

DISSERTATION

LATINA EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENT:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED UNDER
OUR SUPERVISION BY ANTONETTE ARAGON ENTITLED "LATINA EDUCATIONAL
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION
LATINA EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENT:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

This study examined the experiences and factors of six young women who participated in Mi Carrera. Mi Carrera is an after-school program, in Denver, Colorado, focusing on increasing Latina high school graduation and college entrance through teaching confidence building skills. The participants in this study were either in their last year of high school, graduated from high school or in their second year of college. The goal of the research was to understand the particular circumstances of the participants and to describe the meanings of their experiences in the Mi Carrera program.

The study utilized a phenomenological approach of qualitative inquiry through personal interviews, focus group interviews, and a collection of resources that revealed thematic connections, threads of thought, and experiences that illuminated the essence or the “central underlying meaning” (Creswell, 1995) of the participants’ experiences.

All of the participants attended a Denver Public School. Most of the participants are one of the first in their immediate and extended family to graduate from high school and all have aspirations of attending or are already attending college. Four major themes emerged from the data: Perceived Common Problems, Common Experiences, Lessons from Mi Carrera, and Belief in their Future.

The Perceived Common Problem Theme documented challenges faced by the participants: lack of parental guidance in their education because parents had limited

educational backgrounds; participants were expected to assist with family financial responsibilities or caring for siblings, and this was perceived as a problem because they could not participate in many extracurricular activities in school; and finally, stereotypes played a role in the perceived common problems faced by the six participants.

The Common Experiences Theme documents the participant experiences with teachers and counselors, and motivation from parents.

The Lessons from Mi Carrera Theme describes how the program taught skills, beliefs, and positive attributes of being a woman and Latina.

The last theme, Beliefs in their Future, provides insight about how the young women feel self-assured through a strong sense of self. They believe that they will accomplish their goals of graduating from college and make a difference in society.

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Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow. Melody Beattie

It is with great gratitude that I extend my feeling of appreciation to all those who assisted me in this project. The journey has been a process where I have learned immensely about others and myself. Writing this dissertation has taught me to persist with joy, appreciation, and gratefulness for each moment that presents itself in this life.

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To my parents, grandmas, grandpa, sister and brother, I thank you for your constant support and faith in my abilities. Your steadfast love always encourages me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Mi Casa/Mi Carrera project has impacted my future in so many positive ways. It has developed my skills for the future, taught me about my culture and opened the door to a new way of life. Mi Carrera's mission to build a strong body, mind and spirit is now who I am (Mi Carrera [Pamphlet], 2000).

These words of a participant in Mi Carrera represent how a young woman witnesses her growth as a participant in the Mi Carrera program. The above quote created interest in this researcher to discover how Mi Carrera may impact the achievement of Latinas.

Statistically, Latinas have fared below average in graduation rates, test scores, and educational advancement. The trail to the top of an educational climb may be difficult for some Latina students in their educational journey. The trail is not clearly laid out for some Latina students because they may have obstacles to overcome in order to find their path. Such obstacles may include lack of resources, lack of parent guidance, and lack of educational preparation. Despite such deficiencies, some Latina students are provided with guidance, sense of self, and hope for their future. Young women participating in Mi Carrera are graduating from high school and attending college. Uncovering the ways in which Latina students experience support from the Mi Carrera program may enrich educators' perspective about Latina achievement made in the process of ascending to the summit of an education.

Latina young women achieving in school are naturally at the center of this research. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines achievement as the act of accomplishing or finishing something, and something that has been accomplished

successfully. Furthermore, this same dictionary defines success as the achievement of something desired, planned, or attempted. This study examined common factors and experiences that Latinas face and how students experience participating in Mi Carrera and the lessons learned for the future of Latinas, educators, and those interested in student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

The education of Latinos is important for them as well as for the future of America. The Census Bureau counted 35.3 million Latinos in the year 2000—1 out of 8 people in the United States is Latino. Latinos are verging on becoming the nation's largest minority group (US Department of Commerce, 2002). Unfortunately, many Latino students are not finishing their high school education. According to the Census Bureau, roughly 43% of Latino people twenty-five years old or older did not graduate from high school versus 13% for whites in the same age group. Additionally, one-quarter of these people had less than a ninth grade education (US Department of Commerce, 2002).

Consequently, with so many Latino students dropping out of high school, a significant number of the labor pool will be unqualified to meet demands of the twenty-first century. Additionally, a lack of education limits individual's potential jobs, thus increasing the already high rates of poverty. "In 1995, both black and Latino children (42 and 39%, respectively) were more than twice as likely as white children (16%) to live in poverty" (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1996, p. 61).

Furthermore, low income and minority students have not been equally represented in colleges or universities as compared to middle class and affluent students (Banks, 1994). There has been a decline in the number of minority students accepted into colleges and universities in the post-affirmative action era (Dynes, 1997). Therefore, it is important for educational programs in and out of school to promote higher achievement. A college degree is a benchmark for viability in the post-industrial era. "Demographic trends and demands of the world's knowledge-based technology driven economy mandate preparation of the greatest possible number for a university education" (Dynes, 1997).

Also, experts project that minorities will make up one-third of new hires in the next decade with Latinos being twice as numerous as any other minority hire (GAO, 1994). Latinos in the U.S. tend to be a young segment of the population with more than 40% under the age of eighteen (Guernica, 1980; GAO, 1994). This young segment of the population will represent a major new segment of the work force. Latinos are expected to constitute 16% of workers in American industry in the early part of the twenty-first century (Guernica, 1980).

With the population changes found in the work force and growing number of school age Latino children, it is important to examine how Latino students are achieving. However, much of the research of Latino students focuses on the drop-out rates. There are many studies that display minority-student school failure (Fernandez, Paulsen, & Hirano-Nakanishi, 1989; Humphreys, 1988; Rumberger, 1987). But these studies cannot provide reasons for Latino students' achievement. As more research is done to discover

the variety of ways Latino students learn, it is increasingly possible to find methods, tools, and procedures to assist them in successful learning. Thus, more studies need to be conducted on schools and programs that are successfully meeting the needs of Latinos. “If we are really interested in the success of an increasing number of ill-prepared youth, we must work at restructuring schools. That process begins with restructuring our vision” (Betances, 1999, p.59). Educational systems must prepare students to think critically; develop self-confidence, integrity, and commitment; understand diversity, communicate effectively (verbally and in writing); work in teams, learn and use technical skills, and operate in a global environment (Jbeily, 2001).

There are programs that are assisting Latinas to higher high school graduation and college attendance. One such program that supports Latinas to graduate from high school and attend college is Mi Carrera in Denver, Colorado. No study to date has examined successful achievement of Latina students impacted through the outreach program, Mi Carrera. Translated into English, “Mi Carrera” means “My Career.” It is a self-empowerment program that assists Denver area female students who are from low socioeconomic status attending Baker Middle School and West High School. These schools are part of the Denver Public School District. Also, the program assists the Mi Carrera participants who graduated from West High School and are pursuing their post-secondary degree in the Denver area. This is a program that is making a difference in the young women’s graduation rates from high school and college attendance rates. This program has a high Latina population and it is dedicated to empowering students through self-motivation, self-awareness, study skills, leadership development, computer skills, career awareness, college and scholarship application procedures, goal setting techniques, and

life skills that nurture the mind, body and spirit of the individual. This study seeks to understand the experiences of young women participating in this program. A qualitative approach is used in this study in an effort to understand the phenomenon of the experiences of Latinas in Mi Carrera.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore how the young women in Mi Carrera experience the program as it assists in their educational success. By interviewing participants in Mi Carrera, the researcher may learn how they are succeeding and what and who is assisting them in their educational achievement. Sonia Nieto (1996) asserts, "Only by listening to students can we learn how they experience school, how social and educational structures affect their learning, and what we can do to provide high-quality education for all students" (p. 4). Hopefully, this study will foster interest in schools across the country in improving the conditions of learning for Latinas through the development of similar programs such as Mi Carrera.

Mi Carrera was established in 1979 as a dropout prevention program, focusing on increasing high school graduation and college entrance attendance. Students meet regularly after school with occasional field trips taken to build community within the program. One hundred and nine young women participated in Mi Carrera in the year 2000. All participants continued into their next grade level. The nine seniors in the program graduated from high school and all but one graduating senior attended college in the next academic year. This study offers an opportunity to analyze Latina student experiences in a model program.

Significance of the Study

In this study, young women are the focus and their voice becomes public through contributing to the literature. A public voice is very powerful, not only for the empowerment of the participants in the study, but also in the literature. A phenomenological approach paints the picture of how the girls experience the program as it assists in their success. This will focus on how the young women talk about their experience in the program and what it means to them. By participating in the research, it is hoped that the young women will acknowledge their self-confidence and self-perceptions of their achievements. Additionally, the study will investigate how Mi Carrera systemically recognizes the important elements that promote Latina student achievement. Phenomenological studies involve sources of information coming from interviews, focus groups and collection of resources that will reveal thematic connections, threads of thoughts and experiences that illuminate the inquiry. The inquiry focuses upon the meaning of participants' experiences through how they live and display the impacts of the Mi Carrera program (Creswell, 1998).

Such a study may develop a basis for validating and augmenting racial/cultural pride, future success, and role modeling for younger generations. Current school systems are losing too many Latino students because they are not meeting their educational needs. Latino students dropout at a higher rate than students from other racial-ethnic groups and they score lower on standardized tests of reading and writing than do other racial-ethnic groups (President's Advisory Commission, 2000; Fashola & Salvin, 1997; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1992). Latino students often fall through the cracks

because their cultural differences and their disparate resources and family situations are rarely taken into account. Some schools even stigmatize rather than affirm biculturalism (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). For instance, a recent report by the American Association of American Women (AAAW) Educational Foundation asserts that teachers and counselors may have lower expectations and aspirations for Latinas as compared to other students (Ginorio & Huston, 2001).

This study may provide public school educators, universities, and their communities with recommendations and evidence to validate the importance of how some Latina students perceive their academic progress and how the Mi Carrera program impacts them. The results of this study can contribute to public education's response to national, state, and local policies focusing on increasing the educational success rates of Latino students.

Research Questions

The study will address two research questions in particular and several sub-research questions. The research questions are below:

1. What is the experience of Latina students participating in the Mi Carrera program?
2. Are there common experiences and/or factors affecting participants' lives and academic achievements?

The research sub-questions correlating to the first research question are as follows:

- a). How do Latinas perceive their identity and its relation to their academic achievement?
- b). How does the program influence their scholastic achievement?
- c). How do the participants value their educational achievement?
- d). How do the participants envision themselves in school and in their future?
- e). How do the participants perceive the Mi Carrera program as different than their general educational experience?

Below is the sub-question correlating to the second research question, which is: among the group of Latina students, are there common experiences and/or factors affecting participants' lives and academic achievements?

- a). What common and different problems are shared by participants as students in the United States?

Interviews conducted in phenomenological studies allow for participants to tell their story. This means that the above questions may not be the only questions asked, because in the interviewing process the researcher may find other topics that need more detail and other questions may emerge. The researcher then interprets the stories told in the interviews to provide insight from the experiences being explored in a study. The researcher will use the above questions as a guide to hopefully uncover the stories that have led to the success of the young women in the Mi Carrera program. The study will

address how students in Mi Carrera recognize the important elements that promote their achievement.

Delimitations/Limitations & Assumptions

The study focuses only on Latina students participating in Mi Carrera. The study is limited to interviewing high school and college students who participated in Mi Carrera. Therefore, the study is limited to the perceptions of Latina students involved in Mi Carrera. This is the only program investigated and these students will share how they view their success.

The limitations of the research are as follows:

1. The results are dependent upon the objectivity, honesty, and communicative nature from students;
2. Student participation is dependent on parental permission;
3. The analysis of the data is limited to the perceptions of secondary and post-secondary Latina students; and
4. The collection of data is completed at Mi Casa where the Mi Carrera program is housed.

Assumptions for this study are: the researcher has identified Mi Carrera and will use a phenomenological approach in the study of this program. The researcher has identified students supported in a program that aims to promote academic advancement of low-income students. Such a study may develop a basis for validating the role of racial/cultural pride for Latina success; by listening to student voices the study will contribute to the depth of literature about Latina student success.

Definition of Terms

1. **LATINA:** A term used in this study to identify the young women in this study from cultural backgrounds of Spanish speaking populations in the United States. In the Spanish language, there are feminine and masculine nouns and a woman is a Latina. This group of Americans is originally from Mexico, Latin and South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spain and other Spanish speaking countries.

2. **LATINO:** This term is usually representative of all people from cultural backgrounds of Spanish speaking populations in the United States. In other words, this term will identify this group of people when generalizations of the group are stated because the masculine term prevails when referring to both men and women. Also, the Spanish language references men as the masculine noun through the use of the word Latino. This group of Americans is originally from Mexico, Latin and South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spain and other Spanish speaking countries.

3. **HISPANICS:** This is yet another term that represents all people from cultural backgrounds of Spanish speaking populations in the United States. It too identifies this group through general references to this group people. This group of Americans is originally from Mexico, Latin and South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spain and other Spanish speaking countries. The next chapter will provide more depth behind the meaning of the three terms used to identify Spanish-speaking populations in the U.S.

4. UNDERPRIVILEGED: Low-income student populations who come from deprived living conditions, education conditions, etc., caused by poverty and lack of opportunity; disadvantaged.

5. SUPPORT SYSTEMS: People or programs that sustain or provide motivation, stability and growth opportunities for students. Latino students may perform successfully due to cultural, family, gender, personal, school and social entities that have a positive influence.

6. ACHIEVEMENT: the act of accomplishing or finishing something; and something that has been accomplished successfully.

7. SUCCESS: the achievement of something desired, planned, or attempted.

Summary

This study will add to the literature related to Latina students. The participants to be interviewed will have their voice in the center of inquiry in this study and hopefully will yield insight to their experience in the Mi Carrera program. In the best interest of the participants, it is also hoped that their insights will help to improve the learning environments of students like them.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study is to document Latina students' experiences in relation to their participation in the Mi Carrera program and how it influences their academic achievement. This literature review is divided into two sections: the first section will focus on commonalities among Hispanic students in the United States; and the second section will focus on information related to the female Hispanic students in the United States. By placing this information in two separate sections, a more holistic picture of the context of the participants' lives is developed.

Hispanic student achievement is important to American society. Demographically, the Latino student population is growing quickly and educators need to implement systemic changes to prepare these students for the technological, economic, and social changes in society. Hispanics will be a large force in the labor market, and an educated labor market is needed for continued economic stability. In spite of this, the present dropout rate among Hispanic students is soaring. Latino students are often overlooked, misunderstood, and they are "falling between the cracks." Parents, teachers, administrators and communities need to find ways that better relate to and educate Latino students. The first section of the literature in this review focuses on six categories: Demographics, Hispanic culture, language, education, teacher roles in implementing Hispanic achievement, and family influence on Hispanic student success. The second

section is divided into two parts: Latina education and Latina achievement. The literature review will serve as an avenue to explore the issues and ideas presented in the narrations students present in the phenomenological interviews in this study.

Section 1: Commonalities among Latino Students

Demographics

Hispanic Americans will be the largest minority group by the year 2005 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1999). “By the year 2025, Hispanic children will make up 25% of the school-age population. In the nation’s largest states—California, Texas, Florida, and New York—Hispanics already have reached that level” (President’s Advisory Commission, 2000, p. 2). By the year 2050, Hispanics will constitute 25% of the U. S. population, up from 11% in 1996 (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1999). The Census Bureau counted 35.3 million Hispanics in the year 2000—1 out of 8 people in the United States is Hispanic. Verging on becoming the nation’s largest minority group (US Department of Commerce, 2002); the Hispanic population is growing faster than any other population group. Moreover, the Hispanic population is young and will account for “most of the overall (youth) population growth expected between 1982 and 2020” (Pallas et al., 1989, p. 19). Since Hispanics are young, their significant growth rate will continue to flourish among the preschool, school age, and college-age youth in the 21st century (U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1999). The education of Hispanics is important for them as well as the future of America.

This ethnic group is diverse and is comprised of: Mexican, 65.2%; Central and South American, 14.3%; Puerto Rican, 9.6%; Cuban, 4.3%; and other Hispanic 6.6%.

(U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1999). Subsequently, their vast ethnic diversity also accounts for their black or white racial backgrounds (U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1999).

Most of the Hispanic populations reside in major metropolitan cities throughout the United States. In fact, 16 cities account for more than two-thirds of where all Hispanics can be found (Chapa & Valencia, 1993). Furthermore, the population of Hispanics is highly aggregated in only a few states throughout the country. Since Hispanics are densely populated in cities, urban education highly impacts the lives of students. Schools in large cities must battle with large class sizes and fewer monies allocated per pupil.

Metropolitan living impacts Latinos and many struggle with large poverty rates. Latino children are more likely to live in poverty as compared to White children. The figures show 10.6% of White children live in poverty, while 34.4% of Latino children live in poverty. As would be expected, Hispanics have larger unemployment rates in comparison to Whites (6.7% for Latinos versus 3.6% for Whites) (U. S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1999). Also, many Hispanics are employed in lower skilled jobs such as in agriculture, service oriented positions, and construction or factory jobs (U. S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1999). Having looked at the statistical demographic information, it is pertinent to fill in this data with a more rounded picture of Latinos by examining their culture.

Hispanic Culture

Latino and Hispanic Labels

In the late 1970s the Nixon Administration coined the term “Hispanic” to represent the ethnicity of people of Spanish speaking descent. Thereafter, government agencies and the media started to use the term to *officially* identify people of Latin America and Spanish descent living in the United States (Gomez, 1995; Oboler, 1995). The culture of American people from Spanish speaking backgrounds is varied. This group of people is from Mexico, Central and South America, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Spain and a few other nations.

Ethnic labels are used to identify groups of people, and most schools, government agencies, and organizations will use the term “Hispanic” to categorize Spanish-speaking people. But the term “Hispanic” simplifies the diversity of the Spanish speaking groups in the United States. It is a term that creates confusion among groups of Spanish speaking descent. It references roots to Spain but it disregards the oppressed populations and newly arrived immigrants of Mexico, Puerto Rico Central and South America (Gimenez, 1997). Some people find the term “Hispanic” offensive because it does not recognize the indigenous heritage, which is so important to some of the Spanish speaking populations (Rodriguez & Gurin, 1990). It is similar to saying most of the people in the United States are English because that’s the language they speak (Funk, 2001). It gets confusing because of the various ethnic roots we have in this country. The confusion of terms people call themselves also confounds the technical differences found in government documents. For instance, a person who is black and speaks Spanish may

have difficulty filling out the census questionnaire because their race is black but they are tied to a Spanish speaking culture (Oboler, 1995).

However, there are two umbrella terms that identify people from backgrounds of Spanish speaking populations in the United States: Latino and Hispanic. Both names are controversial because groups of people of Spanish speakers often desire to obtain their unique identity, especially if they recently moved to the United States (Lustig & Koester, 1993, p. 21). What people choose to call themselves depends on their place of origin, length of time in the United States, political views, and ways in which other people view them. Unfortunately, labeling brings about stereotyping and discrimination. Yet, these terms are used to classify people of Spanish-speaking descent into one ethnicity (Padilla, 1984). People from different regions of the country use "Latino" and "Hispanic" to identify their personal background, but "Latino" is favored as a personal identifier, while "Hispanic" is mostly used as a political, social scientific, and mass media term (Carrasquillo, 1991; Gimenez, 1997, Gomez, 1995). Both of these terms are controversial; and both lend insight to the complexity of people of Spanish-origin backgrounds. The terms represent groups that share a common heritage of Spanish conquest and culture and use of the Spanish language (Melville, 1988). Yet, people of Spanish-origin share differences in Spanish linguistic characteristics, economic status, demographics, personal histories, self-perceptions, and specific cultural traditions (Carrasquillo, 1991). Thus, the researchers, Chapa and Valencia (1993), recommend that the terms be used interchangeably to reflect preferences people desire to call themselves. In 1980 and 1990 the U.S. Census Bureau used the term "Hispanic" to identify the Spanish speaking population. But in 2000 they used "Hispanic/Spanish/Latino," which

shows the importance of broadening the identifiers to show language changes with time. In this study, both Hispanic and Latino identifiers are used.

Cultural Values/Beliefs

In identifying the culture of a group of people, one must evaluate a family's country of origin, heritage, background, use of verbal language, use of body language, traditions, social values, attitudes, religion, customs, and belief systems (Shade, 1997). Additionally, culture includes dress, diet, music, food and inter/intra-personal communication patterns. Cultural values are defined as, "complex but definitely patterned . . . principles . . . which give order and direction to the ever-flowing stream of human acts and thought as these relate to the solution of 'common human' problems" (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1960, p. 4). Florence Kluckhohn and Fred Strodtbeck stressed that an individual's value orientation is based upon a continuum from individualism, to group-identification, to a hierarchical social organization. Hispanics are more closely associated to the group-identification orientation because they rely on familial relations, in-group marriages, and segregation (Cortese, 1995). Their family structure is very strong and they place strong value tendencies around cooperation found in the family structure.

Acculturation

The Hispanic population is growing and two-thirds of the children born to Latino families are born in the United States (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of the Labor Statistics, 1999). The Latino families tend to be large and extended, which is important to their culture. This is a group that is deeply rooted in their own culture. Many Hispanics remain tied to cultural roots of their family rather than the cultural roots of the

United States. Sociologists categorize Hispanics into three acculturation categories: traditional, maintaining close ties with native cultural customs and tradition; dualistic, maintaining native cultural customs but adopting some of the dominant culture's values; and assimilated, not maintaining native culture but adopting the dominant culture's values (Jimenez, 1983). The majority of Hispanics are dualistic, or "cross-culturalizing," which means that they are maintaining their own distinct culture through the Spanish language, while adapting some of American culture (Hundley, 1987).

The melting pot theory has not worked with the Latino culture because it asks them to deny their cultural background. Pederson (1991) (as cited in Bellatin, 1995) states, "the melting pot metaphor makes the mistake of overemphasizing the universal common-ground generalizations shared across cultures to the neglect of culturally unique perspectives" (p. 22). The culture of Latinos is very important and plays an integral role in their life, family, language, and history. Asking Latinos to deny their culture is asking them to deny themselves.

The Influence of Culture on Latino Education

The manner in which students learn is based greatly upon how closely the school relates to their value orientation and acculturation level. The United States school system has been developed and refined according to Puritan American culture. This Puritan American culture places emphasis on independence or individual orientation as seen through competition, and contrasts cooperation and group decision-making characteristics of Latino culture. Furthermore, learning in America "emphasizes . . . self-reliance, industrious, thrifty, highly motivated and certainly competitive . . ." cultural characteristics (Shade, 1997, p. 36). Consequently, the Latino often faces the choice of

remaining true to oneself and one's background or attempting to succeed in the Anglo-dominated educational environment (Cortese, 1995). Thus, the choice between familial values and American educational values may exist in such contrast that a Latino student's cognitive growth, self-esteem, self-concept, and educational aspirations may be at a distinct disadvantage as compared with other students (Grossman, 1995).

