD programs. Invisibility supports the argument for the need for mentorship at the doctoral level. Invisibility produces feelings of isolation by being the only ethnic student in class. Or invisibility is not seeing a woman of color in dominant academic roles, resulting in questioning their own space in academia. Invisibility was caused by a professor being doubtful of a research topic, resulting in imposter syndrome. In quoting the Doctora’s painful feelings, I refer to the multiple times I sobbed alongside the heart wrenching Testimonios of the Latinas in this study as they relived the harsh experience of being a PhD student. As painful as it was for them to communicate their stories, some Latinas felt it healing when in community, knowing their participation would bring awareness to the importance of equity in doctoral programs.
Identifying themes across the Doctoras led to the fourth theme, feminist energy. Feminist energy was a source of emotional support and encouragement between the Latinas and their mentors. Most Doctoras used their feminist energy to find strong Latina mentors with similar backgrounds who transformed their experience and led them to complete their PhD. Most Doctoras did not have a sense of belonging in doctoral programs. Many of the Doctoras learned how to claim their space in academia with the help of a mentor. The Doctoras with Latina mentors could navigate and resist oppression by creating safe spaces, validating experiences, sharing lived experiences, and legitimizing the Latina culture in academia. Double alienation emerged from the Testimonios as the Doctoras described alienation from doctoral programs and their traditional familial roles. This groundwork adds to the existing research that Latinas feel alienated in doctoral programs due to cultural and language barriers, patriarchy, and other identity markers (Phillips & Deleon, 2022). The following findings from the Doctoras address how they claimed space and faced alienation in academia with a mentor: some attended conferences with a mentor to learn how to combat racism, sexism, homophobia, and white privilege. One Latina mentioned a “Woman of Color” conference in Washington D.C. annually. Three Latinas dealt with alienation with the support of their mentors by writing and publishing articles on topics related to racism. Other Latinas recorded dealing with alienation by joining women's support circles, participating in a social justice program, peer mentorship, or through therapy. Many of the women had mentors who helped them obtain adjunct positions, co-teach with their mentors, were hired as graduate research assistants, and followed the academic professional path of their mentors. The Latinas felt their families were supportive but did not understand the challenges of graduate school.
Through their narratives, they shared experiences used to obtain a PhD. One Doctora explained her trajectory while in the PhD program, which offered critical higher education talks where they brought people/mentors from other universities to speak. They chose a wide range of ethnicities and genders to represent. She had the opportunity to engage with two *Mujeres* with PhDs who had claimed their space, and those interactions changed the course of her future. The Latina's strong cultural values and mentorship taught them to claim their space in academia. Cultural values will be discussed in the next section.

The small representation of Latina mentors in academia helped most Doctoras manage adverse experiences and find comfort through shared values. Latinas in the study spoke passionately about how they negotiated their family obligations with mentors and how higher academic expectations were not consistent with their values (González, 2006). Several Doctoras shared their affirming mentoring experiences and shared values. Unfortunately, Elena was not as fortunate. She explained that she was born and raised in Puerto Rico and was not a part of the marginalized community. During the PhD program, she had another classmate who identified as Latina, but she did not say she was Latina. The two Latinas did not collaborate during the course, which made Elena very lonely about her cultural background. Novelist, essayist, anthropologist, and filmmaker Zora Neale Hurston is widely credited as familiarizing the saying, “All my skinfolks ain't kinfolks,” insinuating that similar cultural validation may not exist between those with the same cultural backgrounds. As described in chapter two, several Latina scholars from the literature review, such as Espino (2014), Acevedo-Gil, and Madrigal-Garcia (2018) used their voices to raise important issues affecting Latinas’ graduate school survival to resist macro and micro-oppression. In this study, it is evident that tensions exist in the literature and the lives of the Doctoras. Systemic inequity and not having a mentor have caused cultural harm to
numerous Latinas within higher education institutions. Navigating the Latina identity in a homogeneous field of doctoral programs has proven to be a challenge for Latinas.

Although my initial thoughts were that having a Latina mentor would assist the Doctoras in this study, a few Latinas had either inept mentorship from Latina faculty lacking confianza (trust), or the Latina faculty left the university due to not being tenured or, according to the Latinas, the faculty faced too many barriers to continue at that university. Other Latina stories revealed that working-class women who were the only Latinas in their program were often excluded from faculty interactions, lacked mentorship, faced cultural barriers, received decreased funding, and had many more deficit-based experiences. The Doctoras’ stories add to the existing research of “social-witness accounts reflective of collective experiences, political injustices, and human struggles often erased by dominant discourses” (Huber & Cueva, 2012, p. 393). The Doctoras also shared a common experience of racism. Audre Lorde’s (1992) definition of racism is “the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and thereby the right to dominance” (p. 496). The work of the Latinas’ Testimonios models solidarity with one another to build bridges between us and the next generations to successfully negotiate their cultural and gender identities while navigating doctoral programs. Overall, mentors could have made a difference in the mental stress and success of the Latina PhDs. The influence of mentors could offer social and emotional support and result in positive consequences for equity in higher doctoral programs.

Many Doctoras in this study existed in academic environments, lacking trust in the system, the university, and the faculty. Daisy recalls a professor asking her group, “I do not know why it is hard to understand you as everybody speaks English in your country.” The Doctora felt the cruelty from the professor but could not find the words to stand up and speak up
against that. She shared her thoughts with the group: “Why don’t they say that to someone from Australia or Britain?” Not having confianza may be a leading factor in not having a mentor.

Eighteen of the twenty-four participants agreed that having a mentor helped them with the pace of their PhD completion. This finding was significant considering the small amount of research about Latinas with a PhD (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020; Crisp & Cruz, 2010) and mentorship (González, 2006; Rudolph et al., 2015). Understanding that not all Latinas in this study had a positive experience with their mentors determining the pace, I engaged with the idea of inept mentors. In a couple of the Latina’s experiences, the inept mentor was dismissive of the Latina’s pace and doctoral goals. Incorporating the Testimonios was not meant to be disrespectful but to bring to light what injustices Latinas face in doctoral programs.

Given the importance of cultural values, U.S. Latino/Latina college students who strongly endorse cultural values may be more likely than others to engage in prosocial actions that may be encouraged by their ethnic or cultural group. On the contrary, many students grow in mentoring relationships based on the values shared between mentors and mentees. Inman (2020) has written about the quality of mentoring relationships and how the shared values between her and her mentor have been more important than gender or racial mentoring relationships. Monica adds to the research by stating that her mentors were like family. They were trustworthy, they helped her build her social capital, and, more importantly, they had shared values. Establishing networks of resistance and support with a mentor contributes to the success of Latina PhDs.

**Implications for Research**

*Testimonios* in this study represents the twenty-four Latina PhDs in this study and not the overall population of Latinas. The Latinas’ lived experiences in this study can guide researchers and university leaders to implement mentorship support structures for future Latina PhD
students. The Doctoras in this study have testified that having a mentor is crucial in doctoral programs. Many Doctoras attributed completing a PhD to the fact that they had an effective mentor-mentee relationship. While having access to a mentor is beneficial, experienced mentors know how to implement different approaches to the needs of the individual mentee. The Doctoras have given examples from superior mentors to mentors who need more culturally responsive mentorship for the Latina population and their needs. This study suggested the critical role of mentorship in these particular ways: funding, finding postdoctoral positions in higher education, giving emotional support along with cultural competency, and being in their scholar familia circle. For some Doctoras, the priority is to be in a safe space with people who look like us and have a mentor rather than getting fully funded in a place where we do not look like anyone, and there needs to be more support. The Testimonios have implications for researchers, institutions, and policy and practice to build better mentoring programs for Latina PhD students.

Despite the obstacles and barriers, the eighteen Latinas in this study who had a mentor emphasized that mentorship increased the quality of their doctoral journey. There is a dearth of specific theorizing on how Latinas fit into the social structures they navigate (Hernández, 2020). Implications for researchers may include females who are undocumented or DACA students pursuing their PhD. Future research could also focus on BIPOC PhD students. If BIPOC students were mentored effectively, the chances of completing a PhD would be much higher. Another added value was borrowed from the first Doctora, Elena. Her mentor created a manual of information for effective mentoring called “Chrisertation.” The manual had the students' deadlines. It was up to the student to be responsible enough to meet the deadlines. He offered clear, structured guidance in the manual. He monitored students and created safe spaces for them. Elena had the following suggested improvement for researchers: the students were given
this manual the first year and assigned to a mentor, but not the subsequent years. PhD Elena suggested that there needs to be a manual or clear guidance for all the PhD years, while faculty need ongoing professional development training in culturally relevant mentorship.

This study was foundational for future research for Latinas in a PhD program with mentorship. I recommend that ongoing research is required to determine how institutions create equitable access to mentorship across student support, retention, and success in doctoral programs.

Based on this study, other research avenues could extend, build on, and support this research. Future topics to explore are 1) A common definition of mentorship. 2) The emotionality of Latina's doctoral experience. 3) The role of peer mentorship in doctoral journeys, particularly of Latinas. 4) Latina faculty experiences as a mentee during a PhD program. 5) The only lonely Latina in doctoral programs.

Recognizing the emerging themes from the Testimonios, institutions with accredited doctoral programs would benefit from critically examining how to mandate the appropriate type of mentorship for all students of color in academia. Peer mentorship would be as beneficial as having an individual mentor. Furthermore, Latinas should be assigned a mentor early in the program with a faculty member. Many of the Doctoras in this study had faculty members leave their positions at their university, which left the Latinas to find another mentor to affirm and validate the Doctora’s intersectional identities while writing a dissertation.

If Latinas did have a mentor, they must be conscientious of the intersection of gender, ethnicity, race, class, sexual orientation, nationality, and religion (Crenshaw, 1991). A Doctora shared her knowledge about normalizing the experience of being an educated Latina; when students come from marginalized identities, they overlap with first-gen, socially and
economically disadvantaged, and they need an infrastructure to support them. If we are going to be genuinely intentional, there must be a mentorship program in place in terms of being deliberate and intentional. More studies are needed to understand Latina students in doctoral programs, such as having a mentor that supported Latina efforts (Espino, 2014) or how to assist Latinas in forming positive connections between one another’s experiences and social contexts.

Another critical dimension for future research is to understand the mentor’s perspective and related challenges such as high advising loads, balancing requirements for teaching, service, research, and mentoring as well as the lack of incentives to take on a mentoring role to include preparation time to serve as a mentor.

**Implications for Policy and Practice**

Institutions should be rated on the humanistic approach in what they do to be inclusive of students and what they do to make students successful. Institutions constructed events and activities that support community building among students within and beyond their cohorts to foster peer mentoring (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022). The institution could offer training for faculty about how cultural and linguistic differences function as assets to the university, colleagues, and students (Cavazos, 2016). A final institutional action item could be offering a tiered support system and mentoring. Many felt overwhelmed by their degree requirements and may require multiple support structures to advance learning goals (Roberts & Plakhotnik, 2009, p. 49).

Moving forward in policy and practice in higher education, a policy could benefit Latinas through mentoring by employing faculty who respect and reflect Latina cultural values, have Latina faculty representation, and have mentors willing to support the Doctoras’ research interest. The Latina doctoral experience must coexist with mentorship to uphold Latinas’ identities as Women of Color in institutions where they are the overwhelming minority. This
would demonstrate a real commitment to equity and inclusion and a commitment to hiring more Latino/a faculty. The dearth of Latinos in tenured faculty positions is typical in institutional contexts, especially with the unprecedented demographic growth of Latina/o students in academia in the past fifteen years (Turner et al., 2017). The need for institutional change is apparent in graduate education due to Latinas having the lowest number of doctorates compared to non-Latina groups (Gándara, 2015) and being underrepresented in doctorate programs across the US. When institutions work collectively to recognize and ameliorate the barriers Latinas face, they will move toward real diversity (Phillips & DeLeon, Phillips & DeLeon, 2022, p. 208). As an asset-based view suggests, changing classroom practices by drawing from the academic value and contribution of students of color is necessary for all students' success in doctoral programs. Institutions with culturally sustained pedagogy, multicultural or ethnic studies in graduate programs benefited students by decolonizing the coursework and held value for cultural differences that facilitated Latina academic success (Martinez, 2017). Ethnic studies are essential because stereotypes of Latina graduate students often frame themselves as individually responsible for their subordinated social position, a consequence of multiple oppressions (Hernández, 2020).

A final implication would be to reward faculty members for effective mentoring by creating a program with mentors trained in diversity, equity, and inclusion and reward marginalized community work by offering tenure, promotion, and compensation (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022). Presently, most tenure evaluations do not place value on mentorship. Mentorship should align with all tenured faculty's publishing and teaching expectations (Santa-Ramirez, 2022).
Many questions and ideas for future research arose when writing about mentoring Latinas on their doctoral journeys. The following are suggestions for universities to implement mentoring programs on campus. I recommend the following practices which reflect a humanizing approach to mentoring.

**Community Partnerships for Teacher Pipeline (CPTP)**

CPTP is a teaching exploration program that is part of the Center for Collaborative Education’s (CCE) Educator Pathway. Three California community colleges created community-based teacher pipelines with mentors, who strengthen the profession by increasing the number of teachers of color. CPTP offered a multi-tiered network of support such as: a semester stipend, informal learning activities, a mentor, a Success Coach, and a Teacher Mentoring Network. The project was funded by Supporting Effective Educators Development (SEED), a federal grant. From 2020-2023, CPTP had 300 self-selected diverse community college students who were exploring teaching as a career path in STEM Education, Special Education and Early Childhood Education and paired them with mentor teachers in the community. WestEd evaluated CPTP using a quasi-experimental design (QED) with a matched group of comparison students. The results of the study were that CPTP succeeded in producing better outcomes for the participating students when compared with the outcomes of matched comparison students enrolled in the same colleges (Heredia et al., 2024). One nuance to the CPTP mentoring facet is to secure funds for the mentors and mentees. I participated in this program as a mentor for three years. I highly recommend CPTP as the benefits of making a difference in the lives of the community college participants outweigh the small amount of the stipend.