Herbert Grossman (1995) describes another cultural factor that hinders some Latino students from school achievement, which is called the "locus of control." This is an internalized belief that impacts students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and stresses little faith that one is in control of their lives. In other words, a Latino student may have a pessimistic, fatalistic attitude attributing poor academic performance "to fate, chance, and various circumstances beyond their control, and they do not believe they can determine whether they will succeed" (p. 29). This attitude leads to a lack of belief in one's ability to achieve. In contrast, this attitude contradicts the American school system, which is based upon an internal locus of control, implying personal control of outcomes and stressing competition (Mestre & Royer, 1988).

Furthermore, some Latinos may assume that they do not have control of some aspects of their lives because of their lack of power due to prejudice against them (Shade, 1979). Hispanic students may encounter prejudice based on their skin color, which is a biological factor that is out of their control. The "dark complexion still labels many Hispanic children as 'low class' and 'better suited for field labor'" (Richardson, 1999, p. 152). The exception to this belief in a lack of control in one's life is the resilient Hispanic who succeeds despite dire circumstances faced at home, school, and society (Richardson cited in Henderson & Milstein, 1996). This student may have stronger

mental processing skills, high self-esteem, and believe in their own success (Richardson in Henderson & Milstein 1996). Another factor out of the control of a Latino student is their use of the Spanish language. As such, the next cultural trait to explore is language and its influences on the Latino student.

Language

History of Spanish Language

A large part of the history of the United States stems from the colonization by Spaniards who settled the Native American lands. This colonization brought many changes to the lives of the Natives, and one such change was language. It is the Spanish language that unites all Hispanic people, yet each group (i.e., Puerto Ricans, Mexican, Cubans, etc.) of Spanish speakers will use a distinct form of the language. In other words, Spanish is spoken with different syntax, phonology, and vocabulary across the various Spanish-speaking people (Melville, 1988). The Spanish language has been controversial in this nation's history, as explained below.

Some Hispanic students speak Spanish in today's classrooms. Historically, however, the use of Spanish in the classroom was forbidden. Some public schools around the country use to have an English-only rule. This rule was strict, and severe punishment was administered if Spanish was used in the classroom. For instance, Chad Richardson (1999) interviewed people who attended schools with the English-only rule in South Texas and one woman recounted a gruesome experience based on speaking Spanish in school:

‘One day a new boy came to our school. His English was very bad, so he was speaking in Spanish when the principal passed by. He reached out and grabbed the new boy and shook him very hard. Then he got a paddle and hit this boy, over and over, until the boy fainted. Then he turned to the rest of us and said the same thing would happen to us if he caught any of us speaking Spanish. The new boy never came back to school, and I never spoke Spanish in school again’ (149).

This forceful message to Spanish speakers was enough to scare anyone into following the rules, yet it was inhumane treatment. Disciplining by force does not foster positive self-esteem, self-image or acceptance of students. Instead, the English-only rule created a defense mechanism called ethnic self-hatred (Carrasquillo, 1991). Fortunately, some educational programs today promote the Spanish language in the classroom, such as with bilingual education.

Bilingual Education

The federal government gave official and monetary support to bilingual education in the late 1960s and emphasized the importance of equal opportunity to education for all students (Carrasquillo, 1991). Bilingual education is defined as “schooling provided fully or partly in the second language with the object of making students proficient in the second language while, at the same time, maintaining and developing their proficiency in the first language and fully guaranteeing their educational development” (Merino, 1991, p. 119). Bilingual education is a tool to help students whose first language is not English, and to allow them to perform as well in school as majority students who have English as a first language.

Bilingual education provides positive learning experiences to students and enhances a sense of pride in language and culture. Bilingual education programs show academic success with Hispanic students. McKenna & Ortiz (1988) advocate, "Research studies have consistently documented that children whose first language is not English, who are members of a minority group, and who are of low-socioeconomic status do best in acquiring second language proficiency if education is begun in their first language" (p. 207). Furthermore, they assert that the higher the level of proficiency in the first language, the higher the level of academic success, and the greater the acquisition of the second language (McKenna, & Ortiz, 1988).

However, bilingual education programs have been under attack recently with heated policy adoptions in California and other states' mandates. Bilingual education has been at the forefront of political debates, in large part over the cost of such programs. "In one estimation, California spends \$2 million annually on bilingual instructors, textbooks, consultants and administrators" (Anderson, 1998, p. 25). Opposition to the California bilingual education program claimed that it is a program that is not working. Yet, much of data that the opposition used to support their claims was not based on classroom observation (Anderson, 1998). In fact, according to Willig (1985) there have been very few classroom observations of bilingual education. If heavily funded programs are to be valued, they need to be studied. Thus, "the quality of instruction in Spanish is a key factor in the success of students in bilingual programs, and must be a focus of research and professional development in the education of these children" (Fashola, O., Slavin, R. Calderon, M., & Duran, R., 1997, p.8).

Despite the reported large sums of monies going toward bilingual education, it is insufficient in light of the decreases in funding over the past decade. The students who need bilingual education the most end up having programs that are under funded. Large numbers of students that are taught bilingual education in major cities like Los Angeles, New York, El Paso, and Washington, D. C., receive inadequate amounts of funding (Carrasquillo, 1991). Thus, the bilingual programs become diluted and have not received enough financial support to carry out quality programs. This has meant, unfortunately, that “few new bilingual programs have been established. Bilingual education has been redefined to mean ‘ . . . any special efforts used to teach language minority children even if the children’s primary language is not used in their instruction’” (Carrasquillo, 1991, p. 119). Consequently, California’s Proposition 227, was passed and made “it illegal to use Spanish in instruction,” (Stern, G., 2000, p. 14) unless a group of at least 18 parents sign parental waivers and ask for primarily Spanish to be spoken in the classroom. The proposition requires Spanish-speaking students to participate in a one year structured English immersion (SEI) program (Sapiens, 1999). Many argue that a one-year immersion program will insufficiently equip students with proficiency in English (Martinez, 1998). Dr. Patricia Gandara, Associate Professor of Education at the University of California—Davis states, “All the research indicates that it takes between five and seven years until someone is proficient in a second language to learn in an academic setting. . . . These kids will be able to speak, but they won’t be able to do algebra” (Cummins, 1984; Streisand, 1997, p.36). Lockwood & Secada (1999), emphasize that it takes a long and consistent effort to learn and acquire a second language.

ESL

To cut costs, many school districts have not used bilingual education curriculum effectively; instead, they include English as a Second Language (ESL) or immersion programs as primary language programs and claim that these sufficiently meet bilingual standards. These programs are useful when many language groups are represented in one classroom or when bilingual education is not feasible. The problem with ESL is that it requires students to be submersed into regular instruction classrooms. This type of instruction may be effective and ineffective in some cases; it all depends on the number of students in the program and how well the entire staff of a school enforces and meets the needs of the English language learning groups. Also, the ESL program does not meet the need of the Spanish-speaking students because it strips them of their first cultural foundation, language (San Miguel, 1988).

Overall, the bilingual education programs in the United States may need to be repaired, but English-only policies did not work in the 1950s and have yet to be successful today. The bilingual education programs across the country may need to be revamped to meet the needs of students. Schools may first start by valuing language. As Bell Hooks (1989) points out, we need “as many languages on hand as we can know or learn” (p. 79). Language should be developed and not eliminated from a student. It should be a tool that students may use to empower themselves. In other words, Richard Ruiz (1997) argues that language is important and if a child comes into the classroom knowing Spanish, educators may capitalize on this skill to empower the student to success. Some researchers believe the current bilingual program takes away the native

language and replaces it with the majority language. Some researchers desire to create a model or enhance the current bilingual education program to promote multilingual skills as important to succeed in a global marketplace (Courts, P., 1997; Stern, G., 2000). And for a bilingual education program to be successful, it should be depoliticized (Lockwood, & Secada, 1999). With such reforms, many students may be better equipped for a rapidly changing society.

Consequently, both culture and language are important to the achievement of Latinos in a technologically advanced society. Yet, because of the factors related to culture and language, Latinos are being deprived educationally (Ortega & Roos, 1995). Latinos are not succeeding in the educational systems, especially when examining high school graduation rates and under-representation in both college and career representation (Reyes, 1992). The next section will examine the formal education of the Latino student.

Education

Dropout Rate

An educated populace is able to participate socially, economically, and culturally in a nation. With the Latino growth rate at the forefront of society, they will represent a major new segment of the nation's workforce. However, the face of the workforce is changing due to technological advances. Is the Hispanic population ready to participate in such a technologically advanced society? Some researchers would say "no," because Hispanics have a large dropout rate and are continuing to perform poorly in schools. The dropout rate for Hispanics has been estimated between 35 to 88%. However, these estimated percentages are based on calculations that are not uniform. (Valverde, 2002). What is clear is that "Hispanic students are the largest-growing sector of the population

and have the highest dropout rate of any major segment of the U.S. population” (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998). The National Center for Education Statistics (1995a) reports that 30% of all Hispanics aged 16 through 24 were dropouts. This percent is three times higher than whites in this age group (8%) and two times higher than Blacks in this age group (14%) (The President’s Advisory Commission, 2000). This large dropout rate is also related to immigration:

In 1989, 43% of Hispanic 16 to 24-year olds born outside of the United States and District of Columbia had not completed high school or earned a GED. Many factors contribute to this dropout phenomenon. The status of dropout rates for first-generation and at least second-generation Hispanic Americans was considerably lower (17% and 24%, respectively). It should be noted, however, that Hispanic dropout rates are still double those of non-Hispanics when the length of residency in the United States is taken into account. In other words, high status dropout rates among Hispanics are not just a problem associated with recent immigration (NCES, 1995b, p.60).

Two major reasons attributed to the high dropout rates are immigration and low socioeconomic status (Lockwood, & Secada, 1999). Darder et al. (1993) reports the immigration of Latinos as follows:

Latinos will comprise more than 25% of all U. S. children from birth to 17 years of age. More than 6.25 million Latinos are school age; more than 5.4 million Latino children attend public schools, with another 2.4 million expected to enter the system in the next four years. Latino children will soon be the majority of the public school students in major urban centers across the country. And in cities

such as Los Angeles, New York, San Antonio, Miami, and Chicago, where the largest numbers of Latinos reside, Latino enrollment in many schools already exceeds 50% (p. 1).

Many Hispanic students live in economically distressed areas of the nation. They attend schools that are plagued with insufficient materials, inadequate staffing, the threat and presence of violence, and overcrowded buildings. "They encounter stereotypes, personal prejudice, and social bias that often is part of larger anti-immigration forces in this society" (Lockwood, & Secada, 1999, p. 35). John Ogbu (1987), an educational anthropologist out of University California at Berkley, believes that the prejudice and discrimination these students encounter set them up for failure. Ogbu (1987) looks at Hispanics who have been in this country for a few generations as an "involuntary" minority. They come from a line of families that have been in this country who have suffered conquest and colonization. These minorities have been assigned the lowest position in American society. They have been divorced from their original culture and they have not been allowed to assimilate into American society as the White immigrants have. "In the case of the Mexican Americans, those who later immigrated from Mexico were assigned the status of the original conquered group in the southwestern United States" (p. 321). According to Ogbu (1987), it is the caste-like or involuntary minorities who usually experience more difficulties with social adjustment and school performance. They do so because they perceive discrimination as enduring and permanent. Involuntary minorities do not really believe that they have an equal chance with White Americans to get ahead by acquiring an education. "These minorities have developed a variety of

‘survival strategies’ to compensate for apparent lack of equal opportunity” (Ogbu, 1987, p. 326). Many times these survival strategies do not include getting an education.

Many Hispanics experience “poor/failing grades, grade retention, lack of teacher and counselor support, disciplinary problems (attendance, cuts, lateness), lack of extracurricular activities, . . . irrelevant curriculum, disinterest in school, dislike of teachers, weak interpersonal relations, and lack of minority role models” (Marin, 1989, p.10). In examining teacher role models in more depth, Hodgkinson (1992) conducted a study that displayed the national average of student to teacher ratios based on ethnicity. This study reported that for every 64 Hispanic students, there was one Hispanic teacher. In comparison, every 17 white students had one white teacher and for every 40 Black students, there was one Black teacher. Thus, this study confirmed the low ratios of Hispanic teacher role models for Hispanic students. These factors may show Hispanic students that a “basic incompatibility . . . [exists] between the characteristics of . . . [themselves] and what the school offers” (Martinez, 1998, p.26).

On top of the educational struggles that Hispanics experience, some find that their home life is plagued with hardships. They witness the adversity of their parents and family members who have limited employment opportunities. This does not support a promising vision for many students. A former Latino dropout that was interviewed for Lockwood & Secada’s (1999) study expressed that the “American dream” is for someone else, not for Latinos.

The dropout rate is also compounded by teen pregnancy. In 1995, 11% of Latinas aged 15-19 gave birth to children (this figure only accounts for births and not pregnancy rates). This birth rate is higher than for White or Black females in the same age bracket

(Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Fashola & Slavin, 1997; and Romo & Falbo, 1996). As cited in Ginorio and Huston's report (2001), "'Girls who are discouraged at school will often escape through getting pregnant,' [and this] . . . reverses the common argument that pregnancy precipitates dropping out" (p. 26). Another study showed that teen pregnancy was not the primary reason for Latinas to dropout of school. Instead, this study reported that being set behind a grade level and sex role expectations from traditional Hispanic families were important causes for dropping out of school (as cited in Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Furthermore, a study conducted in East Los Angeles among lower socio-economic Latina students found 63% of the students who became pregnant were not attending school. And some conclusions made in this study led researchers to believe that those "dropping out of school may encourage Latina teen pregnancy, rather than the converse" (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. 25). Of those Latina students having children, only three out of 10 report leaving school due to teen pregnancy, which is about the same rate as Anglo girls (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Teen pregnancy is a complex issue and it impacts many Hispanic students. Thus, the dropout phenomenon is a gradual process that includes many factors as seen above (Frase, 1989).

Tracking and Testing Implications

Another reason attributed to the high dropout rate is the low expectations placed upon Latino students. Many students are seen as "low achievers" and placed in low ability tracking programs, which is a traditional practice among secondary schools that is not questioned (Meier & Stewart, 1991; Oakes, 1985). Students are vulnerable when teachers have low expectations of them because they may lose interest, develop negativity toward school, and let their academics decline (Romo & Falbo, 1996). Ability

tracking programs often send students into academic grouping (i.e., special education, ability or curriculum tracking, and separated bilingual education) early in their academic career. A Latino student may go to vocational classes rather than college bound classes (Kent & Ruiz, 1992, cited in Sandoval, 1994; Meier & Stewart, 1991). Yet, many students in these programs are capable of excelling in higher-level coursework, but their opportunities are limited.

One way of observing the limitations that Latinos face is noting their low participation rates in gifted and talented programs and college bound courses, which is true for minorities in general (Gibson, & Follo, 1998). To enter gifted and talented programs, students must pass requisite tests and be recommended by teachers. Thus, in 1986, three percent of Hispanic students were enrolled in gifted and talented programs (Orum, 1986). What's more, the Advanced Placement (AP) classes, which offer college level courses to high school students, have low Hispanic participation. Students taking the AP class may take and pass an AP exam, which allows them to test out of introductory college courses in core subject areas, such as American History, Calculus, etc. By 1996, seven percent of Hispanic students took the AP exams compared to 13% of white students who took the exams (NCES, 1998).

Hispanic students are attending college, but not in numbers proportional to their percentage in the population. In 1995, Hispanics were 25% of the national population but only eight percent of students enrolled in postsecondary education; this percentage has risen since 1976 when four percent of all students enrolled in college were Hispanic (NCES, 1998). However, most of the 1995 Hispanic college enrollees attended community colleges rather than four-year institutions (NCES, 1998). And, in 1997 only

11% of Hispanics between the ages of 25-29 completed a four- year bachelor's degree, whereas, 35% of the general population between the ages of 25-29 completed a four-year bachelor's degree (NCES, 1998).

One reason for low enrollment of Hispanic students in postsecondary institutions is that secondary schools do not prepare them adequately for advancement to higher education. In secondary schools across the country, Hispanic students are perceived as lacking interest in school and often times stereotyped by teachers who have low expectations of their abilities. Much of the stereotyping occurs because teachers do not understand the Hispanic cultural background and they do not relate to the student (Reyes, 1992). Or the classes are so large in urban schools that the teacher is barely surviving and has difficulty developing relationships with students (Lockwood & Secada, 1999). Furthermore, it has been thought that the Hispanic student is dropping out because of their intelligence level. However, students of various abilities and intelligence levels dropout, and intelligence level is not necessarily a factor to cause dropping out (Davis, 1989). In fact, many Hispanic students stated that they dropped out more because of school related concerns rather than job or family concerns (NCES, 1995b). In a study where 374 Latino dropouts were interviewed, the researcher found that school was experienced as "boring and a waste of time" (Tidwell, 1988, p. 940). Another researcher, Delgado-Gaitan (1988), discovered that the frequent response of boredom, as a reason for dropping out, was masked by anger which students felt in regards to the unsupportive conditions in school.

Students bored in school may not feel challenged, and they were more than likely placed in a low achieving class based on IQ or standardized test results. In 1970

researchers found that 83% of the districts surveyed were using achievement and/or IQ tests as basis for sorting students into tracked classes (Oakes, 1985). Standardized tests do not tell the whole story of a student's ability (Rinn, 1995); yet, they often become the only measure for student achievement (Darder et al., 1993; Oakes, 1985).

Another consideration about standardized achievement tests is whether they are culturally biased. Oakes (1985) asserts, "white middle-class children are most likely to do well on . . . [standardized tests/IQ tests] because of the compatibility of their language and experiences with the language and content of test questions" (p. 11). For example, in 1992 Hispanic 17-year-olds scored only slightly higher in reading, math and science than 13-year-old white students (NCES, 1995). Consequently, the fairness of such tests is measured in the consistently lower scores for minority students, young women, or students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (Oakes, 1985; Rinn, 1995; Peng, 1982). The unfair nature of these tests does not provide a clear assessment of academic achievement among minorities. As a final point, Darder et al. (1993) suggest public school assessments need to provide multiple opportunities to demonstrate knowledge and critical thinking skills in meaningful ways.

The implications of the Hispanics' lack of success in the educational system in the United States are costly to the society as a whole. As the dropout rate continues to grow and Latinos continue to have low postsecondary graduation rates. This reduces economic competitiveness in society, and more money is spent on public services associated with crime and impoverishment (Levin, 1985). When students do not graduate from high school, they may experience high unemployment rates, lower income, and less job stability (Hoffer, 1988). This leads to long-term impacts on individuals, families,

communities and society. Thus, it is imperative that the educational needs of Latinos be met nationally (Lockwood, & Secada, 1999; NCLR, 1990). If Hispanic students are to succeed educationally, there need to be changes within the educational system.

Promoting Secondary Hispanic Achievement

Most of the current research on Hispanic students focuses on the dropout rate and the socio-cultural factors that impede their success. The literature focusing on dropout rates and socio-cultural factors often times explains why Latino students struggle, and displays a “social deficit model,” often referred to as the “culturally different paradigm” (Hatton & Gonzalez, 1999). For instance, schools across the country will use this paradigm to explain why they have such a large dropout rate among Latinos. This model allows administrators and staff to accept an excuse for failure as the fault of the culturally different student. In other words, the perspective of the culturally diverse student is then looked at as less intelligent, less capable, and less motivated. The model implies that the culture, value, and physical appearance of the student must be changed or they will not succeed in school (Hatton, & Gonzalez, E., 1999). “Teachers who accept this paradigm also are saying that nothing is wrong with their pedagogy, teaching practices, or methodologies, or with the school system” (Hatton, & Gonzalez, E., 1999, p. 25). They further promote the educational status quo and it continues to operate under this paradigm; students are then expected to learn to adapt to the school programs or fail. The faculty and staff who buy into this paradigm then believe that the solution for improving the plight of the Hispanic student is beyond the control of the school system (Hatton, & Gonzalez, E., 1999).

Latino students and their success are not beyond the control of the school. In fact, Latinos are succeeding in some schools because the educational system recognized the Latino ancestral pride, their language, and the importance of their culture and how it influences their learning. And the schools promoting successful programs provide high expectations that assist students to succeed. Schools recognizing the need for systemic change recognize important elements that promote Latino student achievement. Such elements are found in the recommendations created by the “Hispanic Dropout Problem” (1998) as explained below.

Recommendations

In former President Clinton’s administration, the United States Secretary of Education, Richard W. Riley, created an initiative to address Hispanic education, called “The Hispanic Dropout Problem.” In September, 1995, he appointed a team of research scholars, policy analysts, and practitioners to study issues surrounding the Hispanic dropout problem. This research team listened to open hearings of testimony from school personnel to the community members in locations around the nation that fostered large populations of Hispanic students. The Hispanic Dropout Program (1998) compiled recommendations for Hispanic student achievement as follows:

- First, our nation must invest monies, and time for the success of Hispanic students. This requires schools to create smaller class sizes where teachers may establish relations with their students (this will be discussed in more depth below).
- Second, achieve attitudinal shifts among teachers, textbook publishers, and school boards to create curriculum that reflects the lives of Hispanic students.

Sonia Nieto (1994) stresses that the curriculum is often times at odds with the experiences and backgrounds of Latino students. She suggests that the curriculum focus on Latino history and culture in schools so students may take pride in their backgrounds. Also, she suggests that the curricula include topics of discrimination and racism so that constructive discussions create understandings. Students experience these issues and there needs to be dialogue to prepare students how to deal with such challenges.

- Third, create teacher preparation and professional development programs that teach the importance of respecting the language and culture of Hispanics. Also, teacher preparation programs need to educate a more diversified population to meet the needs of a more ethnically diverse student population. Furthermore, staff developments need to provide a knowledge base about the Hispanic student for teachers who work with Hispanic students. This knowledge base should include techniques that address the different learning styles of students. Puerto Rican students interviewed in a phenomenological study confirmed that more effective teachers who can affirm their culture and language in school make a huge difference in their achievement (Rolon, 1998). Furthermore, once a faculty is trained about Hispanic students, they must realize that change takes time (Fullan, 1991) and collaboration among communities, parents, and teachers is an on-going initiative.

- The fourth initiative requires implementing effective programs. These programs must be comprehensive and make a difference throughout the entire school. They must challenge content and emphasize activity over passivity. And

the programs must engage the learner. The programs must nurture students to feel cared about and valued. Thus, the programs bring in a personal connection that shows students that they are cared about as an individual and their culture is valued. Finally, students must feel that they are making a contribution that means something.

- The next recommendation recognizes that successful programs take into consideration the timing of the program, measurable results, and expectations that are set and put into motion.
- Sixth, teachers must have “buy-in” to the implementation of programs that create Hispanic student achievement. There must be discussion, planning, voting, and sustained teacher education in the program initiative. Programs must be tailor made to meet the climate of the school.
- Finally, schools must step away from the politicization of issues surrounding the English-Only movement, and status of immigration. “Politicizing the education and futures of so many students, HDP members believe, is at best a nonproductive enterprise” (Lockwood & Secada, 1999, p.5).