**Laura’s Suggestions (O’Meara et al., 2021)**
Laura, a participant in this study, was passionate about finding ways to counter invisible labor for faculty of color. Although this study is about mentoring PhD Latinas, her suggestions are relevant in mentorship. Women faculty from historically marginalized populations are disproportionately called upon to diversity work and mentoring while other women faculty do more teaching. Furthermore, women faculty of color are not rewarded or compensated in any way for the time spent mentoring nor are they recognized for all the hours spent mentoring. Part of Laura’s work at the university is to promote equitable faculty workload. Laura shared a resource she uses, by O’Meara et al. (2021) which contains recommendations on how to promote equitable faculty workloads:

- **Transparency:** Departments create faculty work activity dashboards to monitor the range of efforts when mentoring students.

- **Credit:** A credit system policy is in place which allows faculty members to “bank” their work in one area to do less in another area. This allows faculty members to receive the appropriate acknowledgement of time spent mentoring, which is considered above expected effort from faculty members.

- **Norms:** Putting into place planned rotations of teaching assignments, which usually co-exists with mentoring students.

- **Solution:** A rubric was designed for three different faculty groups. The rubric included a concrete description of expectations including teaching/mentoring, research, and service that was considered below, meeting, above, and exceeding department expectations (O’Meara et al., 2021). These strategies supersede traditional workload modifications and develop a path toward equity-minded workloads in academia.
The Claremont Colleges

Several programs exist at the Claremont Colleges that uphold and implement mentorship programs. The following are organizations that have mentorship programs which can serve as examples for other colleges.

- Chicano Latino Student Affairs office hosts a Sponsor Program, which consists of returning students who serve as peer mentors to first year Latinx students. The Sponsors assist first year students as they transition into The Claremont Colleges which provides a network of support.
- IGNITE Claremont Graduate University Student Mentorship Program is for first year students of historically marginalized communities. First year students are matched with a continuing CGU student to Create community and enjoy networking.
- The Office of Black Student Affairs mentorship program provides group mentoring for incoming first year students of African descent in the five colleges, and pairs incoming students with trained peer mentors according to shared academic and co-curricular interests.
- Pomona College offers The Asian American Mentor Program (AAMP) which is a student-run organization that fosters community among individuals who self-identify as Asian, Pacific Islander, Asian American, multiethnic, and/or multiracial (API/A). Mentors work with mentees to explore and express identities within historical, social and personal contexts.
- The MERGE Mentor Program is a resource for all multi-ethnic first year students at the five Colleges. MERGE Mentors are upperclassmen who have been trained to help mentees thrive at the Colleges as they face rigorous coursework and unique and
challenging questions about their multi-ethnic identities. The MERGE Mentor Program also strives to raise the political consciousness of the mentees so that the Colleges may be a safer place for all students.

- The Queer Questioning Mentor Program consists of students from the seven Claremont Colleges who identify as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual or agender (LGBTQIA+) community or any other gender and sexual identity along the queer spectrum. The confidential mentor program is designed to provide students with support, social involvement and engagement in activities, working through identity development, and learning how to navigate the college environment as a queer or questioning student.

- The Indigenous Peer Mentoring Program (IPMP) is a 5C student-driven collective focused on the well-being and development of students identifying with an Indigenous community from across the world. First year students are placed in small community circles with other new students, which are then led by current student mentors.

- The Harvey Mudd College Mentoring Program, Mudders Mentoring Mudders (M³), was created to provide support for Mudders from sophomore through senior years by alumni, faculty, and staff. The role of the mentors is to meet with the student face-to-face at least four times per year, check in with their mentee at least once a month via email, phone, or video-chat, and attend various mentoring activities per year.

- The South Asian Mentorship Program is a student run, not-for-profit organization. The South Asian Mentorship Program will work together with other API organizations at the 5Cs to host a variety of programs and events that are free and easily accessible to the undergraduate body.
Western University 5C Pre-Health Mentorship is an organization that matches pre-med students at the 5Cs with mentors at Western University's College of Osteopathic Medicine. Mentors help pre-med students select extracurricular activities, find volunteer work, and learn how to prepare for the MCAT.

International Connect, known as “I-Connect”, is a student-run affinity group that fosters a supportive and inclusive community for international-identifying students with a mentor. I-Connect hosts regular meetings, plans community-building activities, provides academic/pre-professional support, and runs a mentorship program open to all underclass students.

Effective Faculty Mentoring

Future research should be conducted to discover effective strategies for individual faculty who serve as mentors. The results from this study highlighted peer mentorship, scholar familia, and a sense of only-ness. The following strategies are recommendations for individual faculty members as they mentor Latina doctoral students.

Wasburn (2007) offers practical advice about Mentoring Women Faculty: An Instrumental Case Study of Strategic Collaboration. Wasburn recommends a strategic collaboration between a supportive peer-mentoring group and two seasoned faculty members (2007). By relying on a group of mentors, rather than an individual mentor, the mentee benefits from having more than one perspective or expertise. Furthermore, by having a group of mentors in place of an individual mentor, should one of the seasoned faculty members leave the group, the mentee is not left with feelings of abandonment or feeling rejected as did some participants in this study.
The key component for a successful mentoring relationship is the integration of *cultura* (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Multiculturism and diversity are ways of being for marginalized communities. Culture combined with an academic family aka scholar familia would validate the mentees’ experiences. Once trust is built between the mentor and mentee, a sense of familial responsibility to one another is created and can be extended to other similar individuals, creating a culture of a scholar familia who understands the Latina culture. Family-like relationships translate into *comunidad*, multiplying the sense of belonging, reciprocity, and interrelatedness (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007).
More efforts from mentors need to be completed at all stages of the PhD program for Latina communities to create a sense of belonging. At the institutional level, doctoral programs may benefit from critically examining how academic structures impact Latina’s sense of belonging (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020, p. 387). For example, faculty can assist in sustaining pluralism by knowing the ways Latinas differ and transforming spaces to be inclusive for all PhD students. A sense of belonging can derive from the guidance of a mentor’s wisdom regarding coping strategies, developing communities of students of color, and mentor support and validation. Sharing resources such as Latina community spaces which look like the Chicano Latino Student Affair office in Claremont, CA. Or offering a physical community of support in the form of clubs, like the Doctorxhood Club at Claremont Graduate University. Faculty mentors can also collaborate with university counseling centers for Latinas to learn healthy coping strategies but also as a space for their experiences to be processed and validated through the sharing of their Testimonios (Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020).

**Limitations**

This study was limited by the need for a definition of mentorship, measuring the population of Latinas who began a PhD but still need to finish, and time constraints on completing the PhD. The most notable limitation was that each Latina had a different definition of a mentor. The lack of a standard definition is overwhelming not only from the Latinas but also from the literature. Each Doctora was asked for their definition of mentorship (Appendix K). With this information, I hoped to find a common thread among the Doctoras’ views of mentorship. The twenty-four definitions were so different that creating a micro-common definition of mentorship was nearly impossible. Without a common definition within a small study, how can universities nationwide implement this much-needed policy requiring mentorships for all students?
A further limitation was not including the voices of Latinas who began a PhD program and never finished because they needed a mentor or guidance. This study, which only included Latinas who completed a PhD, points to the need for more research on the role of mentorship and paints an incomplete picture of the doctoral journey. Those who still need to complete the PhD may or may not have a mentor or need more support or guidance.

In addition, the limitation of the timely completion of a PhD was not a requirement. Remembering past experiences tends to fade over time. Therefore, an approximation of comparisons over time was not made. One Latina completed her PhD thirty years ago, so her memories might have shifted and changed from the experiences obtaining the PhD. Furthermore, although I did not directly observe actions between a mentor and a mentee, I relied instead on the recollections and memories of the Doctoras to describe their mentoring relationships.

Luz, one of the Testimonialistas, advised me that mentorship might be outside the solution. She believes that mentorship might ease the pain and the transition of being in the wrong structure. She does not think we should put the weight of restructuring and demolishing a system on another person because mentorship is a very intimate and vulnerable process. She stressed that we should not put the weight of dismantling a system on someone trying to help us. We must dismantle inept programs to create positive and intentional pathways in which mentorship should be included as part of the solution to systemic racism.

**Conclusion**

During the third focus group Zoom meeting, the Doctoras felt like my family by supporting and encouraging me in the PhD journey. One thanked me for this work and for focusing on Latinas and mentorship because it is so important. She stated, “Know you have all of
these comadres who will help you push forward. Whatever you need, at least know you can count on me.” She added:

Thank you for bringing us together despite being from different time zones, but it is nice to see other women's faces working to bring awareness to the Latino community. Moreover, I am so proud of you. I cannot wait. Moreover, hopefully, we will participate and be there for your defense to cheer you on.

Stella chimed in and said, “Yeah, I want to echo that everyone appreciates you setting some time and dedicating this work that is so important. It is imperative. So, thank you so much.” Others were also thankful and stated, “Thank you for participating. It is excellent what you did,” or “Thank you, again, for the space and opportunity to share experiences.” Now more than ever, I feel connected to Feminist Cherrie Moraga when she says, “How we gather matters” (Moraga, 2017). The Latinas in the focus groups added to one another’s stories; some agreed, and some had different points of view of their collective experiences. Many PhD Latinas asked to stay connected with one another, serving as a testament to the power of community in this study.

The Doctoras described in this study are consistent with Huber Perez’ (2009) notions of Testimonio. The Testimonios of the twenty-four Latinas with a PhD shed light on the tensions, negotiations, and challenges the Doctoras experienced while completing their PhDs with or without a mentor. Every Testimonio differed in some way, yet as a collective, they provided insight to ameliorate doctoral programs' oppressive systems and an understanding of the importance of mentorship for Latinas in a PhD program.

Doctoral programs must provide Latina PhD students with effective mentorship, holistic support, resources, and opportunities to help them survive and thrive in academia. Admitting Latinas into doctoral programs is not enough. I wish for the healing to continue for the extraordinary Latinas in this study. This dissertation complements the existing literature by voicing Latina doctoral students' mentoring needs in doctoral programs. My study also adds to
the existing research by exposing the experiences of successful Latina PhDs and how they claimed space grounded in their community and found the right tribe to maintain their cultural and gender identity while obtaining a PhD.
Epilogue

I am consciously aware of the tensions I have dealt with in a doctoral program, such as needing to learn how to research, unfamiliarity with IRB, and needing a mentor. Over the past five years of attending CGU, I have experienced the beauty of my daughter graduating from NYU, my oldest daughter moving home from AZ, a worldwide pandemic, the loss of my uncle to Covid, moving to a different city, resigning from a twenty-six-year teaching career, and the social injustices I continue to feel and witness. These experiences have introduced me to a scholarly life filled with new good and not-so-good experiences. My positionality concerns my struggles, family, community, research, and life. Using a Chicana Feminist epistemology, I inwardly turn the lens to document my story. This work is about me. It is about my journey to understanding what it takes to earn a PhD without a mentor while desperately holding on to my cultural and gender identity. It is about the resources used to help me understand why so few Latinas have a PhD and how I persevered. I’ve been searching for adequate ways to help me claim my identity as a first-generation student and a Mexican American woman with Indigenous roots.

Claremont is where I learned to be a scholar. I joined the Chicano Student Latino Affairs upon entering the doctoral program in 2019. The CSLA supported me in two major areas: first, I joined the meet and greet with Dr. Daniel Solórzano in March 2020. Dr. Solórzano had a significant impact not only on my research but also on choosing the LatCrit framework. Second, in the Spring of 2021, I was asked by CSLA to present my research during the Brown Bag Graduate Research Series. This was an opportunity to share my research with the CLSA community, and this organization believed in my work. Chicano Latino Student Affairs supported the first milestone in the doctorate program.
The next milestone and learning opportunity happened when I was accepted to the 2021 summer institute of The National Endowment for the Humanities, an independent federal agency of the U.S. government, to study Borderlands Narratives about Identity and Binationalism. I was very content yet overwhelmed with teaching, the NEH grant, the pandemic, and working on my doctorate.

I passed IRB on April 23, 2023, when I completed twenty-five Testimonios (one did not count), four focus groups, and all transcriptions in five weeks. The Testimonios included rich substance that has had the most profound effect on the dissertation. Trying to learn from twenty-four Latinas what contributed to the level of success of completing a PhD was the most emotional experience I have ever had with strangers. Tears stung my face as I cried along with over half of the Latinas in my study. Identifying with their Testimonios had a traumatic effect on me as I realized we shared experiences of oppression. It was during the Testimonios that I learned about healing through dialogue. I could not have known about healing from an article or book. I learned that surface similarities hide differences and historical oppression. Giving voice to each Latina and letting them tell their stories on their terms created space to learn about the pluralism of the hegemonic term “Latina.”

In June 2023, I had another profound experience. I visited the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, waiting for my husband to leave work. I have read Professor Eve Tuck’s articles about Indigenous Studies and followed her work. Dr. Tuck’s articles provoked me to learn more about my Indigenous roots. Upon arriving at the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center, I was greeted and told I could work on my dissertation in the basement of a building where Indigenous dissertations were safely kept. I walked into the only special collections research library devoted to preserving the history and culture of the Pueblo people. I
was overwhelmed with a sense of pride. I had never held a dissertation, so I began to cry when I saw shelves filled with dissertations by Indigenous authors. The archivist encouraged me to finish and said she would honor my work by including it alongside the other dissertations.

This dissertation marks the celebration of plurality. My identity of being a strong-willed female Mexican American with Indigenous roots, growing up in Southern California, is how my identity informs my role as a PhD researcher. I have learned to write from within as opposed to writing about, with a focus on lived experience. This has been a lonely process that works in solitude. In a sense, this is my Testimonio, my healing. Thank you, Rosa (Latina participant), for teaching me that my existence is my resistance.
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Cynthia D. Villarreal, email message to the author, April 6, 2023.


### Appendix A: Demographic Questionnaire

**Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity**

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<th>Question</th>
<th>Interviewee #1</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B: Recruitment Email

Dear Participant,

I invite you to participate in a dissertation study regarding Latina experiences with a PhD titled *Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity.*

Congratulations on completing your PhD. All Latinas over 18 who have completed a doctoral program in the United States can participate in this study by completing a consent form and demographic questionnaire and participating in two 30-60-minute meetings about your testimonio. A testimonio is an authentic narrative told by the speaker.

The first meeting will take place on a recorded Zoom video call with the researcher, and the date and time will be your choice of convenience between April 7, 2023 - May 21, 2023. I ask your permission to record on Zoom with you facing the camera during the interview. I will ask you questions about your life experiences, focusing on mentors who have influenced you, especially in graduate school.