The above seven recommendations correlate with the following sections on resources and four programs promoting Latino achievement.

Resources

“The link between education and income has long been established, as has the link between education and upward mobility” (Polinard, J. L., & Wrinkle, R. D., 1995, p. 463). In a study conducted by Polinard & Wrinkle (1995), Hispanic students perform better when revenue per pupil is high and minority teachers provide instruction.

Furthermore, they found that community role models having at least a high school diploma added to the achievement of Hispanic students. And it is obvious that the evidence shows that when Hispanic students attend class, this, too, correlates positively with their achievement. However, having more resources for the sake of improving Hispanic achievement must result in high quality instruction for the students. Lockwood & Secada (1999) assert that

If we do support schools with new resources, we have to be careful. . . . Schools have been coping up until now. With more money, they are not necessarily going to change. They may continue their old behaviors, the coping behaviors. But clear linkages between monies infused into schools and the quality of instruction students receive need to be high on the agendas of both educators and policymakers. . . . 'High quality instruction,' Secada points out, 'requires additional resources to accomplish smaller class sizes, an end to overcrowded schools, improved materials, and high-quality professional development. Money definitely is necessary, but it must support specific activities' (p. 5).

Therefore, Hispanic student needs may be met when carefully thought out programs institute effective change.

Teacher Roles in Implementing Hispanic Achievement

An effective teacher pays attention to students and appeals to student interests. Teachers are challenged with creating personal bonds with their students that will enhance learning. However, a student of a diverse background is not always understood, recognized, or is sometimes seen as unimportant to learning. The reasons for a student of color to be overlooked in a classroom are numerous. Class sizes, teacher stresses, and

teacher trainings are some of the reasons students are overlooked. Teachers have great demands to fulfill their positions. Most schools have oversized classes of students that do not receive personal attention. "Large schools neither nourish the spirit nor educate the mind" (Meier, 1995, p. 107). Many schools are run like a factory with a schedule that tries to meet the needs of hundreds of students. The factory is barely running and the resources are scarce. This factory is an ineffective system that needs to be changed because teachers are not set up for success. Teachers are asked to take on far too many tasks in one day (Marshall & Tucker, 1992; Curiel, 1991).

Michael Fullan (1991) discussed the "classroom press," which are the daily influences on teachers, such as: many interactions with students, completing a large range of operations simultaneously, and adapting to ever changing conditions unpredictably. "Teachers engage in an estimated 200,000 interchanges a year, most of them spontaneous and requiring action" (Fullan, 1991, p. 33). With this constant pressure on teachers, it is challenging to meet the needs of all students. The classroom press places a toll on teachers and "... exhausts their energy--'at the end of the week, they are tired; at the end of the year they are exhausted'" (Fullan, 1991, p. 33). The classroom press is yet another symptom of a system of education that shows the "factory approach" needs to be changed.

Additionally, it is important for teachers to be knowledgeable about language, history and culture of their students, especially students of color. Language, history and culture are parts of a student's symbolic system, which every human group uses subconsciously to view their world and how they operate in it. Furthermore, teachers need to know how to adapt to all students' personal background as well as their various

learning styles. Every student brings a wealth of information with them to a classroom. A teacher's challenge is to reach all students in an equitable manner that develops trust, respect, open and safe communication. Thus, teachers have the opportunity to tap into the wealth of information that students bring to the classroom, which may develop into quality learning for the student (Adams, M., Bell, L. A. & Griffin, P., 1997).

All students are educable and the behavior of the school is critical in determining the quality of the education. Deborah Meier's (1995) Central Park East Schools (CPES) in Harlem are proof that smaller class sizes, better relationship building among staff, students, and parents, and responsibility of learning on the learner are ways to ensure success among students. Unfortunately, many school administrators, teachers, school boards and others will blame the student for their lack of ability to learn. This is based on a deficit model, often referred to as the "culturally different paradigm" (Hatton & Gonzalez, 1999; Lucas, T., Henze, R., & Donato, R., 1997). This model is used to explain dropout rates among students, especially students of color. This model allows administrators and staff to accept an excuse for failure as the fault of the culturally different student. In other words, the perspective of the culturally diverse student then is looked at as less intelligent, and less capable. However, one of the best ways to ensure higher graduation rates is to train teachers to adequately integrate minority and Caucasian groups more effectively. Integration may occur if white teachers develop rapport with students of color and also show all of their students how to integrate in a class that has a positive environment promoting a spirit of respect, fun, and thirst for learning. Tinkunoff (cited in Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez, 1997) conducted a study observing 58 teachers in a study titled the Significant Bilingual Instructional Features (SBIF). Teachers who most

effectively moved their students toward consistent productivity were firm yet felt love for their students. They felt that their classroom of students was their family; some teachers told their classes that they were their brothers and sisters, and some students even called their teacher mom or “Tia.” The classroom environment was set up as a home away from home and the teacher’s purposefully created a safe environment for learning.

Furthermore, Lucas, Henze, and Donato (1997) conducted interviews with six successful high schools and they identified several routine actions performed by their staffs that led to Hispanic student achievement. The six traits observed in these schools were: place value on students’ languages and cultures; set high expectations for minority students; design staff development to help teachers and other staff serve students; design counseling programs that give special attention to minority students; encourage parents to become involved in their children’s education; and build a strong commitment among staff to have a strong desire to empower the minority students through education. The personal outreach that these staffs performed created a new paradigm that reached many Hispanic students. The staff sometimes made home visits, and got to know the students and parents on a personal level. “When students see that their teachers and administrators are aware of the social and political pressures their parents face, and are actively engaged in helping ‘the system’ assist their families, they too become invested in the process of education” (Howe, C., 1994, p.45).

Finally, Castro and Ingle (1993a) assert that there is a need for more Hispanic and other minority teachers, and a need to improve the way all teachers are prepared to work with Hispanic and other minority students. Yet, high school graduation rates among Hispanics need to increase so that there is a larger pool of these students furthering their

education in universities. If higher high school graduation rates increase and more Latinos decide to pursue higher education, there may be a larger pool of Latino participants in education programs. Also, the lack of Hispanic teachers may be a result of current Hispanic college graduates deciding on higher paid professions versus the education field. The education profession does not compete well with other high paying professions. If more Hispanics do enter the education profession as teachers, they may assist in transforming how Latino children are educated. Unfortunately, currently there are few Hispanic teacher role models in the school systems. Hodgkinson (cited in Howe, C., 1994) relates the number of students to teacher ratios as follows: "The ratio of white non-Hispanic students to white non-Hispanic teachers is 17:1; for African Americans the ratio stands at 40:1. For Hispanics, however, this student to teacher ratio soars to 64:1" (p. 45).

Unfortunately, the way that teaching is administered, from the training level to the school level, has changed very little in the past twenty years. Yet, the number of minority children has grown, which has changed the face of our school clientele. In the review of literature done by Protheroe and Barsdate (1991) regarding culturally sensitive instruction, the authors found differences in teacher/student learning, teaching styles, and differences in socioeconomic class and community understanding:

When educators do not adapt their educational approaches to these differences, mismatches between teachers' culturally-influenced teaching styles and students' culturally-influenced learning styles occur. This can cause students to do poorly in school and to be referred to and accepted into programs for students with learning disabilities and/or cognitive disabilities (Grossman, 1995 p. 8).

Thus, the curriculum, instruction, and activities are seen as mismatched, leading to unsuccessful systems that are not reaching minority students.

Overall, the numerous aspects of education and learning are faced with many challenges. Teaching is a demanding profession. A teacher faces enormous challenges in a day. In order for teachers to successfully meet the needs of Latino students the system must be changed. Teacher training programs need to adapt to the changes in higher populations of minority students. If teaching starts to adapt to the needs of the Latino population, then perhaps more Latinos will graduate and pursue higher education, bringing more Latino teachers into the profession. Therefore, teacher-training programs need to adhere to the culture, history and language of the Hispanic student. The factory of education at all levels is an old factory. The industry of teaching needs to be changed back to a more personalized system that focuses on meeting the needs of all students. There are many factors that aide in the success of students. Teachers, curriculum, administration, and classroom environment are only part of the equation for Latino student success. The last section of this review will examine how family roles influence Hispanic student achievement.

Family influence on Hispanic Student Success

The Latino family has been characterized as warm, informal, personalized, they believe in family loyalty and they have a relaxed sense of time (Espinosa, 1995). Klukhohn and Strodbeck (1960) created a value continuum that examines differences among various cultural groups and their behaviors related to family interactions, understanding of time, work habits, and cultural implications. They found that the Hispanic family structure is closely associated to the group/collective orientation. Their

family structure is very strong and their values are associated around the family. On the other hand, many non-Hispanic teachers fall under the individualistic orientation and are task oriented. This difference in value orientation may result in a culture clash between Hispanic families and non-Hispanic teachers.

The differences between non-Hispanic teachers and Hispanic families may be further viewed through the family structure. Many Hispanic children come from large, extended families and some children live with their parents as well as other relatives. These families are multigenerational and the children view the interactions between young and old alike. Grandparents and other relatives may care for the children (De La Rosa & Maw, 1990). The father has been characterized as the authority figure and typically the firstborn son follows in his footsteps taking responsibility for the family (Loridas, 1988). The mother is usually responsible for the children's education. The parents believe it is their responsibility to instill respect and proper behavior at home. They see the school's role as instilling knowledge (Nicolau & Ramos, 1990).

The family system is important to learning opportunities that student's experience (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994). Parental involvement in school leads to increased student achievement (Walberg, 1984). The resources families have end up influencing how students perform in the classroom. Parents provide much incentive to aide in their child's successful school behaviors. But parents are one piece of the equation that guide students in their education. Student achievement is related to expectations from home, motivation, role models, and experiences outside of school (Kahle, 1982). Unfortunately, there are several barriers to parent involvement, especially by the time a student reaches the middle or junior high school age. The barriers may come from varying views such

as: student's attitudes--wanting independence from parents; school administrators who believe that parent involvement at the middle school age level is not as necessary as when students were younger; or parents may feel alienated from the impersonal structure of schools (Chavkin, N., 1995). Additionally, parents who are culturally different and speak a language other than English may find it most difficult to connect to the school (Plata, 1989).

The difficulty for parents to connect with schools includes many factors. A study conducted by Romo (1983) examined how some Latino families perceived the school experiences of their children. The families in this study were characterized as people with Mexican heritage whose parents, and usually grandparents, are U.S.-born. The Latino families interviewed expressed feeling alienation from the schools. Parents want their children to succeed in school (Espinosa, L, 1995). They have high aspirations for their children to go to college, but they still saw their own children dropout of school. The encounters they had with school administration and teachers were difficult because they had difficulty understanding the school jargon related to curriculum, and school organization (Romo, 1983). Additionally, Romo (1983) asserts that parents

... felt that their own academic skills, especially in reading and writing, might be inadequate; and these feelings inhibited active participation in school-related situations that demanded display of academic skills such as political letter writing, speaking in front of a group, working with children in the classroom, or questioning methods of instruction (p. 637).

Some families were confused with the information given to them at parent teacher conferences and many of the families did not understand their children's academic

progress or the kinds of programs in which they participated. They also disagreed with the school personnel's description of their children or children's abilities. They expressed support for their children and attempted to help them with schoolwork at home, but as the children advanced into higher levels, the parents could not offer their help because they did not understand the work. Darder, Rodriguez, and Cox (1993) stated, "Although most Latino parents hold high aspirations for their children and want to help their children be successful in school, they often lack the knowledge, skills, and confidence to challenge public schools to involve them" (p. 13).

Schools desire to connect to the parents of minority children. However, the communication between them has not been strong, which is one factor for failure among Latino children. Plata (1989) asserts that

Historically, classroom teachers' insensitive communication has provoked Hispanic parents to: (1) avoid contact with the school (Ruiz & Padilla, 1977), (2) feel intimidated by the school system's presumed influence and authority, (3) control negative feelings about the school personnel, and the curriculum for fear of reprisal toward their children, and (4) mistrust school and its personnel. In short, Hispanic parents and school personnel have worked separately for the benefits of Hispanic children and, at times, to the hindrance of each other" (p.86).

Furthermore, much of the communication that schools send to parents is in writing and there are many Hispanic parents who have difficulty reading English. This prohibits parents from effectively carrying out expectations from the school (Romo, & Falbo, 1996). When parents are confronted with complicated policies in the written format, they often give up and do not play an active role in their child's schooling. Such written

materials may alienate Hispanic parents from the school and school staff (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1998).

Effective relationships between schools and Hispanic parents are necessary to insure stronger communication for the benefit of Hispanic students. In order to develop relationships with parents of Latino children, teachers may consider home visits. Home visits may open communication positively and foster trust between parents and teachers. Teachers should learn about the Hispanic culture so that they adapt to them to create a bridge of understanding. The role of family is extremely important in the Hispanic culture and by making a home visit, the teacher shows respect and a willingness to learn and accept the Hispanic culture and lifestyle (Plata, 1989).

Epstein and Connors (1995) believe that students, teachers, parents and communities must join in partnership to work to encourage the best practices for successful learning. Partnerships are viewed as useful, especially in the middle grades, and must incorporate equity, development, and quality. Equity includes all families in the communication related to activities. When schools implement partnerships, they must ask if their programs are set up to make every family feel welcome to participate in school policies, programs, and other details that impact students. Secondly, development means the partnership understands the developmental needs of students in the middle grades as compared to the primary or secondary grades. Development, too, reflects the diversity of student's at all middle grade levels and accounts for the needs of students, parents, and teachers. For example, if a school district adopts portfolio assessments as a standard to judge whether a student connects key ideas of a class to their learning, then the development of the assessment must meet the developmental age level of students.

The decision to use portfolios must be displayed to parents effectively so that they understand the importance of such a standard. The last characteristic of a partnership is the quality design of programs that meet the needs of students, parents, and schools. When partnerships create programs, they monitor the quality of school activities, decisions, communication, etc., through soliciting feedback from students, parents, and faculty (Epstein, J. & Connors, L., 1995).

Nicolau and Ramos (1990) studied parent/school partnerships in elementary and middle schools across the country. They found that the personal approach of talking face to face with parents at their homes in their primary language was most effective in engaging parents to be a part of their school/parent partnerships. Schools found that after a parent comes to a school function once, the challenge was maintaining their attendance and gaining their continued support in the partnership. Nicolau and Ramos (1990) found that the effort to build Hispanic parent/school partnerships was worth it because they saw a change in attitudes and behaviors. Parents started calling the school to inquire and ask for homework assistance for the children; parents visited the school more often; many parents reported feeling more comfortable, welcomed and appreciated in the school; there was an overall sense of camaraderie between parents and staff, which fostered mutual respect, and trust.

On the whole, the Hispanic family is collective and may operate differently than the non-Hispanic family. If schools desire to have Latino parent involvement, they must reevaluate their approaches to invite parents to be a part of the school. Parent involvement programs require that parents, communities, and schools become strong supporters and advocates for the education of their children. For such programs to exist,

the schools, teachers and administrators must learn about their clientele. The Hispanic student is raised in a culture different than the culture of the majority population. If teachers do not reach out to Hispanic families in an inviting manner, then they may lose their involvement. Also, schools, communities, teachers and administrators should understand that Hispanic families may not be involved in their children's school because of feeling intimidated due to their lack of education. When schools adapt to their audience, they may create parent/school partnerships that are personable and foster trust and respect.

Section Two: Latina Students

Education

The educational profile provided above is pertinent information related to the Hispanic student. More and more studies are revealing challenges faced by Hispanic female students. This section will examine some studies about Latinas, which will strengthen the need for further research related to Latina educational experiences.

A leading study outlining Latina educational experiences in the U. S. comes from the Association of University Women Educational Foundation in a report titled, *Si, Se Puede!/Yes We Can*, by Angela Ginorio and Michelle Huston (2001). This study is instrumental in showing Latina educational achievement and underachievement. Their study shows that the graduation rates for Latina girls are the lowest of any other racial or ethnic group and they are under enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and classes for gifted students. Ginorio and Huston's (2001) study provides information about the role of the high school counselor as important for academic achievement and yet many are not assisting Latinas to plan to go on to higher education. Ginorio and Huston (2001) explain

that Latinas face problems of language barriers, low expectations in tracked courses, low test scores, lack of teacher understanding of the Latino culture, and lack of parent/school partnerships—all of these issues were discussed in section one found above and apply to the Hispanic female.

Despite the barriers to success that Latinas face, they may have a future built on academic achievement if they are confident in themselves. A Latina that achieves has a strong sense of confidence because she has a sense of identity. “Students must have self-confidence or a sense of ‘efficacy’ to implement the options they see for themselves in the future” (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. 39). Family, school, peers and others are important to the process of building Latina self-efficacy and confidence. Unfortunately, stereotypes of Hispanic girls are based on being submissive underachievers, and family, school, and the media often reinforce these stereotypes. Negative stereotypes of Latina gender-role attitudes in U.S. society, schools, and Latino families often contribute to poor educational performance by Latinas.

Latinas enter an educational system that is not providing appropriate services to their gendered educational needs. According to the American Association of University Women (1992), girls enter U. S. public schools with about the same measured ability as their male counterparts, but during their school experiences, they are less likely to receive adequate teacher attention, especially in science classes; also, females hardly find themselves reflected in the classroom materials or textbooks. For example, Sadker & Sadker (1994) studied high school history and science textbooks used in current classrooms and found that only between two to three percent of the content is devoted to

women. The science text had about two-thirds of the drawings reflecting the male body. Of the five science textbooks reviewed not one had a picture of a female scientist.

The American Association of University Women (1992) also found that girls are less expected and less encouraged to pursue higher-level mathematics and science courses, and career counselors tend to discourage them from pursuing engineering and science courses in their college years. Also, Sadker & Sadker (1994) found that the longer girls stay in school, the further behind they fall in standardized achievement tests, especially in math and science.

Sadker & Sadker (1994) indicate that minority girls receive the least amount of attention in the classroom and this affects their experience enormously. They are faced with issues of racism and sexism. This was also confirmed by a study interviewing Mexican females (Hazelwood, 1996). Also, female students end up receiving less praise, recognition or constructive criticism in the classroom than their male counterparts and this shortchanges their academic achievement. Sadker & Sadker (1994) show that outside the classroom, athletics continue to be dominated by male students. Teamwork, leadership, and confidence result from participation of sports; yet, there still is not enough funding that goes into the women's sports programs. Their study suggests that increasing opportunities for girls to participate in athletics could improve opportunities for success.

Latina Student Achievement and High Achieving Roles

Promoting educational achievement among Latinas is important to the retention and success of these students. When examining the classroom, there are effective measures that engage Hispanic students. One study by Moll (1988) examined effective

teaching in an urban elementary school that had a high population of Latino students. He found that two teachers were teaching a group of Hispanic students and they had high expectations of their students. The students were given various assessments, which adapted to a wide array of learning styles and they were not isolated according to skill level. Instead, they were separated into groups based on subject interest. Furthermore, Moll (1988) witnessed the curriculum including Latino cultural elements. This study gives insight to the importance of high expectations and understanding the background of Latinos to promote greater achievement.

Carmen Rolon (1998) conducted a phenomenological study at the secondary level that provides useful information about how 10 Puerto Rican females experience high school. The students believed that their education achievement was due to parental support, teacher support and academic pursuits for higher education. A strong desire to continue their education assisted in their high school achievement. Many of these participants would become the first in their family to attend college, but some were unclear about entrance procedures and the high school or college of choice did not provide much feedback in this daunting process. Furthermore, this study revealed four common problems faced by many of the participants and they are: moving from one residence to another due to unemployment, underemployment or health problems; participants in this study also faced discrimination and dropping out was a viable option sought by the participants who had problems at home; next, many of the participants moved to the U.S. when they were in elementary school and they entered English as Second Language (ESL) or Transitional Bilingual Education (TBE) programs. The participants stressed the importance of these programs because they provided support

through their transition into this country and some of the teachers were the best because they related and cared for the students. This study recommends the overall importance of ESL and TBE programs to be better funded and less politicized because they made a huge difference in the participants' lives. The third and fourth problems are interconnected. Participants felt that the curriculum was not inclusive enough of people outside of the mainstream and tracking students excluded minority students from academic achievement opportunities. Students in this study recommended the education of teachers regarding discrimination and in-depth learning about people from different ethnic groups. If teachers learned about Puerto Ricans and other minorities, students would be treated better and more awareness could be administered in how students learn. Overall, this study provides a strong basis for understanding more about Puerto Rican females in high school.

Another study investigated the impact mothers had on Latinas and their achievement. Marsiglia and Holleran (1999) used qualitative research through collecting narrations from a group of Latina high school students and asked questions about expectations placed on them by their mothers and others in their family. They confirmed past research about the importance of building strong relationships through family ties (Collier, Ribeau, & Hecht, 1986). They found that it was important to discover the students' experiences because they provide rich details about self-perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes. Many of the students expressed that their mothers were their strongest role models and that their mothers wanted them to stay within the cultural Hispanic background such as being obedient and subservient. But they also received messages from their mothers to advance their education so that they could have a better life. The

Latinas expressed that their mothers spoke of the future through family planning, independence, and plans for attaining a college degree. This study supports the importance of understanding how family life impacts the cultural implications of Latinas.

Not only do mothers influence the future of Latinas, but also role models and mentors may have a great impact on their advancement in school and in life. Latinas need to be exposed to many possibilities for their future achievement. Schools may lend support and assist in developing options for Latina students to think about future careers. Jeanne Weiler (1997) suggests that schools implement solid career education programs geared toward minorities. She suggests that career development programs for female minorities need to address their needs and adapt to their life experiences. Furthermore, Weiler (1997) promotes the importance of collaborating between high schools and institutions of higher education. Such collaborations can expose students to understanding the college experience and can generate role models that inspire young female minorities for future educational pursuits. Also, she promotes educating minority girls about gender role stereotyping and the impacts it may have on their future careers. For instance, the girls should learn about inequities in the job market and how “nontraditional” careers in science or math vocations may promote higher paying careers for women. Similarly, the young women should be educated about the effects of racism, sexism and discrimination in the workplace so that they develop effective skills for promoting better working conditions.

A study that further promotes the importance of career development examined 20 high achieving Latina women using qualitative methodology. The results of this study suggest that the participants were

passionate, tenacious, demonstrated strong career self-efficacy, and had an inner conviction that included effective coping skills, internal motivation, career persistence, and high instrumentality. When confronted with challenges and potential barriers, high achieving women used similar support systems such as mentors, networks of women, role models, family and spouses. They reframed obstacles as advantages or ignored potential barriers (Gomez, Fassinger, Prosser, Cooke, Mejia, & Luna, 2001, p. 297).