The second meeting will be in a group setting on Zoom, where I encourage each group member to keep all information confidential. This second meeting will take place after the researcher identifies topics and themes. These topics and themes will create a “reflection exercise” where the group will be given a series of random reflections to read aloud, and everyone will have time to respond in writing. The reflections are based on anonymous responses from Testimonio #1, generated by the researcher. Then the group will discuss the themes and agree on agreeing or disagreeing and why. The process will create an opportunity for the researcher to analyze the data in ways that can provide a richer understanding and share lived experiences that may explain the successful relationship of having a mentor.
Your participation in this study is voluntary. Please know I will use a Zoom meeting recording if you grant permission. I will only use information from this research for the dissertation. All conversations will remain private; I will not use your name or other identifying characteristics in the dissertation, reports, or presentations.

I am appreciative of your time and consideration of participating in the study. Please send me a date and time that you and I can begin the testimonio on a Zoom recording. I can be reached at jacqueline.rangel@cgu.edu or 626-393-3222.

Respectfully,

Jacqueline Rangel
Doctoral Candidate
PhD in Urban Leadership
Claremont Graduate University
Appendix C: Recruitment Letter

April 17, 2023

Letter of Recruitment

Dear Dra.,

My name is Jackie Rangel, and I am a doctoral candidate at Claremont Graduate University. I invite you to participate in a dissertation regarding Latina experiences with a PhD titled Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity. If you kindly agree to participate, I will schedule a time for you and me to meet on a Zoom call and send the demographic questionnaire and a consent form.

Congratulations on completing your PhD. You have paved the way for others like me, and I thank you.

All Latinas over 18 who have completed a doctoral program in the United States are eligible to participate in this study by completing a demographic questionnaire and a consent form and participating in (1) testimonios individually and then (2) in a focus group setting. The testimonio and focus group will take place on a recorded Zoom video call, and the date and time will be your choice of convenience between April 2023 - May 2023. I ask your permission to record on Zoom with your face on camera during the interview/testimonio. We will talk about your life experiences in English, Spanish, or both, whichever you prefer, focusing on mentors who have influenced you, especially in graduate school.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Please know I will use a Zoom recording for the interviews if you grant permission. I will only use information from this research for the dissertation. All conversations will remain confidential; I will not use your name or other identifying characteristics in reports or presentations.

I am appreciative of your time and consideration of participating in the study. If you have any questions or agree to participate, please contact me as soon as possible at jacqueline.rangel@cgu.edu or 626-393-3222, and I will send the demographic questionnaire and the consent form.

Respectfully,

Jacqueline Rangel
Doctoral Candidate
PhD in Urban Leadership
Claremont Graduate University
Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Before starting the interview, briefly greet the participants and try to connect with them/build rapport. Thank them for their expertise and passion and for volunteering to participate in this important study.

Introduction
Thank you for agreeing to speak with me about Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity. I imagine you are extremely busy, and I appreciate you taking the time to talk to me today.

Before we start, I would like to confirm that you are comfortable with the informed consent document and the demographic questionnaire you signed and to see if you have any questions.

If at any time you wish to stop the interview or not answer a question, you are completely free to do so without penalty. I will take all necessary precautions to protect your anonymity. After the interview is transcribed, I will coordinate a time for focus groups to meet on Zoom.

Also, participants often use a pseudonym, such as a favorite name, that I can use during our interview. Is this something you’d like to use?

If the testimonio lasts more than 39 minutes, we will take a few minutes to break so I can start the Zoom again (due to the University's 40-minute license). Before I hit the record button and we begin the interview, do you have any questions?

Qualitative Interview Questions
Suggestions when interviewing: reflect, feel, help participants expand, summarize, probe, etc., start with planned questions, then ask follow-up probes based on the content/direction of the interview. Last, when asking and responding to questions, aim to remain somewhat neutral rather than reinforcing/praising their responses.

Interview Questions

Testimonio #1

1. Please describe your doctoral journey.

2. What is your definition of mentorship? What does mentoring mean to you?

3. How many mentors have you had in your lifetime? Male or female?

4. How important are mentors for Latinas?

5. Tell me about your mentorship experience in graduate school, if they apply, or if you have any other mentorship experiences.
6. Do you still keep in touch with your mentor?

7. Did your mentor discuss financial literacy (fellowships, scholarships, financial impact, etc.)?

8. Does the higher quality of mentorship determine the pace of completing a PhD?

9. How did you deal with challenging experiences in academia that are associated with gender and your culture?

10. In what ways have you witnessed gender affecting the educational experience of Latinas?

11. How has your experience of your ethnic identity in higher education shaped your hopes and dreams for future generations?

12. In what ways, if any, would you change the course of obtaining a PhD?

13. What is most important to you when exploring ways to enhance a mentorship relationship?

14. Are you currently a mentor?

After asking all the interview questions, Thank you again for helping me better understand Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity. This interview will be transcribed over the next few weeks, and I will schedule focus group meetings to change, clarify, or add any information. Also, if I have any additional questions later, would you be willing to have a brief conversation?

Turn off the recording device when the call ends.

Usually, when I finish the interview, I reserve 30 minutes to do the following:

- I save both audio files (primary and backup), send the audio file for transcription.
- Complete field notes
- Complete reflexive journal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer’s name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant’s pseudonym:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants assigned ID:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

165
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Interview date:</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview starts and stops time:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview location/type (e.g., phone, in-person, video web-conferencing, etc.):</strong></td>
<td>Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interviewer completed field notes (to describe facts, context, logistics, etc.):</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interview completed reflexive journal (to describe reactions/biases/experiences):</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date of interview transcription:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date(s) transcription sent to participant (initial and reminder):</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Date participant confirmed member checking:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Follow-up questions needed for subsequent interviews:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix E: Focus Group #1/Reflection Exercise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>These are perspectives on how our mentors have played a role in obtaining a PhD. Can you offer your rationale?</th>
<th>1. Latinos don't get mentors.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Mentors are crucial. I believe mentorship is so important in a society where our culture, our language, our way of knowing, and our existence aren't valued. They are not validated.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We need mentors who occupy the spaces that we would like to occupy, who are doing what we want to do and being who we want to be, whatever that looks like, because it's different for all of us.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. But unfortunately, the consensus was nobody was mentored. It was survival of the fittest.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Of all the different forms of mentorship, the one that's been the strongest is peer mentoring.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Based on these statements, how can we help others understand the Latina experience?</td>
<td>1. There are a lot of institutional roadblocks that privilege some over others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I was the only Latina.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. In our PhD programs, I wish we all had access to therapy and a lot of mental health support.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Stay true to myself and study the Latino culture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Lonely Latina.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Education is the greatest equalizer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why are these experiences important?</td>
<td>1. When students come from marginalized identities, they overlap between first-gen and socio-economically disadvantaged. They need an entire infrastructure to support them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I've had conversations with Caucasian males saying their experience is very different, and they get defensive, they get upset, and they don't like it. So, it silences me to have these honest conversations sometimes because they can't handle them.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Any additional thoughts about these phrases from the Testimonios? | 1. And in terms of gender, I had a lot of professors that were women. I didn't have a single professor that was a Latina.  
2. Gender is tied to our culture. For many of us, we were raised that a woman is supposed to have children and stay home, cook and clean, and support their husband. I support my husband 100%. But you know, we each have our careers.  
3. Others … don't have to experience some of those moments of profound discomfort or feeling like an imposter and having others do stuff that's just profoundly disquieting. |
| What is your opinion of these similarities/differences with the Testimonios? | 1. I'm not a first generation. I had a wealth of resources from my family. And I belonged to higher education and was confident in my abilities. So, it didn't seem like a daunting challenge.  
2. When I said I wanted to get a PhD, my family was like, why? How is that going to help you? Why are you working so hard? Why are you going to leave your family? They didn't understand. |
# Appendix F: Codes, Categories, and Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Themes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More Mentors</td>
<td>Institutional Change is Needed</td>
<td><strong>Navigational Barriers</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Latinas in Higher Ed</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Color</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-Standing Norms</td>
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<td>Systemic Barriers</td>
<td>Systemic Inequities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male Dominated</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficit Narrative</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Latina</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Spaces (Network of Peers too)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacking Mentors</td>
<td>Systems of Oppression</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trauma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Struggle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor Push</td>
<td>Mentors Determining the Pace</td>
<td><strong>Identity Through Mentorship and Scholar Familia</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Latinidad</td>
<td>Network of Peers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familia</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Sharing</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Peer Mentors</td>
<td>Sense of Belonging</td>
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<tr>
<td>Scholar Familia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Validation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Experiences</td>
<td>Latina Assets</td>
<td><strong>Cultural &amp; Gender Assets</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationship Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marginalization</td>
<td>Experiences</td>
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<td>-------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Humiliation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Imposter Syndrome</td>
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<tr>
<td>Space</td>
<td>Scholar Familia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nurture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Gender &amp; Culture too</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infrastructure of Support</td>
<td>Gender &amp; Culture</td>
<td><strong>Feminist Energy</strong></td>
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<td>Connections</td>
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<td>Gender Expectations</td>
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<td>Being a mother</td>
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<td>Rejection</td>
<td>Painful Feelings</td>
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<td>Toxicity</td>
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<td>Stereotypes</td>
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<td>Daunting Experiences</td>
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<td>Workload</td>
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<td>Broken Spirit</td>
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</table>
Appendix G: Institutional Review Board

Mentoring Latinas on doctoral journeys: testimonios of cultural and gender identities.

4484

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PI</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Approval Status</th>
<th>Created</th>
<th>Approved</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jacqueline</td>
<td>Rangel</td>
<td>Exemption Status</td>
<td>03/02/2023</td>
<td>04/13/2023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student,</td>
<td>Emilie Reagan</td>
<td>Exemption</td>
<td>Received</td>
<td>Approval Expires</td>
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<td>N/A - CGU</td>
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<td>Verified</td>
<td>Date of Completion</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>(2)</td>
<td>04/13/2023</td>
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<td>Student</td>
<td>03/15/2023</td>
<td>Tests, Surveys,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Protocol Fields

- Submitted By: Jacqueline Rangel
- Admin: James Griffith (Exempt Protocol Administrator)
- Study Sites: Online
- External Funding: No
- IAA Relying on CGU: No
- Vulnerable Subjects: Not Applicable
- Anticipated Start Date: 03/08/2023
- End Date: 05/31/2023
- In-Person HSR: Research does not involve in-person interaction with subjects/participants
- Other Funding Source: Not Applicable
- Grant Number: Not Applicable
Appendix H: Consent Form

You are invited to volunteer for a research project. Volunteering may not benefit you directly, but you will be helping us explore the success of Mentorship for Latinas with a PhD. If you volunteer, you will be asked to complete this consent form, a questionnaire, a testimonio with the researcher, and a testimonio in a group setting on Zoom. This will take about fifteen minutes for the questionnaire and 30-60 minutes for each testimonio of your time. Volunteering for this study involves no more risk than what a typical person experiences on a regular day. Your involvement is entirely up to you. You may withdraw at any time for any reason. Please continue reading for more information about the study.

Study Leadership: This research project is led by Jackie Rangel, a doctoral candidate of education at Claremont Graduate University, and supervised by Dr. Emilie Reagan, a professor of education at Claremont Graduate University.

Purpose: The purpose is to learn from Latinas with a PhD if a mentor made a difference in earning a PhD successfully. And if a mentor helped maintain their cultural and gender identity in higher education.

Eligibility: To be in this study, you must be 1. The participant must be a female over 18 who has completed her PhD from an accredited university in the U.S. 2. The participant must describe herself as Latina: a woman of Latin American origin or descent. 3. The participant must be willing to discuss her schooling experience with or without a mentor and the elements contributing to her academic success with a researcher. At the same time, it will be recorded and later transcribed. 4. The participant must be willing to be contacted later for member checks.

Participation: Before the study, you will be asked to complete a questionnaire that will take about 15-20 minutes, asking about your ethnicity, education, and family background. During the study, you will first be asked to meet with the researcher on Zoom for 30-60 minutes about your lived experience and testimonio, with or without a mentor in higher education. A testimonio is an authentic narrative told by the speaker. An example of a question is, “How important are mentors for Latinas?” The meeting can be conducted in English, Spanish, or both languages. The second meeting will also take place on Zoom and will last 30-60 minutes. This meeting will be conducted in a group with other Latinas with a PhD the group will reflect, discuss, and engage with the thematic categories and how their lived experiences either agree or disagree with them.

Risks Of Participation: The risk that you run by taking part in this study is a confidentiality breach. These risks will be controlled by each participant having a pseudonym, securing the collected data in a locked file cabinet, and destroying the original data after the research project is complete. I will also ask for confidentiality among the other participants in the focus group setting.

Benefits Of Participation: I expect the study to benefit the upcoming Latina scholars by identifying the strengths of having a mentor in higher education and understanding the importance of mentorship for Latinas who have obtained a PhD. This study is also intended to benefit the Latina community and future recommendations for mentorship programs.
**Compensation:** You will not be directly compensated for participating in this study.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may stop or withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any particular question without it being held against you. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future connection with anyone at CGU.

**Confidentiality:** Your individual privacy will be protected in all papers, books, talks, posts, or stories resulting from this study. We may share the data we collect with other researchers, but we will not reveal your identity from Testimonio #1. I have an ethical duty not to share raw or identifying data with others. I will assign a pseudonym to each participant. Furthermore, to protect the confidentiality of responses, I will secure the collected data in a locked file cabinet and destroy the original data after I complete the research project. At the conclusion of the interviews, I will provide my email and cell phone number, where participants can reach me with any concerns.

Testimonio #2 will be conducted in groups of participants on Zoom. The benefits of working as a group can result in the power of change. I ask each participant to keep group information confidential with what is being said during the meeting, respect another’s privacy, and not share what is disclosed during the focus group. As the moderator, I am responsible for anonymizing any data from the group.