This study shows the complexities related to women of color who struggle as minorities within minorities. In other words, they are characterized with a bicultural identity, which means they live as a Latina and as a woman in a male dominated society. The participants stressed the importance of knowing oneself and maintaining a balanced perspective of how “racism and sexism may affect career-related behavior; [but] developing support networks congruent with personal style, values, and culture; and developing bicultural skills where applicable” (Gomez, et. al., 2001, p. 298). This is an important study that shows how high-achieving Latina women persist to meet their career objectives by remaining true to their beliefs, values, and sense of self.

Latina career development is found to be similar to Latina student achievement because of the tenacity required for success in both arenas. Latina student achievement at the college level starts with consistent college attendance. Ginorio and Huston (2001) provide statistical information about the number of Latinas attending and completing college:

Latinas outnumber Latinos in completion of the associate's (59% to 41%), bachelor's (52% to 48%), and master's (52% to 48%) degrees. Latinos

outnumber Latinas in their completion of professional degrees (56% to 44%) and doctorates (51% to 49%). Hispanics overall are dramatically underrepresented among doctoral recipients: of the 44,652 doctorates conferred in 1996, Latinas received 462 (1% of the total) and Latinos 488 (1% of the total) (p. 10).

Issues of retention in school are of grave concern. Of the Latina undergraduates attending institutions of higher education, only half were attending full time. "Men were more likely to attend full-time than women" (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. 10).

For Latina women to stay in higher education, many of them display skills that assist in their achievement. A qualitative study about minority women from disadvantaged backgrounds found that first generation college students displayed resiliency to a stressful environment. All women interviewed came from a poor socioeconomic background. They also experienced at least one type of family dysfunction such as child abuse, alcoholism, drug abuse, etc. These women had higher-level thinking skills that made school seem easy and they were successful in their elementary education. However, most of the participants were not recognized later in their education as potential candidates for success. Yet, these women believed they had something to offer society and persisted in their educational pursuits. Thus, they felt that completing higher education was important to their purpose in life. This study provides insight about the importance of examining the complexities of attending and pursuing higher education when coming from a difficult background.

Summary

The literature described above displays pertinent information related to the Hispanic student. The Hispanic student growth rate has an impact on the face of

American society economically, technologically, and socially. The way that the Hispanic student is educated will impact her role in society. Hispanic student achievement is important to the future of the Hispanic worker. What a student gleans from school will drive their economic status in society. Needless to say, presently the Hispanic student is misunderstood and is falling through educational gaps. The dropout rates of Latinos should alarm all educators, parents, and communities. We now need to put forth efforts to assist in better ways to understand, relate to, and educate Hispanics. This review of literature examined Hispanic growth, culture, values, acculturation, and language, dropout rates, teen pregnancy, teacher roles, parent roles, and Latina education and achievement.

The literature shows that there are many factors that are hindering the achievement of Hispanic students. Education of children is an interconnected endeavor that involves students, parents, schools, communities, and politics that support the system. If all parties educating the Hispanic students come together, educational reform will change for the better. Therefore, this review of literature has defined the context of the participants' lives, and it has provided theoretical as well as research avenues to explore and question. This study proposes to examine how some Latinas experience educational success through participating in the Mi Carrera program. This study is necessary because such an examination will expand the literature by fostering healthier educational pursuits of Latinas that hopefully promote stronger democratic ideals of equality in the next century.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter explains the rationale behind the qualitative methodology used to explore the experience Latinas have in the Mi Carrera program and how the program impacts their academic achievement. First, a description of the qualitative paradigm is explained. Next, this chapter describes the procedures used in the phenomenological approach, the design chosen for this study. This chapter then identifies why the Mi Carrera program was chosen and the practices that promote student achievement. Additionally, information about the participants in the study and the methodology of data collection and analysis follows. Finally, trustworthiness and credibility of the study are discussed in this chapter.

Education has relied on two main research practices, known as quantitative and qualitative, during the twentieth century (Sherman & Webb, 1988). Both quantitative and qualitative have many methodologies and approaches for research inquiry. Quantitative research is based on scientific methodology. Thus, careful selection and observation of variables are studied. Quantitative researchers are interested in asking “*why* and look for a comparison of groups, a relationship between variables, with the intent of establishing an association, relationship, or cause and effect” (Creswell, 1998, p. 17).

Qualitative research, on the other hand is interested in research questions that focus on *how* or *what*. This allows for an in-depth meaning of a topic and participants in

a study are often interviewed. This research practice requires the researcher to study participants in their natural setting, and the researcher gathers materials by going to the field of study. The researcher's role is that of an "*active learner* who can tell the story from the participants' view rather than as an 'expert' who passes judgment on participants" (Creswell, 1998, p. 18). Thus, qualitative research is known as the "interpretive" approach to social science and it stresses subjectivity within the study (Creswell, 1998). Due to the subjective nature of qualitative research, it is important that the researcher be aware of the multitude of sources of potential bias that can weaken the findings of the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Furthermore, qualitative research does not attempt to provide data that may be generalized from a sampling of the population studied; instead, it presents an example based on the few people studied. In other words, data from student interviews may illuminate the experience of how some Latina students experience achievement in relation to the Mi Carrera program, which may generate sound hypotheses from even a small number of participants. These participants may be interviewed individually or within focus groups. A focus group may include the same participants as in the individual interviews, but it is a small-group interview. It is important to note that the experience of one student interviewed or a group of students interviewed does not portray the complexity of an entire ethnic, gender, or any other group of people (Nieto, 1996).

Finally, qualitative research is a holistic approach to research. The focus is on the complex interdependencies of its participants. There are words, opinions, stories, and interactions that the researcher must decipher from the participants, which create the reality of the study.

Phenomenological Approach of Qualitative Research

The phenomenological approach is part of qualitative research. The purpose of a phenomenological study is to describe an experience from the participant's point of view. The participant experiences the phenomenon and the researcher observes the meaning the participant experiences within the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). The phenomenological approach views "Human activity . . . [as] 'text'—as a collection of symbols expressing layers of meaning" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 8). The goal of the phenomenological study is to explore the truth and understanding of the experiences from the participant's point of view. The researcher must describe and then interpret the story told by the participants. From the stories of participants there will be themes and patterns that may emerge from their experiences. The themes and patterns are the foundation of the phenomenological research design.

Phenomenological Interviews

Personal interviews and focus group interviews were conducted in this study to define the participants' experience. Personal interviews are one-on-one interviews with the researcher and the interviewee. The personal interviews are useful for individuals to share their personal experience related to the topic being explored. The focus group interview allows a researcher the opportunity to have similar interviewees share their stories in a group and elaborate on key ideas about the topic investigated (Creswell, 1998). Both types of interviews require the necessary ingredient of rapport building. This means that the researcher must set up the interviews by finding an appropriate time and place. And the interview process must create safety for the students being interviewed so that they feel comfortable opening up and expressing their personal story.

Personal stories are simply part of an oral tradition. Fortunately, the oral tradition has historically been identified as an important element in the cultures of Latinos and women. Latinos and women have oral histories that have been passed from one generation to the next. Therefore, the oral tradition is an extension of these cultural groups. Thus, the phenomenological approach allows the researcher not only to learn their histories, but also to describe the significance of the personal relationships in women's narratives (Armitage, 1983). The core of the structure of the phenomenological interviews places personal relationships at the center of inquiry. And Carol Gilligan (1982) stresses that U.S. women experience personal relationships not as mere interactions with other people but rather as definitions of who they are. Therefore, the researcher of this study may discover the significance of those experiences in participants' lives and self-definitions.

Moustakas (1994) suggests that interviews must be conducted by "setting aside prejudgments, and opening the research interview with an unbiased, receptive presence" (p. 180). This will allow the researcher to set aside preconceptions to best understand the phenomenon as experienced by the participants (Creswell, 1998). Nevertheless, the interviewing process naturally incorporates the identity and experience of the researcher. The researcher's subjectivity provides the basis for the story being told. Glesne & Peshkin (1992) believe that subjectivity is something to capitalize on instead of something to be removed. A researcher's technical knowledge, research background and personal experiences account for experiential data (Strauss, 1987). The knowledge of the researcher is used as part of the inquiry process. Maxwell (1996) suggests that, "...

separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insights, hypotheses, and validity checks” (p. 28).

Patton (1990) asserts that the researcher is an instrument in the qualitative process and previous experience and training must be disclosed (Patton, 1990). As a Latina woman, I have been interested in issues concerning the Hispanic community. My passion for learning about Hispanic studies has led me to pursue a Ph.D. in education, and I have a strong commitment to teach others the value of acceptance, tolerance and education. As a doctoral student, I became interested in studying Mi Carrera because it implements apparently successful measures for academic achievement for low-income students. The demographics in this country have changed and warrant positive, creative programs to better educate the Latino student. The Mi Carrera program motivates and inspires young women proactively so that they are empowered by their choices to become educated and eventually become first generation college graduates. As the first person in my family to graduate from college, I have a dream that there will be more programs like Mi Carrera in this country. I want to learn from the experiences of the students to understand in greater depth how these young women perceive their involvement in Mi Carrera influencing their academic achievement.

According to James Banks (1994), being a native member of the population in this study allows me to endorse the unique values, perspectives, behaviors, beliefs, and knowledge of this culture. It legitimizes me as a community member who can speak with authority about issues within the Latino community. Banks (1994) states that many scholars of color have challenged traditional interpretations of their cultures written by mainstream scholars and researchers leading to discussions about the effect of a

researcher's life experiences, values, and objectivity He asserts that the life history of researchers influences their research questions, and their knowledge base. He also suggests that marginalized groups not only experience a different reality but also interpret that reality differently.

Overall, it is of utmost importance that the study be conducted ethically. Thus, the consent, anonymity and confidentiality of the participants are important to this study. The interviews were tape recorded for best recall of data. As part of the standards presented in this study, the researcher was fully immersed in the research. By such immersion, the researcher gained insightful conclusions.

Research Questions

The study addressed two research questions in particular and several research sub-questions. The research questions are below:

1. What is the experience of Latina students participating in the Mi Carrera program?
2. Are there common experiences and/or factors affecting participants' lives and academic achievements?

The research sub-questions correlating to the first research question are as follows:

- a). How do the participants perceive the Mi Carrera program as different than their general educational experience?

- b). How does being in Mi Carrera help participants compared to their experience in high school?
- c). What was a typical meeting like at Mi Carrera?
- d). What is the most important skill Mi Carrera taught and why?
- e). What is one-way Mi Carrera has helped in your life?
- f). Describe how Mi Carrera makes a difference in life?
- g). Compile twenty skills gained by participating in Mi Carrera?
- h). How has Mi Carrera impacted your future?

And a question asked of the college students was:

- i). What did it mean to you when you were in high school and you decided to go to college?

Below are the sub-questions correlating to the second research question, which is: among the group of Latina students, are there common experiences and/or factors affecting participants' lives and academic achievements?

- a). Do participants share common problems or experiences faced as high school students?
- b). How do Latinas perceive their identity and their relation to their academic achievement?
- c). How do participants value their educational achievement?

d). How do participants envision themselves in school and in their future?

Additionally, all the participants were asked demographic information about themselves and their families. They provided information about their identity; they described their culture, what language they use in their home, and age and educational background.

Interviews conducted in phenomenological studies allow for participants to tell their story. The researcher then interpreted the stories told in the interviews to provide insight from the experiences being explored in this study. The researcher used the above questions as a guide to uncover the stories that have led to the success of the young women in the Mi Carrera program.

Mi Carrera—A Model Program with Best Practices for Success

The Mi Carrera program was chosen as the site for this research because it is identified as a model program influencing middle and senior high school Latina students (Ginorio, 2001). Mi Carrera is an extended resource program out of the Mi Casa Resource Center, which was founded in 1976 in Denver, Colorado. This center offers programs to move women from poverty to greater self-sufficiency through opportunities for enterprise, employment, and education. Through the Mi Carrera program, Mi Casa works to build economic independence for girls by providing young women with after-school workshops on leadership development, cultural and community service activities, and entrepreneurial skills training. There are two major goals of the Mi Carrera program and they are to reduce the dropout rate and increase the number of young Latina women

who go on to college. It was started in 1979 for low-income girls attending the predominately Hispanic West High School in the Denver Public School District. And it eventually reached out to middle school students from Baker Middle School—this is the public school the students attend before entering West High School. The program has also started to include former Mi Carrera participants who attend Denver area institutions of higher education to work with the middle and high school girls (Mi Carrera [Pamphlet], 2000, Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Ms. Foundation for Women, 2001).

Mi Carrera accepts all Latina students willing to participate in the program. The program prides itself on a strong structure, environment and curriculum that promote student success. The following are goals and practices of the Mi Carrera Program:

- Leadership and motivational training is provided to promote quality decision making choices, and becoming the leader of oneself;
- Self-identity awareness classes are taught for students to learn their culture, gender, class, and historical background in America;
- Study Skills are taught to assist in improving student academic pursuits;
- The importance of regular school attendance is encouraged and the project manager (the director of the program) visits the school to show visibility and importance of attendance;
- Meetings are held Monday through Thursday in a positive learning environment where learning, fun, and friendships are developed;
- Field trips are taken for fun such as snow shoeing, or a trip to Elitches, or the Butterfly Pavilion, etc., to expose students to different opportunities, and these trips also promote team-building experiences;

- Basic computer keyboarding skills are taught to assist in their class projects and future college work;
- Career awareness through workshops and guest speakers are provided to broaden the scope of their understanding potential future jobs;
- Financial literacy classes are provided so that students understand how to manage their money;
- College and scholarship application procedures are given so students know how to market themselves for the advancement of their education;
- Goal setting techniques are taught to influence future choices, and manageable goals are made so students can recognize the empowerment of goal setting;
- An environment that empowers and encourages students is established to develop self-confidence, self-worth, self-sufficiency, and a sense of pride in their accomplishments;
- Life skills are taught that nurture the mind, body and spirit of the individual.
- Emphasis is made on communication skills, analytical skills, team building skills, technological skills, and the importance of continuing to learn in a complex, multicultural, and rapidly changing society;
- Finally, family involvement is encouraged to share responsibility for encouraging young people to develop personally, academically, and as contributing citizens to society.

In the 2000-2001 academic school year one hundred and nine young women participated in Mi Carrera. All participants continued into their next grade level. The nine seniors in the program graduated from high school and all but one graduating senior attended

college in the next academic year (Mi Casrreira [Pamphlet], 2000, Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Ms. Foundation for Women, 2001).

Human Research Committee

The researcher submitted an application to the Colorado State University's Human Research Committee before the selection process began. This application included assurances and processes which comply with the University requirements regarding human research. The researcher maintained standards and rules to protect individual rights and privacy of the participants. A copy of the consent form is found in the appendix.

Participants and Methodology of Data Collection

In a phenomenological study, the need to have all participants experience the phenomenon is essential (Creswell, 1998). The research collection for this study was conducted from early August, 2002 through the March, 2003 school year. The project manager of Mi Carrera assisted in choosing participants for this study. She compiled a list of all the girls available to participate in the study. Once the list was compiled, the researcher randomly chose 12 participants having completed their 2001-2002 school year: four eleventh grade students, four twelfth grade students, two first year college students, and two second year college students. The project manager then contacted the students for a brief informational meeting to be held before the interviews began. Of the original twelve students identified for the study, only six participated.

The participants of this study participated in Mi Carrera in varying amounts of time. Some were involved since middle school through their high school years and some participated for a few weeks during their senior year of high school. The participants for

this study included one young woman in twelfth grade of high school; two young women who recently graduated from high school; and three young women in their second year of college. Although this is an outreach program adapting to the needs of middle, high school and college age students, this study focused on how the students perceive their achievement closer to the end of their high school careers. Additionally, the study discovered how students already in college perceive Mi Carrera's impact on their past academic achievement. In other words, this study examined how the college students reflect back on their high school experience and how Mi Carrera influenced their graduation from high school and entrance to college. The literature about Hispanic students is more plentiful in relation to elementary and the middle school levels. There are not many studies focusing on the Latina high school student. Thus, this study will add to the literature about this group of students.

Procedures for Collecting Data

The procedures for gathering and inspecting data for this study included gaining consent from parents of participants, and having individual and focus group interviews. Procedures for data collection occurred sequentially in the order outlined below.

A. Acquisition of consent forms from the students and parents of participants—an initial meeting with the participants was conducted to explain the study and ask for consent forms to be signed for participation. Only two participants required consent forms signed by their parents authorizing permission to be part of the study because they were eighteen or younger. The Mi Carrera program has used consent forms in the past for other projects and the Colorado State University consent form from the Human Subjects was used to meet the needs of this study. The consent explained the need for the

study, the process, and the time lines followed. The consent clearly outlines the importance of respecting the anonymity of the participants.

B. Personal interviews—the interviews were conducted one person at a time. Open- ended questions were asked in reference to the corollary research questions. These interviews were conducted at the Mi Casa Resource Center in the same room where regular meetings are held. These interviews were scheduled for about 90-120 minutes. Rapport was established in the one-on-one setting with introductions between the interviewer and the participant. The interview provided time for participants to provide in-depth discussion about the phenomena of how Mi Carrera adds to the experience of the student's life. The researcher sat at a table next to the interviewee. The individual interviews provided insight to themes experienced by participants in Mi Carrera. Focus group interviews were then conducted a few weeks after the personal interviews, so that the identified themes were elaborated upon for clarity in the data collection.

C. Focus group interviews—there were two focus group interviews conducted on two different days after the individual interviews were conducted. One focus group interview had three participants and one had two participants. One of the participants was unable to attend. One of the focus group interviews took place at the Mi Casa Resource Center in the same room that individual interviews were conducted. The other focus group interview was conducted at the local church across the street. The meeting was scheduled for 120 minutes. In the first few minutes, the researcher began with an introduction and explained the purpose of the focus interviews, to elaborate on themes that evolved from the individual interviews. Next, the researcher asked students to briefly introduce themselves. Then the researcher began to ask open-ended questions.

The meeting was audio tape-recorded. Field notes, analytical memos, and summaries of interview meetings were written (Miles & Huberman, 1984). All of the interviews yielded insights about the experiences of the participants.

Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed the information from the tape-recorded interviews. It was important that the data was analyzed on a continual basis throughout the entire research period (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993). The qualitative NVivo software was used to assist in finding the themes of the study. This software allows efficient coding of themes to occur for easy analysis.

The researcher chose to use the principles of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Willig, 2001). The researcher read and re-read interview transcripts to identify themes. Themes emerged in each transcript and were organized and interrelated to establish the common themes across the transcripts. The researcher followed five steps: 1) The researcher read the text for the first time; 2) The next step began the process of identifying the themes by reading the text line by line; 3) The researcher carefully examined and clustered the themes, delineating the main categories of meaning; 4) A summary table was created by the researcher after the categories of themes were created; 5) Finally, the researcher wrote up a narrative description report of the themes in relation to the research questions. This analysis allowed the researcher to discover the essence of the participants' experience in the Mi Carrera program.

Trustworthiness

Credibility must be established throughout the entire study and was found by determining how valid and reliable the researcher is in information gathering (Miles &

Huberman, 1994). One method that created a valid account of the data collection was through careful note taking methods at the research site. This method is called reflexivity and it requires the researcher to take field notes concerning personal reflections. Additionally, this study employed specific techniques that create credibility as described below:

- Prolonged and varied field experience builds trust when the researcher learns the culture of the program and checks for understanding the specifics in the program by communicating and visiting the site or field of research.
- Triangulation is another technique used in this study. It is a method where the researcher compares information from the individual interviews against the focus group information. Also, triangulation requires the researcher to refer to other studies to shed light on themes or perspectives from the collection of data.
- When writing up the analysis of the data, it was important that the researcher clarify any biases that may impact the inquiry. The researcher must comment on “past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study” (Creswell, 1998, p. 202). The researcher of this study is similar to the participants: she is a Latina; she is also an educator who feels that the education of Hispanic students is important. She attended similar junior and senior high schools as the participants in this study. And the researcher is the first in her family to attend and graduate from college.

- “It is helpful to know that scholarly philosophers of science now typically doubt the possibility of anyone or any one method being totally “objective.” Subjectivity is inevitable” (Patton, 1990, p. 482). Knowing that qualitative research is a blending of the subjective nature of the researcher is important to this study. The researcher recognizes that her interpretation of the participants’ experiences is relative to her own experiences. However, it is the expectation of the researcher to portray the events, experiences, and ideas accurately based on the interviews. In order to test for accuracy, the researcher followed the guidelines below.

Creswell (1998) believes the researcher must answer the questions below.

1. Did the researcher influence the contents of the subjects’ description so that the descriptions do not truly reflect the subjects’ actual experience?
2. Does the transcript accurately convey the meaning of the oral interview?
3. Has the researcher derived all possible conclusions offered by the transcriptions of the interview?
4. “Is it possible to go from the general structural description to the transcriptions and to account for the specific contents and connections in the original examples of the experience?” (p. 208).

Overall, trustworthiness is important to verify how participant interviews are being interpreted and analyzed for meaning. The researcher is part of the research process but personal biases must not hinder the accuracy of the information. The techniques above explicate the processes that created validity in this study.

Summary

In this chapter, a close examination of the methodology of this study was undertaken. The qualitative methodology was justified as the choice for this study and the phenomenological approach used to describe the participants' experience in the Mi Carrera program. The phenomenological approach also allows the researcher to explore the significance of personal relationships in participants' narratives, thus making it an excellent vehicle of investigation for the study. The researcher is a Latina who will add to the overall research development and content.

Finally, this chapter further described the research questions guiding the study and the rationale and process of participant and site selection, as well as the actual collection and analysis of data. The trustworthiness was the last point of discussion addressed.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

This study utilizes a phenomenological approach. The study attempts to understand the particular circumstances of several individuals and to describe the meanings of their experience in the Mi Carrera program. Thus far, chapter I introduced the purpose of the study. Chapter two covered the literature on the commonalities among Hispanic students and information related to female Hispanic students in the United States. It also portrayed the primary literature for this investigation. Chapter three, methodology, described the research design framework. Chapter four provides insight about the findings from this phenomenological investigation, and revisits the purpose of this qualitative research.

Chapter four is designed to disclose participant experience in the Mi Carrera program. The goal of this study is to gain insight about the research questions: What is the experience of Latina students participating in the Mi Carrera program? And are there common experiences and/or factors affecting participants' lives and academic achievements? Six participants in the Mi Carrera program were personally interviewed. Several weeks after the personal interviews, participants were asked to be part of a focus interview consisting of two or three participants. All participants except one were part of one of the two focus interviews. Several sub-questions provided a guide for the interviews, including demographic information, general impressions, and insights about their participation in Mi Carrera. There were also questions about their academic success, vision for their future and value of educational achievement. The researcher

originally asked the participants to be prepared for a third interview but it was unnecessary to meet with any of them since the personal and focus group interviews yielded adequately detailed information.

The project manager (director of the program) of Mi Carrera assisted in choosing participants for the study. She created a list of girls who participated in the program. The researcher randomly chose twelve students on the list who completed their 2001-2002 school year; and the project manager contacted the potential research participants by phone and asked if they would participate in the study. Of the students contacted, a few of them did not respond or chose not to participate to the phone inquiry, and two potential participants did not meet the age or ethnic requirements for the study. Of the six students who participated in the study, two had just graduated from high school, one was a senior in high school and three were in their second year of college. All participants signed consent forms and two of the six students were 18 years or younger and had parents sign consent forms for their participation in the study. Selection of participants ceased when the program manager was no longer able to reach any more students. After the personal interviews with the six participants, data showed redundancy of experiences. These redundancies or themes will be described in the remainder of this chapter.

All interviews but one was conducted at the Mi Casa Resource Center in the same room that regular Mi Carrera meetings were held, a location familiar and comfortable to the students with few distractions. One focus interview had to be conducted at the local church across the street from Mi Casa due to a scheduling conflict, but the students found the church familiar and convenient. The personal interviews were 90-120 minutes long

and the focus group interviews were at least 120 minutes long. All interviews were audio taped to capture the full communication and assist in recapturing the essence of the interview for clear data analysis. Field notes, analytical memos, and summaries of interview meetings were also recorded. The interviews were transcribed into word processing software and then imported to qualitative data managing software called NVivo. This software allows efficient coding of themes for analysis. The NVivo software facilitated the emergence of themes, which help to answer this study's research questions. Also, the researcher chose to use the principles of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Willig, 2001). The researcher read and re-read interview transcripts to identify themes. Themes emerged in each transcript and were organized and interrelated to establish the common themes across the transcripts. This analysis allowed the researcher to discover the essence of the participants' experience in the Mi Carrera program.

Experiences/Commonalities Affecting Participant Lives and Academic Achievements

The main objective of the study is to gain understanding and explore the students' interpretation of their experiences in the Mi Carrera program. Another objective of this study is to discover how students describe their experiences in the program and how they impacted their lives and academic achievements. The interviews yielded insights into participants' experiences in the Mi Carrera program, including information about specific interactions they identify as significant. The interview data yields clues and insights to answer the research questions: What is the experience of Latina students participating in the Mi Carrera program? And are there common experiences and/or factors affecting participants' lives and academic achievements?

The participants are all Latina students who either attended or graduated from West, North or Abraham Lincoln High School, all Denver Public Schools (DPS). All self identified as Hispanic, Mexican American, Mexican Indian, or Latino. Most of the participants are one of the first in their family to graduate from high school and all have aspirations of attending or are already attending college. All participants know the value of work as they observe their parents juggle difficult workloads that include long hours for minimal pay, particularly in manual labor professions. Each participant profile opens with personal and familial background and continues with data, which illustrates, on an individual basis, the factors affecting their lives, academic achievement and experience in Mi Carrera. Below are the profiles of the participants. Although their names and identifying characteristics were changed to protect their privacy, and their words were edited at times for clarity, the young women of this study voice their opinions, thoughts, reflections, and experiences.

Participant Profiles

Sophia

Sophia is a second year college student at the University of Colorado in Denver. She participated in Mi Carrera for most of her high school years and even had a position on the staff when she started college. Both of her parents were born in Mexico and migrated to the United States. Her mother is ambitious and came to this country to make a better life. Her mother came from rural Mexico where there was no running water or electricity. She started working the land of the family farm at an early age, working as hard as the boys in her family. Sophia has a close relationship with her mother who has inspired her to achieve to higher academic levels. Sophia and Sophia's mother are no

strangers to hard work. As Sophia was growing up, there was a time that her mother had two full time jobs and one part time job, and Sophia had to assist her mother in completing these jobs. Her mother's mentality revolves around work and Sophia believes that even if her mom is "tired or dying of pain," her mother is going to keep on working. She has seen her mother work difficult jobs in the cleaning industry. Although she is proud of her mother, who has her own cleaning business, she realizes that she does not want to work in an arduous vocation. The strain of such a career has taken a physical toll on Sophia's mother making it hard for her mother to move at times. Sophia understands the hardship that manual labor places on a person's life. Sophia also works for her mother and is determined to have a better life for herself where her education will lead to a satisfying career.

Her father is not highly motivated and his lack of motivation inspires Sophia to excel in life. Spanish and English are spoken in Sophia's home and she believes her father could easily become a translator or use both languages but he has little drive or ambition. Her parents are divorced and as an only child, she has lived closely with her mother who has taught her many skills. Her mother strives for progress and bought two rental properties. Not only did Sophia manage these properties in high school but she also continues to complete the business transactions for these properties. Having a mother who is driven to lead a better life, Sophia has learned the value of work. But witnessing her mother's wearing schedule, Sophia hates the cleaning industry and this drives her to stay in school. As a leader, she expresses her ideas openly, honestly, and articulately and strives for balance in her life.

Rosita

Rosita is a second year college student at the Community College of Denver. She also has parents that are no strangers to hard work. As she grew up, she rarely saw her parents because they often had two jobs. Her parents often had jobs that they disliked. Particularly, she saw her father disliking the people that he worked with, which put him in an angry mood at home. She claims that her family is “functionally dysfunctional,” and she has witnessed her parents’ marriage decline to the point that her dad calls his wife his roommate. Her parents live together just for the sake of the children but they don’t have a happy or healthy relationship. Rosita is the middle child of three and often finds that she is placed in the middle of her parents’ disputes. Her older sister used to be the person who would be placed in the middle of their parents’ fights. But at the age of eleven, Rosita and her family experienced the death of her oldest sister. This was very difficult since Rosita’s sister played a key role in caring for her and her brother since her parents worked so much. She was like a mom to Rosita and her death is still difficult for her.

Communicating with her parents has been challenging over the years. She has a better relationship with her dad now but he used to give her and her brother “hard-core beatings.” She stood up to her dad when she was around sixteen years old and told him she was going to hit him back and “that’s when it changed and he realized that he didn’t want to be like that anymore.” Over time, Rosita learned Spanish and is able to communicate with her dad since he is from Mexico and this is his native language. She and her dad are the only two who know Spanish in her home, and this enables Rosita to

communicate easily with him. She is more comfortable speaking to her dad than her mom at this point in her life.

Her mother is a Chicana from Kansas City, Kansas and has instilled in Rosita the importance of organizing within the community, and Rosita has been dedicated to creating a grassroots organization that stresses the importance of her Latina culture and history. Rosita took a year off from this community work because she was burnt out and needed time to focus on her studies. Her mom was afraid she would not return to it and she would lose her dedication to the culture and history of Mexicans, but Rosita believes deeply in the importance of educating people at a grassroots level. She believes she will always be involved with her community, especially because she is planning on becoming a teacher. She views the project manager of Mi Carrera as a tremendous role model and is thankful that she was involved with Mi Carrera throughout her high school years. She still comes back to seek advice from the staff. She believes that education and knowing one's history are keys to creating a public voice for the betterment of a community.

Angel

Angel believes her investment in becoming a nurse will contribute to the betterment of her community. As a second year college student at the Community College of Denver, she is on her way to becoming a registered nurse. Her involvement in Mi Carrera was limited to the last part of her senior year when she was searching for scholarships and they welcomed her and assisted in this process. She and her older sister have attended college, but her sister dropped out of college to have children and then returned to a technical school and is now a medical assistant. Presently, her sister wishes that she had stayed in school to become a registered nurse, like Angel, because it is a

better career. College is very, very important to Angel, and she and her sister are the first in their extended family to attend college. Her parents grew up in Mexico and did not finish high school because attending school in Mexico is difficult and expensive. To have two daughters go to college is a huge accomplishment and one that Angel takes much pride in.

Having parents who did not graduate from high school, Angel found the idea of college new and puzzling because she didn't know what college was, or what would be the usefulness of attending "school after school." She has witnessed the hard schedules her mother and father have worked as construction and factory workers respectively. She deliberately chose a career that would enable her to spend time with her family because she knew what it was like to grow up as a latch-key-child. She believes that education is the answer to a better life.

Angel's parents have been supportive in most all of her decisions but she decided to get married when she was eighteen, and "They didn't like that but they were really excited and they're really proud and support us with everything." Her family thought that she decided to get married because she was pregnant but she has no plans of having children until her education is completed. She says, "I can't have children with school. It's either children or school." She feels lucky to have found the right person to spend the rest of her life with who believes in her and believes in the importance of her educational pursuits.

Angel is smart, practical and driven. When she is a nurse, she believes she will make a difference with Spanish speaking patients because she is bilingual. Spanish was her first language and it is the predominant language spoken between her and her

husband and parents. She looks at her Mexican culture and the Spanish language as an asset that will benefit others in her future career of nursing.

Adrianna

Adrianna is going to make something of her self and she believes she will be somebody instead of working for somebody like her parents do. Her mother is her best friend and Adrianna observes how hard her parents work. They are labor workers in the construction and sewing industry and they have difficult hours, working a great deal of time, and her father has to work in every weather condition as a construction worker. Her mother wants Adrianna to have an easy job, where she makes a lot of money and has a better life than what they can give to her and her younger sister. Adrianna is the first among her extended family to graduate from high school and her parents are extremely pleased. She exclaimed, "So that's why I'm in school, doing my best...just to make my mom proud and my dad proud, because they're all happy because I'm going to graduate this year, because I'm the first." Coming from Mexico, her parents and their siblings never made it beyond third grade, and language and educational barriers created difficulties for employment. This accomplishment of high school graduation is fantastic, and she not only has grown as a student in school, but Mi Carrera has taught her important lessons while she has been involved during her senior year. Adrianna realizes that high school is only the first step toward success, and she intends to graduate and then attend the Community College of Denver next year.

Lucy

Recently graduating with two high school diplomas is a gratifying accomplishment for Lucy. She was part of the Center for International Studies (CIS)

program in high school and she not only excelled in her studies, but she participated in theater, choir and loves to read. Her ambition comes from her strong sense of self and she wants to help the community, learn about different cultures, learn about things in the world, and current events. Her ambitious attitude was also nurtured while she participated in Mi Carrera during high school. Not only is she ambitious, but also is inspired by her immediate and extended family who all live in Denver and are very close knit. Her family speaks English in their home but she has expanded her knowledge to learn Spanish so that she can learn more about her Latina roots.

She has goals to attend the Art Institute of Denver in a year and this will allow her son to grow a bit bigger. She did not expect that she would have a son in her senior year of high school but now that she has, she believes it is even more important for her to pursue her education. She is a single mom and the child's father is not playing an active role in the child's life. However, her parents help her with her baby and they support her endeavors. She realizes that an education is important because her parents are unemployed due to back injuries and it has created hardship for them. Lucy believes that she has the confidence to become what she wants as long as she has the desire, and she will work at being her best in all she does.

Luna

As a dreamer, Luna allows her creative mind to foresee a successful life. Her creativity is found in the power of her thoughts, often written in her diary. The angels that watch over her provide strength, which include her sister that died when she was two and her godparents that also died when she was young. Luna is a dreamer who envisions herself as a teacher. She started to attend the University of Northern Colorado in the

2002 Fall semester. She has friends who serve as role models in college and she believes she will thrive in college and become a role model for her two younger brothers.

School is important to her and she excels in it and has been doing so since she skipped kindergarten. She was also part of the CIS program at West High School with Lucy, and loved it because it taught her much about herself and other cultures. Also, Mi Carrera was a great program for her to be a part of in her last couple of years of high school because the topics discussed complemented what she learned in the international program. Since she has a passion to learn about other cultures, her international studies allowed her opportunities to travel to other countries. She travels to Mexico regularly and has a strong connection to her parents' native land. She primarily speaks Spanish at home, but she has also learned French, and English was her favorite subject in school. She believes her trilingual speaking abilities will assist her in the teaching profession.

She is the first person in her family to graduate from high school and the first to attend college. Like the other participants, Luna's parents are hard working laborers. Her mother is a seamstress at a factory and her father has a wagon of ice cream that he sells during the summer and he finds odd jobs in the winter, unless he is working on their rental property or new home. Her parents believe Luna is already successful and she will make a huge difference in the lives of her students because she loves children and will relate to them by speaking their language.

Overall, the participant profiles provide an overview of personal backgrounds. The profiles describe some factors impacting their self esteem, academics, perspectives, beliefs and desires. They also describe benefits derived from participating in Mi Carrera. The next section describes the data acquired from the individual interviews.

Individual Interviews

After the participants provided background information, they were all asked six common questions and the college students were asked a seventh question. These questions related to the two research questions: What is the experience of Latina students participating in the Mi Carrera program? And are there common experiences and/or factors affecting participants' lives and academic achievements? The six questions are:

1. How do you think your identity as an Hispanic female influences your academic achievement?
2. How do you think Mi Carrera influences your scholastic achievement?
3. How do you think about your educational achievement? In other words, what do you value about your education?
4. How do/did you envision yourself in high school? How do you envision yourself in your future?
5. How is Mi Carrera different than your general high school experience? What makes it different and why?
6. How does being in Mi Carrera help you compared to your experience in high school?

And the seventh question asked of the college students was:

7. What did it mean to you when you were in high school and you decided to go to college?

The following is a summary of the participant's answers to the questions asked during the individual interviews.

Question 1-- How do you think your identity as an Hispanic female influences your academic achievement?

Most of the participants felt that their identity as a Latina influenced their academic achievement. Particularly, they felt that society, some teachers, and some family members perceived their Hispanic ethnic background negatively. Rosita felt that “general society” expects that she will not finish high school or college, because whenever she meets someone, they ask about the high school she attended and many times people ask if she has children. She responds by asking:

What does that have to do with me graduating from high school...? So, people just assume, because I am a DPS [Denver Public Schools] graduate and brown, I’m a dropout and uneducated and I have kids, or those negative images and stereotypes. But that just gave me more drive to accomplish my goals, to graduate, to graduate with honors, and I ran Mecha, [an after school program that promotes unity among Chicano high school students to learn about their history, struggles, and engage in community service]. [And] in high school I was in a couple [of] college preparatory programs.

Some participants felt that some barriers in school came from attitudes held by the teachers. Luna said, “Just because you were Latina, [teachers] thought you were not good enough.” Many of the participants felt that they had to prove themselves and show that they were not going to meet the stereotypes of getting pregnant, quitting school and working in a fast food restaurant for the rest of their lives. And Luna was shocked that she only saw five Hispanics out of 300 people at her college orientation, and she wondered if other Latinos felt they couldn’t go to college. These stereotypes were well

known and felt directly and indirectly in school. Adrianna said that she had teachers make comments about how long she had lasted in school. These type of comments motivated her to achieve to higher levels because messages like this were belittling and she felt the teacher was really saying, “Why don’t you get married or go work at McDonald’s”? These type of statements were not just stated by teachers but stated in jokes, the media, and in statistics, according to Angel, and she felt that such statements would make her set her goals higher and to strive harder to meet the challenge of getting an education.

Not only did stereotypes influence the participants, but also language barriers impacted their academic achievement. Spanish was the first language that many of the participants knew going into school. Luna remembers being afraid of misinterpreting assignments due to a lack of understanding the language. Some teachers were very patient with the process that some of the participants went through to learn English, but some were impatient. Some of the participants remember feeling scared that an impatient teacher would embarrass them in front of the class.

The participants believed that another barrier to their academic achievement was their familial culture. Many of the participants are dedicated to their families because “family comes first in the Mexican culture” (Sophia) and some are expected to work to assist the family. Yet, their parents could not assist in the participants’ education because they did not know the system, language, and had not completed much of their own education. The parents were busy trying to pay bills to stay afloat financially by working many hours and sometimes more than one job. They didn’t have time to ask if their

daughter finished her homework or they didn't have the education to assist with homework.

Sophia felt that many Latinos attend schools that have limited resources and do not provide a quality education. The quality of her education did not prepare her academically for college. She believes that her school lacked technology, which is necessary to know in college. And her school counselor did not provide much guidance for her to attend college. She attributes this to her belief that many counselors don't believe that Latinos will attend college, so they don't bother providing them with information.

The participants are proud of their ethnic and cultural heritage. But they realize that they have barriers to overcome. In spite of these barriers, Rosita believes that the Mexican history and culture are extremely important and influence her academic achievement by providing strength. She reflects upon the history and accomplishments of "native people that have created structures and math and things that would take the best scientists and engineers to recreate today..." (Rosita). And she believes that people from her ethnic and cultural background are smart, and not ignorant. It is this belief that assists Rosita in believing in herself and her desire to achieve to higher levels for the betterment of herself and the community she lives in. Lucy also believes that her background is not going to stop her from doing something that she puts her mind to, and she knows that she has the power within herself to responsibly achieve.

Question 2-- How do you think Mi Carrera influences your scholastic achievement?

Mi Carrera motivates young women in their self-development through fostering their communication skills, leadership skills, self-esteem, computer skills, and overall

confidence. And learning to have confidence in life allows Lucy to “make a stand for... [herself].” Before Rosita attended Mi Carrera, she had a hot temper and would say whatever came to mind, but this program taught her to control her fiery tongue and communicate so she won’t hurt or offend anybody. Learning who you are, how to present yourself, giving to the community and being a listener were skills that they carried from the program into the classroom. They felt that they could go back to school and try their best (Sophia). And Adrianna felt that learning computer skills at Mi Carrera was invaluable because these skills are used everyday in high school. And the topics discussed at the meetings opened the participant perspectives to issues about the world, which is important because they felt that they influenced the world around them and the world influenced them. They learned by talking, interacting, and doing.

By attending Mi Carrera, the participants felt that they learned about the importance of themselves because the program was for and about Latinas. In the program the participants learned about their culture. Adrianna felt good to know that somebody besides her parents or people at school actually cared about her and other Latinas. And it was comforting to Adrianna to know that “there’s actually somewhere we can talk to people and they know what we’re going through...and knowing that we’re Hispanic, definitely [they] know what we’re going through. And that it’s harder for...[Hispanics].” This program provides insights about how to better deal with stereotypes. The young women felt that this program gave them the confidence to look beyond the beliefs that Latina’s don’t have potential or that they will just get pregnant and dropout of school. Instead, the young women in this program were inspired to go to college and to have self-reliance.

The director of the program frequently checked on the girls' progress, both personally and academically. And she instilled a sense of endless possibilities. The girls were continually encouraged and motivated to go to college. Sophia says that she learned she needed to go to college because "you need an education because that's going to be your ticket for a successful career." Once they were ready to apply for college, the Mi Carrera program assistants and director did everything they could to help with the application and scholarship process. Luna even felt that the program director and assistants went out of their way to explain to her parents why attending the University of Northern Colorado (UNC) was her best choice and they helped convince her parents of the opportunities. Luna's parents were afraid that UNC was too far and too expensive, but Mi Carrera assisted Luna in finding, applying for and receiving scholarships. They constantly encouraged her and others in the program to apply for scholarships and bring in their paperwork so that it could be checked. And once some of the young women were in college, the program director really counseled them about fitting in to college life.

Question 3— How do you think about your educational achievement? In other words, what do you value about your education?

"I value being able to...have an education. I value that I am able to learn day to day. I was taught how to read and write, how to speak...I really don't take my education for granted" (Lucy). Participants took their education seriously and some felt that they were so fortunate to get an education because in other countries, particularly in Mexico where many of their parents are from, an education is expensive and not everyone has the money to pay for it. They believed that being the first in their family to graduate from high school and attend college was similar to being an author of their own story. All but

two of them did not have role models who had graduated from high school before them. Luna felt like she was changing something: "It's a step towards changing something that no one else has done in my family; it just made me proud of myself." She also wants to be a role model for her brothers and other Latinos so that they know that they too can achieve educationally. And Sophia said, "I value the fact that I graduated from high school, because a lot of people didn't graduate...less than 50% because we had 500 freshman and 215 graduated." Adrianna also felt honored because not everybody finishes high school. The participants felt that their education would open opportunities for better employment so that they would not have to work as hard as their parents do for so little pay.

All of the participants feel that a high school education is merely the first step because "the more education you get, the more you want to have" (Luna). And many of them realized that the more they learned, the more they have "so much more" to learn. They have a thirst to continue their education by attending higher education. Luna believes that her education is like a treasure and it's going to be useful to her life forever. And Angel claims that an education builds on what you know, making the base stronger for a more successful life. Rosita values giving to the community and she created an organization that she is still a leader of called, Calmecca Cauthtemoc. She not only is proud of her education, but she is also using her education to teach teens in this program about the Mexican/Aztec and native people's history and culture to understand isms, oppression, homophobia, and a side of history that is often left untaught. She values the lessons that starting up a program gave her and she uses her public speaking skills at

conferences, and she is especially proud to have presented to a crowd of about 1400 people.

Furthermore, many of the participants valued some teachers who really made a difference in their education. They felt that the good teachers made them work and developed relationships with them. Sophia says that there were two teachers who “were incredible.... They had faith in me, they loved me and yet they did not favor me.” These teachers made a difference by listening, challenging and having high expectations of them. Unfortunately they felt there were not enough of these teachers because they only remember a few who really went out of their way to care about them. And some teachers did not believe in Lucy and gave up on her when they found out she was pregnant. But she finished strong and received two high school diplomas because she had come far and believed in the importance of her education.

Question 4—How do/did you envision yourself in high school? How do you envision yourself in your future?

Most of the participants saw themselves in high school as either quiet and reserved, or outspoken. Luna, Lucy, Adrianna, and Rosita started high school very reserved and somewhat shy. And in their last year of high school, they were participating in school activities and voicing their opinions. Sophia saw herself as independent with limited friends mainly because she was so busy assisting with her mother’s businesses. Angel saw herself as a very fun person who was sometimes truant from classes and openly disagreed with teachers if she questioned what they said. And she stayed on top of her studies and made excellent grades in high school to graduate sixth in her class. Overall, they paid attention, did their work, and achieved good grades.

Each participant envisions her future filled with success. They believe that they have already achieved much by graduating from high school and their futures are only going to get better. Lucy believes she will be a professional photographer owning her own business and traveling to many beautiful places, while raising her son. Sophia plans on graduating from college, on self-employment through her own business and having financial stability. She knows that she will own several properties bringing in a lucrative living. Adrianna will first graduate from high school and then get accepted to and graduate from college. She wants a great career to make enough money to buy her parents a house because they have never owned their own home and “they spend money, a lot of money on [her]... and [since she’ll] have money, why not spend it on them.” She also wants to continue to be a role model to her sister. Rosita didn’t think she would make it to college but she is planning to finish college, become a teacher and be a positive role model similar to the way the program director and another woman have been role models to her. She also wants to eventually run her own non-profit organization that is making a difference in the lives of people. Luna envisions herself spending many hours in the UNC library becoming a teacher because she loves children and she loves their sense of discovery. She wants to give to children because she will be doing something positive for others. She also believes she will eventually get married, have her own children and live in a big house. Angel, the last participant, will graduate from college, become a registered nurse or a nurse practitioner and overall succeed at life. Her marriage will continue to be healthy and happy in the future and when she finishes college, she wants to have children. And having a solid career is important to Angel, but

she identifies the most successful part of her life as having her family near and in good health because they provide a sense of security and support.