**Sponsorship** N/A

**Further Information:** If you have any questions or want additional information about this study, please contact Jacqueline Rangel at 626-393-3222 or jacqueline.rangel@cgu.edu. You may also contact Jackie’s Chair, Emilie Reagan, at 909-621-8075 or emilie.reagan@cgu.edu. The CGU Institutional Review Board (IRB) has certified this project as exempt. If you have any ethical concerns about this project or your rights as a human subject in research, you may contact the CGU IRB at (909) 607-9406 or irb@cgu.edu. A copy of this form will be given to you if you wish to keep it.

**Consent:** Your signature below means that you understand the information on this form and that someone has answered any questions about this study. You voluntarily agree to participate in it.

Signature of Participant _________________________________ Date ___________

Printed Name of Participant _____

The undersigned researcher has reviewed the information in this consent form with the participant and answered any of his or her questions about the study.

Signature of Researcher _________________________________ Date ___________

Printed Name of Researcher _________________________________
Appendix I: Social Media Recruitment Post

Testimonios

Are you interested in participating in a dissertation study? Please email Jackie: jacqueline.rangel@cguedu

Participants Needed

Testimonios
Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity

- Are you a Latina who has completed her Ph.D. from an accredited university in the U.S.?
- Are you a female of Latin American origin or descent?
- Are you willing to discuss your educational experience, including whether or not you had a mentor?
# Appendix J: Data Collection Log