Question 5—How is Mi Carrera different than your general high school experience?

What makes it different and why?

Mi Carrera was a home of acceptance, respect, individual attention, fun, and participants felt cared for, listened to and supported. “In school, it’s a big institute. This is like home” (Sophia)! Adrianna felt that she was heard and listened to. The group was small and intimate with about seven to fifteen members and it had the feel of a family, making it easy to listen to one another. Angel believed that people working in a school do it because it’s their job and there are too many students, but at Mi Carrera people were there to help because they want to invest time with you and they want to get to know you. They know your name, unlike in a classroom where you are just another face.

Rosita enjoyed coming to the meetings because there was humor and acceptance. She claimed that there was always somebody smiling, always somebody laughing.... Or you can just come in here and if you’re having the worst day in the world, you can find a spot anywhere in there and you can go ahead and let it out, complain, whatever you have to do, even cry.” And they care about what you believe in and what your interests or concerns are. Angel was concerned about going to college and some of the assistants in Mi Carrera were in college and they offered insights about what to expect, relieving her anxiety and stress.

This program allows participants to speak from the heart, freely about feelings, issues in the world, friendships, relationships, money, the business world, and world issues. It’s a place where friendships are made and confidentiality is honored. In this

home like environment, the young women would hang out, make friends, and be in a place that taught interesting and practical topics to apply in their everyday lives.

Adrianna felt glad that she had this home away from home to go to because at least she wasn't on the streets, bored, or getting in trouble. This was a place that always offered regular meetings and in the summer they enjoyed field trips to places they wouldn't necessarily go to such as Elitches, museums, Water World, and horseback riding. The program was designed to assist the participants in personal development skills such as public speaking, math and essay writing. The participants were so grateful for the program director because she cared about each of them and made the time to address questions and concerns. Sophia felt that Mi Carrera is so different from a public school classroom where a teacher lectures and does not even allow time for questions. Overall, the young women felt that their participation was invaluable on many levels and it allowed them to have fun in a positive environment while they learned and grew.

Question 6—How did being in Mi Carrera help you compared to your experience in high school?

This question received some of the similar answers as the above question but some of the participants felt that there were definite differences. For instance, Luna felt that teachers in high school were not there to be your friends, whereas, the staff at Mi Carrera were friends, had conversations with her, were genuinely interested in her as a whole person and wanted to assist her growth in any way possible. Sophia felt that high school did not help her one bit regarding her personal development, while Mi Carrera helped her in numerous ways in her personal life. And Adrianna was not bored and did not sleep at Mi Carrera meetings like she did at school, because meetings were interesting

and engaged her in simple, yet fun topics. Having the Mi Carrera staff hold Rosita accountable for her attitude was important to her because it supported her and allowed her to look at things differently so that she doesn't get depressed about things she cannot control. The advice given by the staff was useful to Angel and having one-on-one contact with them was gratifying. Angel also felt that it was helpful to have an all-women environment because it allowed the participants the opportunity to openly express themselves.

Lucy on the other hand, felt that her experiences at Mi Carrera and at school were equal. She had teachers who genuinely took an interest in her and supported her similarly to the staff at Mi Carrera. Both environments respected her as an equal and they tried to build her up. Lucy had this to say about Mi Carrera:

They try to help you out the best way they can, I mean if you need something or if you have a problem, they'll sit there and talk to you...they'll give you advice...have lunch with you, just talk to you, be your friend.... They teach you values, like I said: leadership, um, self respect, self esteem, help you get a goal in mind if you don't have one, and help you decide on things.

The participants experienced an intimate environment at Mi Carrera and some of the participants felt the staff could assist them more naturally because they were from the same culture and some even had similar experiences.

Question 7—What did it mean to you when you were in high school and you decided to go to college?

The three participants that are now in college believe that deciding to go to college means a better future, more choices, and more successful lives compared to their

parents. Rosita felt that she was fulfilling not only her dream, but her family's too. Her sister who died when she was eleven had started college and Rosita felt an obligation to follow in her footsteps to finish college. She operates out of internal and external motivation to fulfill her dream of finishing college. Her parents are part of her external motivation. They have seen one of their daughters die, a son go to college and then dropout and now they are proud that she chose to go to college and she is thankful to make them proud. She says, "To know that I'm actually going to get my education, [and] I'm going to get my degree. And just being more educated, and my parents won't see me grow up like they did or work hard like they did."

Sophia always knew she was going to go to college. Her mother motivated her, because "...she didn't want the life she has now for [her daughter]." For Sophia there was never that possibility of, "What if I don't go?" She knew she was going to college to make a better life than her parents and become successful, and Mi Carrera pounded that kind of thinking about how college would create a successful life even further into her brain. In preparing to go to college she felt many emotions: of being nervous, happy, excited, scared—it was a big change. She had learned a lot of self-motivation from Mi Carrera, as well as people skills, leadership skills, and many other personal skills that she developed in order to succeed as a college student.

For Angel "[going to college] meant to me as being another step to being successful in life." Her siblings and cousins are looking up to her and she knows that she will finish because she is determined. Her older sister motivated her because she was the first to go to college, but she then dropped out; and now it is an expectation that her younger brother will go to college—"he has to go to college." Her parents weren't

exposed to college and didn't even know it was a possibility for their children and now all three of them will have degrees. She knows that this is a trend for her immediate and extended family. She has seen many of her white peers who grow up with the expectation of going to college, and their parents start planning from the day they find out they are pregnant. And this is what she will do for her children someday. She knows that college is important because it means that she could set her sights higher than just working "in a Burger King or McDonald's." Going to college also meant that Angel was proving people wrong:

It's just that good feeling that you know, proving to others that you weren't going to be a failure that you know, you indeed did graduate and that you did move on to college. And you're going to graduate from college eventually too.... I was always the good student but it's just I had a lot of teachers and they would always say, you're never going to graduate.

Some teachers said that if she continued taking the same steps, she would get pregnant and dropout. Since her parents worked all the time, she and her siblings were left with the babysitters and family who said that she and her sister were going to get married, get pregnant, and have a bunch of children from different men. This is why it is such a big accomplishment to get to college. She knows that going to college will allow her to succeed with more choices in her life, unlike her parents.

Each of the students' individual interviews shows a glimpse of their experiences in Mi Carrera and common experiences related to their achievements. The two research questions have been answered by the individual interviews: What is the experience of Latina students participating in the Mi Carrera program? And are there common

experiences and/or factors affecting participants' lives and academic achievements? However, focus group interviews examined redundancy of information and to examine themes evolving from the individual interviews.

In summary, the individual interviews describe many factors and experiences impacting the participants' lives. The participants viewed their Hispanic identity as an asset and a liability in school. They desired to achieve academically, yet they felt that stereotypes, parents' schedules, and lack of resources were difficult to overcome in high school. Mi Carrera was a stabilizing force in the young women's lives where many of them learned to become self-determined and successful in life. The focus group interviews provide more data that describe participant self-determination, which is examined below through the emergence of the phenomenological themes from this research.

Focus Groups

The researcher conducted two focus group interviews several weeks after the personal interviews. One focus group consisted of three participants and the other consisted of two participants, because one of the personal interviewees was unable to attend due to a family emergency. Her grandmother was in the hospital, and she had to take her father to visit her. This was yet another example of how the family depended on one another.

The purpose of the focus interviews was to elaborate on themes that evolved from the individual interviews. In the focus group interviews, the participants were asked seven follow-up questions in an effort to look for redundancy and to allow the group to expand on answers provided from the individual interviews. Originally, the researcher

planned to ask two focus interview questions, but before the focus interviews, the researcher felt it important to ask more questions. The seven questions asked were:

1. Explain if you believe there are common problems or experiences you faced as high school students? So in other words, if you believe there were common problems or experiences that you faced as a high school student, what were those common problems or experiences?
2. What was a typical meeting like at Mi Carrera?
3. What is the most important skill Mi Carrera taught you and why?
4. What is one way Mi Carrera has helped you in your life?
5. How do you describe Mi Carrera making a difference in your life? So, I asked you before how it helped you in your life and now how has it made a difference in your life?
6. Compile between all of you twenty skills that you gained by participating in Mi Carrera.
7. How has Mi Carrera impacted your life for your future?

A richer understanding of the phenomenon was achieved by exploring the categories or themes emerging from the answers to these focus group interview questions as well as the answers to the individual interview questions. The answers to these questions yielded detailed information analyzed below through the themes that emerged from the study.

Themes

There were four main themes presented throughout all of the interviews. These themes are: perceived common problems, common experiences, lessons learned from Mi

Carrera, and belief in their future. Each of these themes has corollary characteristics clarifying the themes more fully. Following is an explication of these themes.

Theme 1: Perceived Common Problems

This study seeks to understand the common experiences that affect the participants' lives and academic achievement. As shown in the literature research, there are many factors that impact Hispanic students. Particularly, family educational status and socio-economic status play roles in a student's chance of obtaining a high school diploma and a college degree. Parents may be unable to provide educational guidance if they have not finished their own schooling. And families are close knit within the Latino community and students are expected to financially assist their families. These are just a few perceived problems participants experience.

Parents Lack of Education: Participants felt that the educational system was somewhat difficult to navigate through for reasons that they had no control over. Many of them were the first to finish high school in their immediate and extended family, thus they did not receive specific guidance from their parents or family about their education. They were creating new educational pathways, which meant that they often times felt lost in the process of finding information to assist in succeeding academically. One participant said she felt like she was on a snowy range trying to hike to the top of a large mountain without out any sense of direction. Sophia stated that "your parents did not go through the same school system that you're going through...and so we have no clue." Some of the participants' parents did not even finish elementary school. The participants desired to go to college but their parents did not instill this desire in them. In fact, some of the participants didn't know the purpose of college. Angel stated,

[My parents]...always enforced in us that we had to go to school, but I never had plans of like, when I was young, I never had plans of graduating. I mean I never had plans of dropping out, it's just I didn't know what it was; yeah, I just had to go to school. And college, I didn't even know what it was. I was like, 'What?' And I was like, 'I have to go to school after school?'

This lack of guidance meant that the participants had no role models to follow. Having no role models was difficult because they were not always confident students who had direction for achieving educationally. Some of them didn't know that they had the right to talk to their teachers if they didn't understand the material. Despite the participants' lack of direction the majority of the participants attend college or are planning to attend. And they have a vision to be role models for their younger siblings and cousins.

Work to Help Family: Another problem that the participants faced was their split between two cultures. They felt torn between school and their families. The school told them that part of being a successful student meant participating in extracurricular activities. And their parents stressed the importance of working to financially help the family, or of watching brothers and sisters after school. Their devotion to family is strong. Angel said she has been working since she was eleven years old. And Luna has worked since she was in the seventh grade. The participants in this study felt that it was their responsibility to assist their family financially and by working they were able to purchase things they needed, such as clothes, books, and other items needed or wanted as a student. They felt that working or watching their siblings taught them a sense of responsibility, yet their time was absorbed and they were unable to participate in many

sports, clubs or organizations. Luna stated that “I had to work after school and that kept me from joining programs that I wanted to join.” Also, they felt split between two cultures: “I’m Latina in one culture and then in the institution, the school that I’m going to, is of a different culture than mine” (Sophia). And Rosita believes that she was not able to participate in extracurricular activities because she had to work to help out the family. She felt that being split between two cultures was complicated because “you have your responsibilities with your family and you have your one’s at school.” Participating in Mi Carrera was something they all had in common yet they were not always able to consistently stay connected to this organization while they were in high school due to their work schedules at home and at work.

Stereotypes: The next problem perceived by participants is that they are looked upon as lazy people, drop-outs from school, or they get pregnant and have many children, or they live in places where they witness shootings. The participants felt discouraged that their peers, teachers and society looked down upon them and it was difficult to be labeled as failures. Sophia said it made her angry to be perceived as lazy. She believed that Latinas work hard because “we’re working at a job, going to school, passing our classes, taking care of families....” But some people believe that Latinos will “fail or they’re just going to end up at McDonald’s or some fast food restaurant or some cleaning place where you’re cleaning toilets because either they think, teachers or school administrators think, we’re not interested in education” (Sophia). Angel felt that many people believed that Latinas were either pregnant or drop-outs. She states that there are many of her friends who did get pregnant and dropout. But that should not be a reason for people to perceive all Hispanics like this. She asserts:

Because a lot of times we're classified as oh, you know, they're all drop-outs or they all get pregnant and have a bunch of kids by the time they're twenty. And it's just stereotyping that we get. That, you know, and all they're good for is having kids and you know they never do anything with their life. They have their spouses support them.

Luna believes that "there are people waiting out there, out there just to say, 'oh, there's one of them that just quit.' I'm not willing to be one of those." They felt that their white peers believed they were better than they were and it was hard because they felt they had to prove to them that they were capable of the same performance. And Adrianna said that people she met outside her school always asked if she had seen any drive-by shootings and how many people she had seen killed. She said she never saw any shootings, killings or drive-bys. Luna said that there were also "some students that they just think that because you're Mexican or you're Latina, you're not going to be able to graduate or you're going to dropout or you're not going to go off to college." Participants felt that these stereotypes brought them down but they refused to let these attitudes keep them down because they are making something of their lives.

After examining the common problems perceived by participants, the next theme to examine is common experiences they had in school and with their parents.

Theme 2: Common Experiences

Common experiences felt by the participants as they interacted with teachers, counselors and parents were sometimes negative, but the participants believed that they could turn these into positive experiences to be at their best.

Experiences with Teachers: Most of the participants believed that some teachers really helped them as students in high school. All participants attended public schools where the demographics included a majority of Hispanic students and there were some teachers that guided the participants in their educational pursuits. However, most participants believed that there were far more teachers that were either directly or indirectly racist toward Hispanic students. Rosita used to work at her high school after school and she asserts that some of the teachers were “flat out racist. They didn’t care because you’re Mexican...and you’re not going to be anything in life. You’re only going to clean up after people....” She was also in class one day when a student asked what a farm worker was and the teacher responded by saying they were wetbacks. Rosita also remembered a time during Cinco de Mayo when a teacher once told her class, “if those people are so proud of where they come from, why don’t they go back.” Rosita was frustrated and asked the participants in the focus group, “And go back, I mean, where are we going? Utah, you know, the Four Corners area? We can’t go back, we figure we’ve always been here and we’re not going anywhere as Native people.”

Angel also experienced direct racist feedback from teachers. Some told her in class that “Mexicans don’t go to school, Mexicans are lazy, Mexicans are all the drop-outs and you’re probably not going to make it out of the twenty of you that are in this class; I’m only going to see five graduate.” Angel felt that it was a problem to hear these statements as explained below.

Every year you start the school off, you can’t walk through the hallways because it’s so packed. But then if you have these teachers telling you, no well, 10 out of the 20 or 15 out of the 20 in this class are going to dropout and if you’re going to

leave, go now because I need the space. I mean they're sort of pushing you towards, I mean, they're giving you the ideas or maybe you've been thinking about it already and they're just um, even adding more pressure or telling you...maybe not pressure, but just giving you sort of that option that you could leave, and that they needed the space because they would tell you that.... They would tell you that we need the chairs.... Some teachers were good, and some were awful.

Adrianna expressed that "the teachers are all worried about the chairs and at the end of the school year, they're like, 'I have so many chairs, I don't know what to do with them.'"

Additionally, Luna felt that there were teachers that indirectly had the attitude of "since you're Latina, you're not worth the time. You're not worth having them spend time with you and trying to help you out." Or she felt that some teachers believed that since she was Latina, "you're not going to do much in life, you're not going to go anywhere." This was a problem because there were times that she was provided with guidance to go for the easy classes. Her experience was as follows.

"I felt like they were just trying to say go for the easy stuff, don't do too much, stay down. They are trying to help you but don't tell you [that you] could do it and tell you dream and you could do it or they don't encourage you.... There were a couple of people that I felt that didn't really think of how I could do anything."

The participants questioned why people became teachers if they do not believe all students can learn and why did some of them have such terrible attitudes about Hispanic students.

Experiences with Counselors: Counselors played a role in the students' lives. All participants mentioned either how they were frustrated with their counselors or how counselors assisted in their academics. The participants who were frustrated with their counselors did not know the role of their counselors. Sophia said that in high school she did not even know she had a counselor.

We don't even know what in the world the counselors are for.... And they expect us to come to them to get the information. But sometimes we don't even know they exist. Like, I knew I had a counselor but I thought it was just to handle us, like if I was bad, I had to talk to her. And then it wasn't until later in my high school career that I found out that it was a student advisor who you were sent to if you were in trouble and your counselor was to help you in your academics while you were there. So, that's why it would get me so angry, it's like it's your responsibility....now, that I'm becoming educated, yeah it's true, it's my responsibility because I'm already older and I should have gotten that experience in high school. My counselor should have told me...should have guided me or somebody should have told me, 'you know what, you're able to go to your counselor and holler at your professors, talk to them....' And even now my first year of college I had no clue that I was able to talk to them. And I just seen them as if they said this, like if they said no or yes, that was it. I didn't know...I just couldn't see them as regular people that they could bend and they were flexible and I didn't know how much it was important for you to get that communication with that professor or that counselor and how helpful they could be to you. Plus, you're just kids growing up. I still believe that 9th grade should stay in middle

school because you have no clue what you're doing in high school, which is why they don't even prepare you, and how are you supposed to know it's your responsibility? We're not even adults, not even 18, much less adults.

Not knowing the role of the counselor for some participants was difficult because many of them did not receive help for college or scholarships until their senior year, which they felt was too late to receive adequate assistance. Luna said that she did not know her counselor for her first three years of high school and didn't even know her name. But in her senior year she sought her help and received support and assistance for college preparation. But not all students are self-starters to know where to begin in the process of getting help for their future education. However, some of the participants valued the role that their counselors played in their academic achievement. Angel said that she would not be where she is now without her counselor's help. However, he did not assist her until her junior year and she wondered if she would have made different choices if she knew how he could help earlier in high school.

Experiences with Motivation from Parents: All participants felt that their parents motivated them either directly or indirectly. Parents either motivated participants by expecting them to do their best in school, going to teachers and communicating with them about their child's performance, or by modeling difficulties that come with manual labor. The participants expressed that their parents desired a better life for them and discussed how an education would make a difference. Some participants expressed that their parents believed an education would create more opportunities for them so that they would not have to work long hours under difficult working conditions. Angel's parents would actively question her and her siblings about homework. Even though her parents

could not assist with homework questions, they would get upset if they did not bring homework home. Rosita's mother was actively involved in her education and made sure she was in all of the accelerated classes. She states, "I was fortunate enough to have my mom always, always be involved with me in school. So, I didn't get caught up in the tracking or if you're a Latina or whatever, someone who spoke Spanish, or if you didn't, or if they knew your parents did, they put you in the lower [level] classes." And Adrianna's parents told her, "you could either work or go to school.' So, I decided to go to school. Lucy's parents always stressed that she could do anything she wanted in life as long as she worked for it. Angel also expressed that her parents' work in a manual labor profession encouraged her to go to college because she will eventually get paid more in her first year as a nurse than her parents do now, even though her parents have been working at their jobs for about fifteen years. And Sophia witnessed her mother working too many hours cleaning other people's homes and she has decided she wants "more balance without having work rule your life."

Many of the participants questioned whether life needed to be filled with such hard work, struggle, and hardships that they observed their parents undergo and they believed that education was a key to creating a life filled with less hardship. Mi Carrera taught them that they could have a better life and this is the next theme to explore.

Theme 3: Lessons from Mi Carrera

Mi Carrera was a safe place that felt like a second home for participants to attend. They felt that there was no competition, envy, or jealousy among participants, and it was a fun place to feel at home. They ate food, were among friends, and could express anything that concerned them. Monday through Thursday, participants would go to

meetings from three in the afternoon until about 5:30. The meetings would start out informally with the girls talking to one another and then the director would walk in around 3:30 and they would start discussing the topic of the day. The director was flexible and knew it was important to discuss the issues the participants were facing, which related to their lives. The communication was open, honest, and among all young Hispanic women; they socialized, learned and gained insights about themselves, their culture and their future. Participants believe that Mi Carrera taught them many personal life skills and most importantly, it taught them to confidently believe in themselves. Mi Carrera was a place to discuss matters that were important, empowering them to be leaders. The participants felt that they would not be as successful today without being involved in this program. Sophia said “I don’t know where I’d be right now without Mi Carrera.” They measured success differently, yet they all agreed that pursuing education beyond a high school diploma was a key ingredient to a successful life. Many of them knew this before attending Mi Carrera, and Luna said she would have gone to college without being a part of Mi Carrera but she “would have been more confused [about the process of getting accepted].” This program reinforced the importance of an education and they learned statistics and stories about women who struggled without an education versus women who had an education. They were taught: 1). skills; 2) beliefs; 3) the positive attributes of being a woman and Latina; and 4) confidence.

Skills Learned at Mi Carrera: The program worked to bring out the participants’ best and focused on positive attributes that they have as Latinas. The skills they learned were: being organized; being outspoken and standing up for themselves; effective time management; how to research information and to critically assess what they hear and see;

goal setting; good money management; technology use; recognizing and knowing the impact history has on their lives today; learning about different professions and expected income levels; being self directed learning through reading; writing effectively to express ideas; being a leader; how to search and find scholarships; how to buy a house; how to open a checking account; investing money wisely; confronting problems; communicating effectively; and speaking publicly.

Beliefs Learned at Mi Carrera: The beliefs they learned at Mi Carrera were and revolved around: being humble; being proud of who you are; the importance of getting educated; learning something new everyday through formal and informal schooling; attending and graduating from college is necessary to achieve in life; taking personal responsibility; having balance between self and family; controlling emotions positively and effectively; having balance between work and personal time; having fun in life; dreaming big to reach goals and create positive futures; not being destructively critical of self or others; not negatively judging self or others; thinking before acting; staying accountable to selves, peers, and community; fixing only yourself and not trying to fix others; searching and you will find; everything is a learning experience; reaching your dreams; staying open to change and not staying stuck; seeking purpose in life; crying is needed at times and acceptable; laughing creates joy in life; and believing in the positive nature of life because life is working out.

Positive Attributes of Being a Woman and Latina Learned at Mi Carrera: The participants felt that they learned about the attributes of their gender, culture, and the positive impacts they have on their lives. They learned the importance of: knowing their culture and traditions; being proud of their gender, culture, ethnicity, and who they are

individually and as a group of Latinas; learning differences between non-minority men and women and Hispanic men and women; learning Hispanic history; learning that college is obtainable to Latinas; learning about the stereotypes people outside of their culture have of them and how to combat these stereotypes; learning about stereotypes that occur between the various ethnic groups within the Hispanic culture (i.e., Mexicans versus Puerto Ricans, Mexicans versus Chicanas, etc.); having fun with people who are Latinas; and learning the differences between Latinas who call themselves Chicanas who have lived in the United States for many generations and Mexicans who have just moved here. The importance of this last point was particularly useful to Sophia and Rosita. Sophia's mother moved from Mexico and Sophia clearly identified herself as Mexican and had a hard time identifying with students at her high school who called themselves Chicana. Chicanas have lived in the United States for many generations and there were different cliques in high school where Mexicans and Chicanas had a hard time associating with one another. Sophia said,

I'm not a Chicana, I'm Mexicana! Right, and I still couldn't accept them, and I was like, you're not Mexican enough and then, as soon as I started going to Mi Carrera where I've seen other girls that were Chicana, they were not just like me. [But I found that] they were still...we were still facing the same...issues..... I felt like Mi Carrera helped me, like build a bridge between my . . . [Chicana sisters].

Rosita confirmed this statement of Sophia's and she felt that learning about the history of labels people give to themselves can help Latinas break down stereotypes they may hold against other Latinas.

All of the participants believed that this program was so useful to their growth and the program director was someone who really made a difference in their lives. The program director was like a second mom who listened to their problems, concerns, and joys. Rosita said, “[The director]...is like our mom....And I know I’m able to handle situations now after going through Mi Carrera that I know I couldn’t handle before.” Anytime Angel came to Mi Casa, she was always greeted by the director whom asked “is there anything you want to talk about?” The director had an open door policy and listened, providing guidance to the participants during the meetings and before and after meetings. She cared about the girls and created a strong bond with most of them.

Confidence: Another lesson learned in Mi Carrera was a strong sense of confidence. This was an attitude that they believe was nurtured in this program through knowing they could express themselves among other Latinas and because the director trusted them. Lucy believes that “The most important thing is to find out who you are and have self respect. I mean if you don’t have self respect, then you’re just going to let people run over you.” Adrianna said that Mi Carrera made a difference for her because she is shy and was not involved in activities at school, but at Mi Carrera she gained much knowledge about herself and others. She said, “I feel more comfortable being in a woman’s institution because you can talk about anything and you don’t have to worry about what people say. And you know what they’ve been through, kind of what you’ve been through, they understand. And you can speak your language here, Spanish.” Angel felt that it was empowering to be in an organization where she was not judged, and this provided a strong sense of safety and security.

You don't have anybody looking down upon you or judging you or just basically that...everywhere you go, everybody's looking down upon you and seeing who's better than who and what position are you in, how are you dressed...how are you socially and economically, how are you standing and just how you portray yourself. And here you don't have to worry about that. It seems...I don't know if they are, but it seems that nobody's judging you.

Luna too expressed that Mi Carrera gave her an opportunity to believe in herself:

Life is not easy and I don't see how it can get any easier... there's always going to be something that will make it hard, but I learned that you have to get through it and step into the problem without hesitation and confront it and get through it and it will be behind you. And I...see that I learned too...well, like she [Sophia], I think that I have learned to control my emotions and find ways to talk to my parents, talk to the people that I need to talk to [and]... make them understand what I want and how that's going to change my life and how it will affect it. And having patience and you'll get through it.

And Sophia reflected on her experience in Mi Carrera and said,

Ah, it's helped me in the sense that I can stand up for myself and I can stand up to other people, regardless of ethnicity of the age, the color, the height, the weight, the anything. I can just be myself and not have to worry about what others think, because I'm happy with who I am, and then it doesn't matter if anybody else likes me as long as I'm happy with me. And Mi Carrera made me believe in myself a lot!

Confidence breeds a sense of security. The participants felt that they could rely on themselves for a brighter and secure future. The last theme to discuss is a belief in their future.

Theme 4: Belief in Their Future

The participants felt empowered by the skills that they learned at Mi Carrera and they stressed a belief in the importance of forging a new destiny for themselves. They expressed a sense of self-determination to be their best in all they pursue. The students can transfer the skills learned in Mi Carrera to their personal relationships, educational pursuits and employment. They felt their accomplishments exceeded their expectations, leading them to feel self-assured through a strong sense of self-esteem. Mi Carrera impacted their lives. The following paragraphs reveal the students' belief in their future.

Sophia asserts:

And I see myself successful because I'm sure of myself, I'm sure of what I want to do and um...not exactly what I want to be, but whatever it is, I'm sure I'm going to be doing it because I want to and it's going to make me successful and happy. And Mi Carrera made me believe in myself a lot! Before as if like, I didn't believe in myself, like, how am I, Sophia, *gonna* be able to do and accomplish all that and get here and get there? You know, that sense that um...oh, I can say this word in Spanish but I can't say it in English, let me see if I can say it. Just the fact that assurance of yourself, just the fact that you're sure in what you're doing and don't be scared of facing life because there's nothing bad that can happen, there's nothing worse, all you can do is die. And that's not necessarily bad. And . . . [the director] always, also taught me that not to worry

about things, it may seem bad, it may seem big, whatever problem, whatever issue you're going through, but it's going to have an end, it will have an end.

Rosita stated:

Like Sophia said, whatever...[I decide to do in life]...I'm going to be successful at it. And like [Sophia]...said, successful doesn't mean being rich and having money....It could be a good mother or whatever it is that I'm going to do, a teacher or whatever. And part of that success [means that] I want to be able to help others, people, like how...[the director] and Mi Carrera and the staff at Mi Casa have helped me through my years participating there and still hanging out there. Um, that would be successful to me, just to know I have affected one person, impacted one person. Whether it's one or ten, it doesn't matter, one person has been influenced to look at their lives, their life in a more positive way and change their negative ways, or whatever it is, that's success. That to me would be important.

Luna maintained that she believes in herself.

I would be a person that has accomplished what I want to accomplish. And like... [Sophia/Rosita] say, it doesn't depend on money or anything like that, it just depends how I'm going to feel and I think I'm going to feel like I'm a good person....I mean in the sense that I have accomplished what I want to accomplish and that I could help others with the things that I've learned. And that I could teach others what I've learned and help them do what they want to do. And just um...I'm just a normal person, I guess, like everyone else and having still dreams and feeling good about myself.

And Lucy believes that whatever she pursues she must do it with confidence. "If you know what you want to do, then go for it and do it and have all the confidence that you can." Adrianna claims that computers will be a part of her future. "Well, for me, it would have to be the computers. Um, I like everything about computers, so I think I may be majoring in computers or something around that. And if I didn't come here, I wouldn't have ever known." And Angel declares that she is already successful.

And I describe my success as being wonderful. I mean, I never thought I was going to college. I never thought about it when I was small or in middle school.

And I mean, for me, my success is I'm doing good in school, I'm making it and you know, my family, everybody is healthy in my family, everybody's fine. My marriage life is wonderful. I married the right guy, thank God! And I don't know it's just that everything's working out fine up to now. So, I consider myself successful up to now.

Strong Sense of Self: They felt that they could trust in being happy with themselves. This happiness was intertwined with a strong sense of self and many of them felt that Mi Carrera assisted them in learning how to love and accept themselves. Sophia claims that "Because all the money in the world would not buy accepting yourself and it's not going to make you happy.... But I am happy the way I am and I should be proud and look at the positive stuff." And Rosita agrees with Sophia: "When you're comfortable with yourself, you're comfortable in your own skin; you accept yourself for who you are, what you are and what you could be and will be. That's the ultimate success." The participants' have bright futures because they are empowered by their beliefs and experiences.

Both the individual interviews and the focus group interviews illustrate how the themes: perceived common problems, common experiences, lessons learned in Mi Carrera, and belief in the future influence the participants' choices to achieve, grow, and learn in life. The research shows that their participation in Mi Carrera helped them grow in many ways that impacted their lives positively. All of the participants have unique individual stories with similar paths to success, and they possess an extraordinary amount of perseverance and adaptation skills. The young women are strong, determined, and display characteristics guiding their lives to high achievement.

Summary

The research questions in this study have sought to understand the common experiences, common problems, and factors affecting the participants' lives, and how they experienced participating in the Mi Carrera program. This chapter discussed the participants' demographics, personal profiles, personal interviews, focus interviews, and themes, which emerged from the study.

All the participants' share similar backgrounds and all believe in pursuing their education. They have a desire to give back to their community and serve as role models to their immediate and extended family. They faced challenges with attitudes about prejudice and discrimination in their schools with teachers, counselors, and peers. Yet they believe that they find strength in their families' sense of hard work, because they positively believe in their self-determination to find happiness in anything they decide to pursue in life. Their lives go against the odds because they exude success in being strong women who will make a difference in society.

The research shows that Mi Carrera made a positive impact and difference in their lives and they learned skills that will carry them through life. They had a program to attend that understood them, and appealed to their gender, age and culture. Mi Carrera was a place where they were loved, encouraged, and provided with opportunities and visions for bright futures. The young women enjoyed reflecting on their experience at Mi Carrera because it gave them an opportunity to value and remember how instrumental Mi Carrera was in their lives. They found their commonalities powerful. In essence these young women go beyond the factors negatively influencing their lives and they possess self determination, will power, undeniable strength, self-worth, confidence, skills, beliefs, and hope for optimistic futures through perseverance to achieve despite their economic and social standings in society. The participants' character and ambition are admirable and praiseworthy. Their lives are a celebration and testament of positive experiences reinforced through Mi Carrera's guidance.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter five presents unique factors impacting the lives of the six participants in this study. They have common backgrounds with parents who work hard and provide inspiration for their success. As students, they felt that society, some teachers, some counselors, and some peers perceived them as failures, because of the stereotypes that Latinas either get pregnant, or dropout of school. Yet, these young women go beyond such stereotypes. They are skilled in many areas and they confidently believe in themselves and have visions for bright futures. They exude success as strong women who will make a difference in society. The study reveals four themes that emerged in the findings: perceived common problems, common experiences, lessons learned from Mi Carrera, and belief in their future.

Summary of Themes

Theme 1: Perceived Common Problems:

This theme provides insights about lack of education of the participants' parents, how the participants work to help their families, and how participants perceive stereotypes. Sometimes, the participants felt lost in the process of finding information about their educational endeavors because parents were unable to guide them. And this feeling was compounded even further through a lack of role models. This created an educational deficit of direction. The participants also felt that they were not able to participate fully in extracurricular activities because of familial obligations. They also struggled with feeling weighted down by stereotypes, such as, being perceived as lazy,

drop-outs from school, or that they are likely to become pregnant and have many children. Despite these perceived common problems, the participants are either attending college or anticipate attending, and they see themselves serving as role models for their siblings, cousins and other Latinas, and in one case to her son.

Theme 2: Common Experiences:

The second theme consisted of: 1) experiences with teachers, 2) experiences with counselors and 3) experiences with motivation from parents. The students in this study attended public schools where the demographics included a majority of Hispanic students. Some teachers guided the students in their educational pursuits, yet some teachers were either directly or indirectly racist toward Hispanic students. The racist teachers made comments such as, "... [Mexicans] are not going to be anything in life. You're only going to clean up after people..." (Rosita). Or farm workers are "wetbacks" (Rosita). And Angel recalls teachers making direct racist comments about Mexicans being lazy, dropping out and that "out of the twenty of you that are in this class, I'm only going to see five graduate." Luna felt indirect racist attitudes from teachers who displayed attitudes of "since you're Latina, you're not worth the time." Participants were perplexed by such teacher responses and they questioned why teachers entered this profession if they didn't believe in their students.

The next common experience participants had was with their counselors. Angel and Luna expressed positive experiences with their academic counselors. Angel and Luna valued and appreciated the role of counselors in their academic achievement. However, both of them did not have much interaction with their counselor until the latter part of high school, and Angel wonders if she would have made different choices if her

counselor had assisted her earlier in high school. The other participants did not receive much guidance from their counselors and this left some of them frustrated or without knowledge about the role of the counselors. Sophia felt frustrated because she thought the counselor was to assist with interpersonal conflicts. She did not know that she could receive information about scholarships, college programs, or other means to advance educationally. The schools did not make it sufficiently clear to these students as to what a counselor does. Schools need to make it clear enough so that students can make sound decisions about furthering their education beyond high school.

The final common experience was the motivation the participants felt from their parents, both directly and indirectly. Parents directly motivated the participants by expecting them to do their best in school; and some of the parents dealt directly with teachers by communicating with them about their child's performance. Also, parents indirectly motivated the participants by modeling difficulties that come with manual labor. The participants expressed that their parents desired a better life for them, and discussed with them how an education would create more and greater opportunities for them so that they would not have to work long hours under difficult working conditions. Angel expressed that her parents' work in a manual labor profession encouraged her to go to college because she will eventually get paid more in her first year as a nurse than her parents do now, even though her parents have been working at their jobs for about fifteen years. They deem education as a key to creating a life less filled with hardship.

Theme 3: Lessons from Mi Carrera:

The next theme focuses on lessons learned from Mi Carrera. The participants attended this program after school for a couple of hours from Monday through Thursday,

work permitting. They felt that Mi Carrera was a second home, and they learned many personal life skills and most importantly, it taught them to confidently believe in themselves. They learned the importance of an education that may create opportunities for success. Mi Carrera was a place to discuss matters that were important, empowering them to be leaders. Sophia said “I don’t know where I’d be right now without Mi Carrera.”

The program worked to bring out the participants’ best qualities. They were taught: 1) skills; 2) beliefs; 3) and the positive attributes of being a woman and Latina. Some of the skills they learned were: being organized; being outspoken and standing up for themselves; effective time management; how to research information, to critically assess what they hear and see; goal setting; good money management; technology use; recognizing and knowing the impact history has on their lives today and in the past; learning about different professions and expected income levels; self-directed learning through reading; writing effectively to express ideas; how to search and find scholarships; and confronting problems using effective communication skills.

Some of the beliefs they learned at Mi Carrera were and revolved around: being humble; being proud of who you are; learning something new everyday through formal and informal schooling; attending and graduating from college is necessary to achieve in life; having balance between self and family and work and personal time; controlling emotions positively and effectively; dreaming big to reach goals and create purposeful, positive futures; fixing only yourself and not trying to fix others; having fun in life; and believing in the positive nature of life because life is working out.

Finally, the participants felt that they learned about the attributes of their gender, culture, and the positive influence they have on their lives. They learned the importance of: knowing their culture history, and traditions; being proud of their gender, culture, ethnicity, and who they are individually and as a group of Latinas; learning differences between mainstream men and women and Latinas and Latinos; learning that college is obtainable to Latinas; learning about the stereotypes people outside of their culture have of them and how to combat these stereotypes; and learning about differences that occur between the various ethnic groups within the Hispanic culture (i.e., Mexicans versus Puerto Ricans, Mexicans versus Chicanas, etc.).

Not only did they learn skills, beliefs, and positive attributes, but also they developed a wonderful relationship with the director of the program. The director was like a second mom who listened to their problems, concerns, and joys. The director cared about the girls and created a strong bond with most of them. However, some participants were not in the program long enough to create a strong relationship with the director, but they all reported having positive interactions with her.

Mi Carrera was also a place where confidence was fostered through relationships between other Latinas, and the staff. This was an all-women's institution and it allowed the young women to let their guards down and learn from each other. They felt it was a place where judgments were not made and their families' language, Spanish, could be spoken freely. It is a place where participants learned how to confront their problems without hesitation while trusting in themselves.

Theme 4: Belief in Their Future:

Mi Carrera led the participants of this study to feel self-assured through a strong sense of self-esteem, impacting their lives positively. The participants believe in a future where they are in control of creating their destinies. They felt self-assured to trust without worrying: they may face problems, but problems always have a solution. They want to make a difference in society by contributing and helping others as teachers, nurses, businesswomen, computer scientists or photographers. They have dreams and feel accomplished, because as they reflect on their lives in elementary or middle school, they did not even think they would graduate from high school. They all graduated from high school, except Adrianna who was in her senior year during this study. And they all plan on graduating from college. Mi Carrera assisted them in learning how to love and accept themselves. The participants are empowered by their beliefs, experiences, and they trust in a bright future.

The six young women in this study radiate the knowledge that they have succeeded so far in their lives. Statistics show that many Latinas do not graduate from high school, yet these young women exceeded their own expectations of graduating from high school, and they plan on graduating from college. The common problems, common experiences, lessons learned at Mi Carrera, and belief in their future portray their determination to achieve in life. The next section of this chapter will discuss how the academic literature relates to the findings from this study.

Discussion of Literature

The review of the literature discussed commonalities among Hispanic students and information related to the female Hispanic students in the United States. In this study

the six participants faced obstacles in school and at home, and such difficulties impacted their learning. Another way the students were impacted in their learning was through their participation in the Mi Carrera program. They learned many skills that equipped them academically. They learned interpersonal skills preparing them for stronger relationships in their life equipping them with better means to take care of themselves. Next, similarities and differences are examined between the literature and the results from the findings of this study. These similarities and differences between the literature and the data can assist in explaining the experiences of the six students in this study.

Comparison of the Review of Literature and Data:

The topics in the review of literature that are most pertinent to this study are: Hispanic culture, language, education, resources, family influence on Hispanic student success, and Latina students.

The first area where the literature relates to the data from this study is the discussion that shows Hispanic culture impacting the lives of students. Part of Hispanic culture is related to what people call themselves, such as the labels, “Latino” and “Hispanic.” Some of the participants in this study reported struggles they had with the labels of “Hispanic” and “Latino.” Rosita reported her discontent with labels because: “Hispanic just clumps everybody into one thing and I’m not just a part—I’m not an Hispanic. Not from Spain. The Nixon administration didn’t ask me what I was or what my family is. We’re Mexican Indians. We’re Native people. We’re from here.” The literature review discusses that in the late 1970s the Nixon Administration coined the term “Hispanic” representing the ethnicity of people of Spanish speaking decent. This label of “Hispanic” was then used to *officially* represent people of Spanish decent living

in the United States (Gomez, 1995; Oboler, 1995). The problem with such labeling is that it simplifies the diversity of the Spanish speaking groups in the United States. And the word Hispanic disregards the oppressed populations and newly arrived immigrants of Mexico, Puerto Rico Central and South America (Gimenez, 1997). Participants in this study recognize such labeling and they realize that they are often times not recognized fully for who they are because the media, school, and government unconsciously ignore their indigenous roots and it may lead to discrimination and stereotyping. Sophia said that she doesn't get terribly offended with labels of "Hispanic" and "Latina" because she understands that not everybody knows that she is Mexican. "I don't get offended but I don't feel comfortable, because I feel when somebody calls me 'Hispanic' or 'Latina,' they're just generalizing me" (Sophia). Such generalizations may impact students and the participants stressed that they appreciate being asked how they identify themselves because that is empowering.

The next factor discussed in the literature is the influence of culture on Latino education. Many of the participants felt that Mi Carrera was a place where they learned immensely, and they appreciated not being in an environment where competition or individuality was the emphasis, as it was in their traditional classrooms (Shade, 1997). Instead, they were in an environment where women were the focus, and it helped build them up with skills and values of "... leadership, self-respect, self-esteem, [and the staff at Mi Carrera would] help you get a goal in mind if you don't have one, and help you decide on things" (Lucy). Mi Carrera appealed to the participants' gender, age, and culture, and this is one reason so many of the young women in the program felt they learned and grew in this program.

In contrast to the literature, the young women in this study did not get caught up in the internalized belief referred to as the “locus of control” (Grossman, 1995). The locus of control is an attitude that leads one to believe in a lack of ability to achieve and/or have little faith that they are in control of their lives. The women in this study had solid internal control of their lives. They stressed that they have a belief in their abilities, skills, and confidence in who they are and they trust that they have bright futures. Sophia said she is assured in herself and in what she is doing. She asserts, “don’t be scared of facing life because there’s nothing bad that can happen, there’s nothing worse, all you can do is die. And that’s not necessarily bad.” Furthermore, Luna said, “I would be a person that has accomplished what I want to accomplish.” Angel believes that she has forged a successful path where she is performing well academically in college and contributing to her family as a wife, a daughter and a sister. And Rosita believes she is going to be successful in life and part of her success is to help others as a teacher. Such beliefs from the participants show that they have determined that they are in control of their lives to fulfill their dreams and goals, and to create realities that will be beneficial for them and others.

Language is the next key area of the literature as related to this study. The Spanish language is important for Spanish speaking students. It may be used as a tool to empower students. Unfortunately, in America’s educational history Spanish speakers have been discriminated against and forced to speak English only, which has had dire effects on students (Richardson, 1999). Of the six participants in this study, all but one speaks Spanish fluently at home. Lucy did not learn Spanish in her home but she learned it in school because she felt it was important for her to understand the language because it

is part of her cultural roots. Spanish is a primary language spoken in the participants' homes because almost all of their parents come from Mexico. The participants felt that the Spanish language was important to their growth as students. Those who spoke Spanish as their first language learned English early within the school systems, but Luna remembers a third grade teacher looking down upon her because her English was not fluid; she would often remain very quiet or she would not turn in assignments for fear that they would be misinterpreted. However, she then had a teacher who inspired her to trust her language skills and this made an incredible difference in her achievement. All of the participants felt that sometimes speaking Spanish at Mi Carrera was useful to their interactions and it allowed them to put down their guards and just be themselves. Perhaps someday our schools will, to a greater degree, reward students for being multi lingual, rather than penalize them. Bell Hooks (1989) says that learning a variety of languages will increase the understanding of people in this country who speak languages other than English, and will work toward the betterment of our society.

The dropout rate in the academic literature relates to teacher and counselor interactions influencing the Hispanic student. The participants in this study referenced these educational issues, especially as they impacted them through stereotypes and discrimination. The "Hispanic students are the largest-growing sector of the population and have the highest dropout rate of any major segment of the U.S. population" (Hispanic Dropout Project, 1996). This was disturbing to the participants because they felt that often teachers would tell them that they were going to dropout. Angel stated that she had teachers tell her at the beginning of most of her high school years that ten out of twenty in a class are going to dropout, and if you're going to leave, leave now because your chair is

needed for space in the classroom. She felt that this was “sort of pushing you towards, I mean, they’re giving you the ideas or maybe you’ve been thinking about it already and they’re just...adding more pressure or telling you . . . maybe not pressure, but just giving you sort of that option that you could leave, and that they needed the space . . .” John Ogbu (1987), an educational anthropologist out of University California at Berkley, believes that the prejudice and discrimination these students encounter set them up for failure. The research shows that many of the Latino students in this country are attending poorly funded schools that are overcrowded with insufficient materials and staffing (Lockwood & Secada, 1999). “They encounter stereotypes, personal prejudice, and social bias that often is part of larger anti-immigration forces in this society” (Lockwood & Secada, 1999, p. 5).