Mentoring Latinas on Doctoral Journeys: Testimonios of Cultural and Gender Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Met Inclusion Criteria</th>
<th>Consent Completed</th>
<th>Demographic Questionnaire completed</th>
<th>Interview Scheduled, Method &amp; sent a reminder email</th>
<th>Status of Interview &amp; Thank you email</th>
<th>Status of Focus Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elena</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes 4/18/23</td>
<td>Yes 4/20/23</td>
<td>Calendly + 4/20/23 @ 11:00 sent an email reminder with questions.</td>
<td>Interview completed &amp; transcribed 4/21. Sent thank you email. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 4/25/23.</td>
<td>Sent FG #1 transcription to member check on 5/15/23.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ceci</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes 4/18/23</td>
<td>Yes 4/18/23</td>
<td>Calendly + 4/20/23 @ 2:00 sent an email reminder w/questions.</td>
<td>Interview completed &amp; transcribed 4/21. Sent a thank you email. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 4/25/23.</td>
<td>Sent FG #1 transcription to member check on 5/15/23. Yes, to keep in touch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camila</td>
<td>Yes, PhD</td>
<td>Yes 4/24/23</td>
<td>Yes 4/24/23</td>
<td>Calendly</td>
<td>Interview completed on 4/24. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 4/25/23 w/focus group times.</td>
<td>Sent FG #2 reminder on 5/15/23. Sent FG #2 transcription to member check on 5/18/23.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria Teresa</td>
<td>Yes, PhD</td>
<td>Yes 4/26/23</td>
<td>Yes 4/26/23</td>
<td>Calendly</td>
<td>Interview completed on 4/24. Sent thank you email 4/25. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 4/28/23.</td>
<td>Sent FG #1 transcription to member check on 5/15/23. She confirmed it looks accurate and wants to share contact info.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laura</td>
<td>Yes, PhD</td>
<td>Yes 4/25/23</td>
<td>Yes 4/25/23</td>
<td>Calendly</td>
<td>Interview completed on 4/25. Sent thank you email 4/25. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 4/28/23.</td>
<td>Sent FG #1 transcription to member check on 5/15/23. Yes, please share my contact information. I'm happy to stay in touch with folks. All good with the transcript, too.</td>
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<td>Nene</td>
<td>Yes, PhD</td>
<td>Yes 4/27/23</td>
<td>Yes 4/27/23</td>
<td>Calendly</td>
<td>Interview completed on 4/25. Sent thank you email 4/25.</td>
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<td>Name</td>
<td>Degree</td>
<td>Interview Date</td>
<td>Reminder Date</td>
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<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Yes 4/19/23</td>
<td>Yes 4/26/23</td>
<td>Completed 4/27</td>
<td>Transcribed</td>
<td>5/15/23 reminder on 5/22/23. Showed up at the end and asked to join the next one. She missed FG #1 and #2. Sent FG #3 reminder on 5/21/23. Sent FG #3 transcription to member check on 5/22/23.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juana</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Yes 5/1/23</td>
<td>Calendly</td>
<td>Completed 5/2/23</td>
<td>Transcribed</td>
<td>5/8/23 reminder on 5/18/23.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malory</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Yes 4/24/23</td>
<td>Calendly</td>
<td>Completed 4/27/23</td>
<td>Transcribed</td>
<td>She can meet on Mondays at 10:00 am.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Yes, PhD</td>
<td>Yes, 5/22/23</td>
<td>Yes, 5/7/23</td>
<td>Calendly</td>
<td>She rescheduled the interview. The interview was completed on 5/15/23. Sent thank you email 5/15/23. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/16/23. She sent back the transcription with corrections.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lina</td>
<td>Yes, PhD</td>
<td>Sent reminder to fill out Yes 5/4/23</td>
<td>Yes 5/4/23</td>
<td>Calendly, I sent an email reminder on 4/27/23</td>
<td>Interview was completed on 4/28/23. Sent thank you email 4/28. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/3/23.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosa</td>
<td>Yes, PhD</td>
<td>Yes 5/4/23</td>
<td>Yes 5/4/23</td>
<td>Calendly, I sent an email reminder on 5/2/23.</td>
<td>The interview was completed on 5/3/23 and lasted for 20 min. Sent thank you email 5/3/23. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/9/23.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beatriz</td>
<td>Yes, PhD</td>
<td>Yes 4/27/23</td>
<td>Yes 4/25/23</td>
<td>Calendly I sent an email reminder on 5/17/23</td>
<td>The interview was completed on 5/18/23 and stayed for 10 min. Sent thank you email 5/18/23. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/22/23.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both transcriptions you sent for member check are clear and accurate. Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions. I want to stay connected to the other focus group members, so you can give them my contact information, or they can connect with me on LinkedIn.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>PhD</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Yes/No</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Info</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/8/23</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/8/23</td>
<td>Calendly, I sent an email reminder on 5/8/23. The interview was completed on 5/9/23. Sent a thank you email on 5/9/23. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/9/23. 5/16/23 she emailed: I do not have time to read the entire transcript.</td>
<td>She does not have the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariana</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/10/23</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/10/23</td>
<td>Calendly, I sent an email reminder on 5/9/23. The interview was completed on 5/10/23. Sent thank you email 5/10/23. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/15/23.</td>
<td>Sent a 2nd reminder about signing up for FG on 5/22/23. Sent FG #4 reminders on 5/30/23.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelia</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/2/23</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/2/23</td>
<td>Calendly, I sent an email reminder on 5/2/23. The interview was completed on 5/3/23. Sent thank you email 5/3/23. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/9/23. She found errors (5/10) in transcription and will return it.</td>
<td>Sent FG #2 reminder on 5/15/23.Sent FG #2 transcription to member check on 5/18/23.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Matsui</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/2/23</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/2/23</td>
<td>We booked the testimonio on 5/22/23.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graciela</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/22/23</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/22/23</td>
<td>The interview was completed on 5/22/23.Sent thank you email 5/22/23. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/22/23.</td>
<td>Sent FG #4 reminders on 5/30/23.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luz</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/15/23</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5/15/23</td>
<td>Calendly. Sent a reminder to fill out forms on 5/9/23. I sent an email reminder on 5/15/23. She missed a meeting with me on 5/16 and emailed afterward stating she was in another appointment. She asked to reschedule any day, so I rescheduled it to 5/19/23. She emailed back and said she couldn’t make it.</td>
<td>Sent FG #4 reminders on 5/30/23. Hi Jacqueline, This looks good to me! Sorry for the delay! Re: member check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Event Description</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lupe</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4/28/23</td>
<td>Calendly, I sent an email reminder on 4/29/23. The interview was completed on 5/2/23. Sent thank you email 5/2/23. A transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/8/23.</td>
<td>The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/24/23. Sent FG #3 reminder on 5/21/23. Sent FG #3 transcription to member check on 5/22/23.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>4/28/23</td>
<td>Calendly, I sent an email reminder on 5/2/23. The interview was completed on 5/3/23. Sent thank you email 5/3/23. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/8/23. She will return them w/corrections. 5/9/23.</td>
<td>Sent FG #2 reminders on 5/15/23. Sent FG #2 transcription to member check on 5/18/23.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Stella</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5/3/23</td>
<td>Calendly, I sent an email reminder on 5/3/23. The interview was completed on 5/4/23. Sent thank you email 5/4/23. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/9/23.</td>
<td>Sent FG #3 reminder on 5/21/23. Sent FG #3 transcription to member check on 5/22/23. Thanks for sharing the transcript! It looks accurate. Please feel free to share my email with the others. It was so great to participate in your project. Please let me know if I can be of further support! Wishing you all the best!</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>5/12/23</td>
<td>Calendly</td>
<td>The interview was completed on 5/12/23. Sent thank you email 5/12/23.</td>
<td>Sent a 2nd reminder about signing up for FG on 5/22/23.</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/15/23.</td>
<td>Sent FG #4 reminders on 5/30/23.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pita</td>
<td>No, DNP.</td>
<td>Yes, 5/23/23.</td>
<td>Yes, 5/23/23, Calendly, just hours before we meet.</td>
<td>The interview was completed on 5/23/23. Sent thank you email 5/23/23. The transcribed interview was sent to her on 5/24/23.</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Live in CA: 5. Live outside of CA: 19
## Appendix K: Participant’s Definition of Mentorship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #1</th>
<th>Mentorship is a relationship. It doesn't have to have a set amount of time. But it's a relationship where you have something to share with another person in whatever area, which entails growth, exchanging information, and a type of care.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant #2</td>
<td>Somebody who has the experience and knowledge and shares that with you and is guiding you. When I was in my PhD program, the person who was in my district would be my dissertation chair. I considered them mentors, but I don't think it was always unspoken. It was never that I said, Will you be my mentor? It's just that they truly were my champions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #3</td>
<td>A mentor listens. A mentor sees beyond what you might not be able to see at the moment. Seeing your potential connects you with the community, with the networks and tools to help you not feel alone in the journey. A mentor does not necessarily have the answers, but at least he or she is there to listen and support you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #4</td>
<td>A mentor will guide you and help open doors. We need representation. We need our people because we understand each other on a different level. And so, for me, somebody will listen and tell you you're not crazy. It's just rough out there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #5</td>
<td>My definition of mentorship has evolved. mentoring varies according to what your life path is and where you are in terms of your career. Mentorship is something that straddles both professional but then personal sort of situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #6</td>
<td>A mentor is available, but in terms of your time, you have to be available both emotionally and have enough space so the person can think things through and be able to arrive at their conclusions. So, you want a guide, but being open is incredibly important for being a mentor. For that matter, I mean the key is you have to be able to trust and be open. Otherwise, it's like, if you are not going all the way, it doesn't work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #7</td>
<td>Having an individual available to you to provide feedback, to have that opportunity to ask questions, like, what is it to select a chair? A mentor is someone who comes alongside you to provide guidance and advice to lift you when you're not having the best days. And sometimes to give you a kick, if you need to, in a nice way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #8</td>
<td>A mentor is somebody who guides. Somebody who can relate to your struggles in academia because mentorship and about academia is somebody who understands, who has been there and tries to empower yet humble you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #9</td>
<td>Mentorship is paving the way. It's knowing what you have endured and what you have gone through and providing the same opportunities, if not better opportunities, for someone else. And it's giving those words of encouragement. It's giving folks the opportunities that someone may not have given them before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #10</td>
<td>I don't think one mentor needs to provide everything you need to succeed. That's one thing I learned through my journey through the PhD I realized my advisor could only do so much. And that's okay. I can seek other people for guidance or help.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #11</td>
<td>Mentorship is the ability to connect with another individual who may have the same interest, whether it's research or career, but will provide you with that framework to help you navigate through obstacles and challenges that might come your way. It also provides a sense of motivation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #12</td>
<td>Mentorship is when you have someone with a degree or experience who guides you and supports you in whichever endeavor you're pursuing. Someone who is supporting you on your journey, available to answer clarifying questions and be a guide both on things you know on like the rules and the technical side but also on the culture and expectations, and overall, just looking at your best interest, ideally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #13</td>
<td>Is somebody willing to give you their time and wisdom? And graciousness is the word that comes to mind. And to help guide you and to be that sounding board and that place that you could go to for questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #14</td>
<td>A mentor should clearly be defined. Mentors that I've had have all been Latinas, who have, for lack of a better term, kicked me in the ass and said, “You can do this. You're gonna do this.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #15</td>
<td>A mentor can guide somebody less experienced through their educational program or professional journey. And I think that person is a mixture of a friend and a respected elder. There are so many different definitions. Somebody who can guide me and has more experience and a friendly vibe about them. It is possible to become friends sometimes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #16</td>
<td>The literature says to give them what they need and adjust what you provide based on that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Participant #17 | A mentor can advise you on the journey. So, it is somebody who can help you understand what's coming ahead and help you think about what you need to do to be successful in the future. I think about mentoring, sponsoring, and coaching. A mentor is somebody that talks at you, and a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant #18</th>
<th>Mentorship is an informal relationship between two people where one is learning from the other or relying on the other for support about a given situation or topic.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant #19</td>
<td>Someone who helps guide you and provides you with resources or someone who is there for you when you are stressed and need further support. And it would be great to have a mentor who does both, who gives you resources and helps guide and support you when times get difficult.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #20</td>
<td>Mentorship is when you're able to get support and help from somebody, whether it's someone who has similar identities as yourself or someone who is completely different but is willing to nurture and develop your sense of knowing and sense of belonging in whatever field you're in, or whatever thing you're interested in getting help for.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #21</td>
<td>Mentorship is having somebody who is not only an accountability partner but also somebody who shows you the possibilities of choices that you can make. It helps you think in a different way than just giving you advice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #22</td>
<td>A mentor has your back or when the faculty is willing to defend and help you. Maybe guide you through the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #23</td>
<td>Mentorship is a relationship in which the mentor, who provides advice or guidance, ensures that the person receiving that advice is committed to it. A mentor is someone who is committed to the success of the mentee. And that is through guidance through consejos.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #24</td>
<td>Someone who you trust, who will give you guidance, but will also, as a mom will tell you, talk to you straight and directly when you're making wrong decisions. Also, to talk about the hidden curriculum.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>