A theme in this study concentrates on the teacher and counselor interactions. The literature shows that many Hispanic students experience “...lack of teacher and counselor support . . . dislike of teachers, . . . and lack of minority role models” (Marin, 1989, p. 9). This was true for most of the participants in this study as shown in theme 2—common experiences as explained above. They felt that some of their teachers were unsupportive and made direct racist comments in the classroom. The participants also validated the academic literature by explaining that they had very few Latina teachers. A study that examined teacher roles portrayed the national average of student to teacher ratios based on ethnicity found that for every 64 Hispanic students, there was one Hispanic teacher (Hodgkinson, 1992). Angel said that she remembers having three Latino teachers in all of her K-12 public education. The other participants said that they too had a small numbers of Hispanic teachers throughout their K-12 public education. Some of the

participants did have a counselor who was Hispanic, but they did not always know the role of the counselor. Some of the participants had to find out who their counselor was and how they would assist them academically, especially since they wanted to attend higher education. Many of them felt that the school should have made the role of the counselor very clear so that they would have been encouraged to attend college. Most of the participants appreciated being part of Mi Carrera because this program provided them with tools, skills and desire to go to college. Furthermore, most of the participants were encouraged by the role modeling of the Latina Mi Carrera staff. Not only was the program director Latina, but also there were one or two other Latina staff members who were either in college or had graduated from college. These staff members played a role in the participants' desire to attend college. Luna said that she saw the staff of Mi Carrera attending college, and this encouraged her because she knew if they could attend and make it, so could she.

Teen pregnancy was another issue in the literature that relates directly to the participants' in this study. Many of the participants had friends or classmates who were either in school and pregnant or they had dropped out to have a baby. In 1995, 11% of Latinas nationally aged 15-19 gave birth to children (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). This figure only accounts for births and not pregnancy rates. The participants felt that it was important that they finish their schooling before having children. However, one participant did have a child in her senior year of high school. Yet she returned to school, finishing the CIS program, which provides two high school diplomas, and she has aspirations to attend the Denver Institute of Art in one year. Angel and Adrianna both reported that it was not uncommon to see two or three pregnant girls in various high

school classes. The literature shows that only three out of 10 [Hispanic female students] report leaving school due to teen pregnancy, which is about the same rate as Anglo girls (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Teen pregnancy is a complex issue impacting Hispanic students, but the most disturbing part of it for the participants was stereotypes compounding the problem. The participants stressed their discontent with being stereotyped as a Latina who knows first hand about teen pregnancy. Adrianna believes teen pregnancy is a problem and she saw some of her friends dropout and eventually have children, but she stressed that it does not mean that all Latinas are going to dropout and have children.

Tracking is a further aspect of education that Hispanic students encounter. The participants in this study referred to this issue minimally. Some of them were in college bound classes and some of them were not. Yet, they felt that some teachers placed low expectations upon them and this could impact whether they were placed in "low achieving" classes. Students are vulnerable when teachers have low expectations of them because they may lose interest, develop negativity toward school, and let their academics decline (Romo & Falbo, 1996). Luna felt that she had teachers who had low expectations of her, especially in elementary school and this was discouraging because she now questions if they simply did not believe in her abilities. Rosita's mother was her advocate and continually visited the schools so that she was tracked for college. She believes it helped to have a persistent mother because she was placed in AP classes in high school. Angel was also in a few AP classes. Luna and Lucy were in the Center for International Studies, a high school program, and it encouraged academic discipline, rigor and enrolling in college preparatory curricula. The other participants were strong students

and they were in regular bound programs that were not necessarily college bound, which meant they had to self educate themselves to learn what they needed to do to go to college. Sophia says it was difficult not to have teachers provide guidance in the procedures for attending college. Yet, she is proud to be a student in her second year of college at the University of Colorado in Denver.

All of the participants either have aspirations of attending college or they already are attending. The literature shows that there is a low enrollment of Hispanic students in postsecondary institutions. Part of this poor attendance is due to secondary schools not preparing Hispanic students adequately for advancement to higher education. Some of the reasons Hispanic students fall through the cracks of education is due to low teacher expectations, a cultural gap between the students and the teachers (Reyes, 1992), and large class sizes (Lockwood & Secada, 1999). Also, some Hispanic students perform poorly on standardized tests and they are tracked into low achieving classes as a result. Many of the standardized tests are unfair to minority students, young women, or students from low socio-economic backgrounds, and they do not provide a clear assessment of academic achievement (Rinn, 1995). The implications of Hispanics' lack of success in the educational system in the United States are costly to the society as a whole. The participants felt that they were fortunate to be part of Mi Carrera because they discussed why they were reflected in the media as failing, and it assisted them in understanding why it was important to achieve to higher levels in high school, as well as in higher education.

Of the six participants, two attend the Community College of Denver, one attends the University of Colorado in Denver, and one was about to attend the University of

Northern Colorado. The other two participants plan on attending the Denver Institute of Art and the Community College of Denver. The academic literature states that Hispanic students are attending college, but not in numbers proportional to their percentage in the population. In 1995, Hispanics were 25% of the national population, but only eight percent of Hispanic students enrolled in postsecondary education; this percentage has risen since 1976 when four percent of all students enrolled in college were Hispanic (NCES, 1998). However, most of the 1995 Hispanic college enrollees attended community colleges rather than four-year institutions (NCES, 1998). And, in 1997 only 11% of Hispanics between the ages of 25-29 completed a four-year bachelor's degree, whereas, 35% of the general population between the ages of 25-29 completed a four-year bachelor's degree (NCES, 1998). Despite the statistics, the participants in this study are either attending or planning to attend college. However, a majority of these participants are or will attend a two-year college. Those students attending a two-year program have plans to eventually attend a traditional four-year program. Some of the participants always planned on going to college but they feel that Mi Carrera really supported them and assisted them in the process of finding scholarships and going through the admission procedures. And Mi Carrera made the importance of attending college clear.

The next area to examine in relation to the literature is school resources. "The link between education and income has long been established, as has the link between education and upward mobility" (Polinard, J. L., & Wrinkle, R. D., 1995, p.463). In a study conducted by Polinard & Wrinkle, they found that Hispanic students perform better when revenue per pupil is high and minority teachers provide instruction. Furthermore, they found that community role models having at least a high school diploma added to

the achievement of Hispanic students. The participants in this study reported finding more role models at Mi Carrera than they did in their high schools. And they reported attending old high schools that were run down with old books and materials to learn from. They felt this was an academic disadvantage because they were not being taught about technology or being prepared for college as other students might be in wealthier school districts. This worried Sophia and she felt that the Denver Public School District (DPS) was a poorer school district that was not preparing students for college, but how could they? They didn't have the resources in comparison to other school districts in Colorado. She visited other schools in Colorado and she witnessed these schools having more than DPS. She claims that

Even the technology that was in [these other schools'] . . . classroom was different; their materials, their books have a lot to do with it . . . I've heard people saying that it's the parents that don't help or are not involved. A lot of teachers would say that. Like, wow what could my parent do? Do you want my low-income, minority mother to come, give you, donate you \$50,000 dollars for books. Is that what you want? So, how much does a parent...I know a parent plays a lot . . . has a big role in a student's education. But also the quality of schooling that you're getting, the quality of education [plays a big role], which I feel was not nearly as much as I should have in order for myself to get into college.... And I blame myself also because I don't have the study habits that I should have.

There are many challenges in a district with lower economic funding compared to districts that have more funding per pupil.

Additionally, the participants felt that their parents played an important role in their education. Yet, they recognized that there were communication, and cultural gaps between the schools and parents. The literature addresses these factors by showing barriers to parent involvement in the schools, especially by the time their children enter middle and high school. The barriers may come from varying views such as: student's attitudes--wanting independence from parents; school administrators who believe that parent involvement at the middle school age level is not as necessary as when students were younger; or parents may feel alienated from the impersonal structure of schools (Chavkin, N., 1995). Additionally, parents who are culturally different and speak a language other than English may find it most difficult to connect to the school (Plata, 1989). Theme 2 of this study, as explained above, portrays the common experiences of the participants and it focuses on parental academic motivation both directly and indirectly. Parents directly motivated the participants by expecting them to do their best in school; and some of the parents dealt directly with teachers by communicating with them about their child's performance. Parents indirectly motivated the participants by modeling difficulties that come with manual labor. Most of the participants could not rely on their parents for homework assistance. And this had to do with their parents' lack of education, because all but two of the participants were the first in their immediate and extended families to graduate from high school. Romo (1983) asserts that parents may feel unable to assist their children with basic academic skills because they are inadequate in these areas and this hinders participation in school-related issues.

The last factor to examine in the literature as it relates to this study is the Latina student. In the study, *Si, Se Puede!/Yes, We Can!*, Angela Ginorio and Michelle Huston

(2001) reveal that graduation rates for Latina girls are the lowest of any other racial or ethnic group and they are under enrolled in Advanced Placement courses and classes for gifted students. Despite these limitations, the Latinas that are achieving have strong sense of confidence because they have a sense of identity. "Students must have self-confidence or a sense of 'efficacy' to implement the options they see for themselves in the future" (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, p. 39). Family, school, peers and others are important to the process of building Latina self-efficacy and confidence. Participants in this study explained their self-determined attitudes about their futures. The fact that they have a belief in their future is tremendous because many minority girls receive the least amount of attention in the classroom (Sadker & Sadker, 1994) and they may not have high academic aspirations. The participants in this study mention that learning gave them hope for their future. They were influenced by some role models, parents concerned with their education, participating in school programs that encouraged their advancement to higher education, having some teachers or counselors provide some guidance, and participating in Mi Carrera where they were taught many lessons such as believing in the importance of making a difference in society.

Unfortunately, stereotypes of Hispanic girls are based on being submissive underachievers, and family, school, and the media often reinforce these stereotypes. Negative stereotypes of Latina gender-role attitudes in U.S. society, schools, and Latino families often contribute to poor educational performance by Latinas (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Fortunately, the participants in this study performed beyond such stereotypes and they learned about such negative stereotypes hindering their academic performance. The participants claimed that Mi Carrera had a great role in teaching about such stereotypes

and the discussions at the meetings allowed participants to set high goals of achievement that go beyond such stereotypes.

Not only did Mi Carrera provide insight about cultural barriers Latina women encounter, but also it had a great impact on students' awareness about their lives, gender, and future achievement. The director and staff of the program served as role models who run counter to Latina stereotypes for the participants. Role modeling that occurs between mentors and Latina students is extremely important (Marsigalia and Holleran, 1999). Along with the importance of role modeling is student motivation, parental expectations, and experiences in and out of school, all of which influence student achievement (Kahle, 1982). Mi Carrera served as a program outside of the school that was a home away from home. The literature stresses that students learn most effectively in a classroom where the teacher loves them and treats them like family similar to a home environment (Tinkunoff, cited in Darder, Torres, & Gutierrez, 1997). Many of the participants claimed that the director was like a mom and that they felt at home at Mi Carrera.

The literature also promotes the importance of high schools collaborating with institutions of higher education. Such collaborations can expose female Hispanic students to glimpses of the college experience and can generate role models that inspire young female minorities for future educational pursuits (Weiler, 1997). Of the six participants in this study, two were active in high schools that promoted a collaborative higher education program. The two participants felt that their program allowed them to have a glimpse of college courses and the college environment before attending college. They were grateful for belonging to such a program because they felt that it assisted them in maintaining their goal of entering college.

Overall, the academic research displays the complexities that a Latina student must overcome in order to succeed in high school and achieve to higher education.

Indeed the six students in this study are tenacious and are determined to persevere despite lack of parental assistance, teacher and counselor guidance, and other obstacles they encounter. They are climbing large mountains but they are doing it knowing that they can trust in themselves and in their teachings from Mi Carrera.

Personal Perspective: A Critique

My interest and commitment to this study resulted in part from personal experience as a Latina student. I know that I am biased as a Latina educator who desires to see more Latinas graduate from high school and go on to obtain college degrees. By reflecting on my experiences, I perceive similarities between participants in this study and myself. I, too, attended a Denver Public school and experienced some racism and prejudice from some counselors and teachers. I hoped to find that the young women in this study had a vastly different experience than my own. They have grown up in a different era, and I was hopeful that teachers and counselors were trained with more multiculturalism and diversity in general, and knowledge about Latinas in particular. Another similarity I experienced was encouragement by my parents to pursue my education; they desired a better life for me than they experienced.

In examining the research about Latinas, I believe it is imperative that this population of students be held to high standards. They are intelligent and can offer much to this society. Moreover, teachers, counselors and administrators must be taught about the importance of this population because they can have a profound positive effect on a child's achievements.

Additionally, in relation to trustworthiness and credibility of the study, the analytical framework of the study was grounded in the words and reflections that portray the phenomenon of the participants' experiences. The researcher followed Creswell's (1991) guidelines of trustworthiness as outlined in chapter 3. At the same time, the researcher recognizes that qualitative research blends subjectivity and objectivity, creating a study that "constitutes a perspective rather than truth, [which] is closely related to the issue of objectivity (Patton, 1990, p. 482).

Furthermore, in analyzing this study, it is important to reflect upon some of the critical assessments of the study. There are four areas to address: 1) interview appointments not attended by students, 2) difficult workload of the director hindering the interview process, 3) participant attitude about the recent direction of the program, and 4) the leadership of the program. First, setting up the interviews for this project was difficult at times because the program director was unable to contact students, or students did not respond to her phone messages about the study. And when appointments were made, some of the students did not attend the interview meeting. This was frustrating to the researcher because she traveled two hours round trip to and from Denver and the time commitment was not being honored. Yet, discovering why some participants missed appointments provided insight into and clarity about their complex lives. They were caring for family members, visiting ill grandparents, experiencing transportation problems, or experiencing conflicts with work schedules. Such difficulties confirm the perceived common problems theme as discussed above.

Secondly, the director's workload made it difficult to communicate. The lack of communication delayed the progress of interview appointments. The researcher

acknowledged that Mi Carrera is a non-profit organization operating on a limited budget. The limited budget impacted the amount of staff hired in Mi Carrera. In the last few years, there have been one or two other staff members assisting the director in the operations of the program. However, the assistants were hired in part-time, seasonal positions. This meant that the director had limited resources and her responsibilities were numerous.

Thirdly, one participant in the study felt Mi Carrera was geared toward the middle school level and not her age group because there were fewer high school students in the program. However, this participant declared that she was thankful to be part of this program and learned valuable lessons and insights. The researcher asked the director why there was a limited amount of Latina high school participants. The director explained that the program has fluctuating high school student participation and the program was experiencing a decline in Latina high school involvement in the past year. The director believed it had much to do with how the young women experience growth and that some of the high school students may dropout of the program as they experience influential relationships with males. Or they have too many outside responsibilities such as working to contribute financially to their family. And sometimes they may experience a rebellious stage, and they no longer desire to be perceived as a “studious, responsible” person and they change their image by associating with friends engaging in bad habits such as drugs. Such influences impacting the lives of young women in lower socio-economic backgrounds provide barriers to their education.

Finally, the director had tremendous leadership skills in leading these young women toward academic and personal achievement. The director impacted the lives of

the young women in this study in different degrees. Some of the young women were very close to the director and perceived her as a second mother. On the other hand, some did not spend ample time in the program to create a strong bond with the director. Yet, all of the participants had positive interactions with the director. The program was in large part successful due to the director's leadership. What happens to a program like this if it falls under poor leadership? When the participant interviews were coming to a close, Mi Carrera was undergoing changes. The director resigned and whoever fills her position has an exceptional role to fulfill because this program was successful in large part due to her leadership.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study yielded insight into the experiences of six young women who participated in Mi Carrera. However, unanswered questions remain and lend opportunities for potential study. The researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. Conduct more research on first generation female students in high achieving high school academic programs that are developed in collaboration with higher education institutions. The students found that their parents motivated them directly and indirectly. The lack of educational achievement by their families, and the financial and social repercussions of the lack of economic opportunity, showed to be a strong motivator to pursuing their education. Further research could help explore whether students having familial educational and economic barriers desire to succeed to higher levels of academic achievement.

2. Since there appears to be a cultural gap between some of the participants and their teachers, it would be useful to study teacher perceptions of their Latina students. Further research could explore misunderstandings that may occur between Latina students and teachers.
3. Also, research could be conducted in schools with a high number of Hispanic teachers and counselors. A study such as this would examine how Latina students respond to more Hispanic role models in their lives, and if these role models make a difference in their learning and achievement beyond high school.
4. There is a need for more research on young women from other ethnic backgrounds who participate in specific ethnic high school programs that promote educational and professional achievement, and interpersonal and life skills. This research would promote more understanding about student success in relation to female achievement and college advancement.
5. A final study could examine if there are programs that are gender specific for Hispanic males promoting education through high school graduation, corresponding to higher education and personal and professional skill achievement. Such a study may provide insight about how gender specific programs make a difference for students from Hispanic backgrounds.

Conclusions

The students in this study have much to be proud of because they have gone against the odds by excelling in high school and attending or planning to attend college. Earning a higher education degree should not be so difficult for people from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Yet, the literature in this study shows the many barriers and obstacles Latinas from low socio-economic backgrounds, whose parents do not have high school diplomas (let alone college degrees), have to endure and overcome in order to graduate from high school and attend colleges or universities of higher education. The parents of these participants do not all speak English, yet they had a strong role in the success of their daughter's academic pursuits. They supported their daughters' motivation to achieve academically. The participants in this study attended high schools with few resources and they went beyond the stereotypes of Latina students in this country.

Based on the literature, the stereotypes and discrimination that Latino students encounter, makes it difficult to advance academically (Ogbu, 1987). Latinos must utilize more survival strategies to attempt to participate educationally, economically, and socially in society. What these participants teach us in this study is that Mi Carrera taught the value of understanding stereotypes, barriers, and how their socio-economic standing influences them in their everyday lives. The participants in this study understand that people in their culture struggle to survive. Yet, Sophia, Luna, Angel, Rosita, Adrianna, and Lucy have a strong sense of self and they believe that their lives are testaments that go beyond survival, and Mi Carrera fostered such beliefs. I conclude that a strong sense of self, will power, undeniable strength, confidence, skills, beliefs, and

hope for optimistic futures through perseverance to achieve despite their economic standings in society are invaluable for the advancement of Latina students

Academic achievement benefits Latina students, and benefits our society as a whole, because a populous with more education may contribute to the economics, politics, and educational base that further a more conscious society and promote engaged responsibility. The young women in this study are achievers, who have created success in their lives. This study has shown that Mi Carrera offered a second home for these students. Mi Carrera is a place that promotes Latina pride through a strong sense of self, educational advancement, and hope for the future of the participants of this program. I believe that many other young Latina women deserve an opportunity to participate in a program like Mi Carrera in order to learn important skills that they will use for the rest of their lives. I conclude that more programs like Mi Carrera need to be created for Latina students because the experience the participants had in Mi Carrera made a difference in their lives according to this study. Mi Carrera provided opportunities for support, fun, challenges, learning, and community for young women to participate in after school.

Yet, Mi Carrera is a non-profit organization operating on a limited budget. If more money were funneled into Mi Carrera, perhaps, more young women would find assistance in their educational path. And Mi Carrera could extend its staffing to include more full time professional positions for Latinas. This would foster an even greater depth of participation and role modeling within the program.

If programs like Mi Carrera are not in place, then schools must have teachers, counselors, and principals who believe in Latina student potential, ability, variety of learning styles, and success. As cited in the literature, there is a cultural gap between

Latina students and teachers. Teachers need to be educated about the cultural differences that their Latina students bring to their classrooms. These differences in language, culture, learning styles and gender should be celebrated and exulted so that the Latina students feel safe in the classroom and not ridiculed, discriminated against or stereotyped. And higher education programs need to attract more Hispanics to the education field so that there are more role models in the classrooms. Collaborative programs between high schools and colleges could foster interest in teaching as a field of study for Latino students to participate in and pursue. And schools need to value the history, heritage, and struggles that the Hispanic people have faced in the United States. If more schools used curricula that displayed the history, heritage, and struggles of Latino people, more Latino students would find education has commonalities and relevance to their lives. Additionally, equitable funding must be established so that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are provided with similar learning opportunities that other students receive. More money and resources are needed in schools that have populations of children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Promoting greater resources in an equitable manner for all students to learn, will promote greater opportunities for more academic advancement for all students, especially Latinos.

Mi Carrera is a program that is making a difference in the lives of young Hispanic females. The participants in this study experienced learning a number of skills in Mi Carrera through the promotion of cultural pride, role modeling, understanding of gender roles in society and healthy ways of living. Participants felt that the program offered an abundance of services and strategies for Latinas to learn, grow, feel respect for self and respect for others. The participants felt that the program taught them to believe in the

future of their dreams. The staff at Mi Carrera held the participants accountable for their learning and such accountability stretched participants to become well rounded in their lives.

The lessons learned from this study are evident. Latina students need to be taught about their culture, gender, hope for their future and dreams, and life skills so that they feel secure enough in themselves to take responsibility and desire to make a difference in society. Mi Carrera was a place the girls could grow, feel accepted, and they learned why their educational advancements provide more life opportunities. Latinas face incredible obstacles in life, yet participants in this study were taught that education, having cultural pride and self-esteem will provide pathways to success.

Every student deserves the very best this society can offer. The young women in this study provide insight to their experience and they show that they have climbed mountains to create success and achievement in their lives. They validate the literature and they provide insights about how Latinas are educated today. Clearly, Mi Carrera has provided safety by building academic, cultural, and personal strength within members so that participants may ascend to the top of peaks with guidance to forge through their education.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A
CONSENT FORM

COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

TITLE OF PROJECT: "Experiences of Latina Students in the Outreach Program, Mi Carrera"

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Robert W. Richburg, Ph.D.

NAME OF CO-INVESTIGATOR: Antonette M. Aragon

CONTACT NAME AND PHONE NUMBER FOR QUESTIONS/PROBLEMS: Antonette M. Aragon, (970) 482-4787 (home)

PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH:

This research is an attempt to develop an understanding of the experiences as related to the academic achievement of Hispanic female students who are part of the Mi Carrera Program. Latina females from the Mi Carrera Program, which is an outreach program in Denver at the Mi Casa Resource Center for Women, are asked to participate in personal interviews, as well as focus group interviews.

PROCEDURES/METHODS TO BE USED:

You have been asked to participate in a research study as one of twelve participants. Data for this research will be gathered through personal interviews and focus group interviews. Each participant will be asked to participate in a personal interview and a focus group interview. As a participant, you will be asked to answer questions about your experience in Mi Carrera and how you perceive this program in your life.

The co-investigator will be in contact with the Program Manager, Susan Medina, of Mi Carrera to identify you as a participant of this study. Once you have been identified, the first meeting time with you will be arranged to inform you about the research project. This meeting will be brief and will take about 30 minutes. At this first meeting, you will be requested to schedule a meeting with the co-investigator for a personal interview and a consent form will be explained and given to you requesting your signature and phone number. The consent form must then be given to your parents to sign and return in order to participate in the study. You may be contacted by phone for confirmation of all interviews. The following will be asked of you:

1. Meet with the co-investigator for a personal interview that will take about 70 minutes. After this meeting, you will be asked to schedule for the next interview, which is a focus interview.
2. Meet with the co-investigator and a small focus interview with six other participants in the study. The focus interview will take about 90 minutes.
3. You will only be contacted for one more personal interview if there are any questions concerning the information from either the first personal interview or the focus group interview.

All interviews will take place at the Mi Casa Resource Center where the regular Mi Carrera meetings take place. You will be asked to sit across from the co-investigator during the interview and the co-investigator will take notes during the interview. You will also be asked to

Page 1 of 3 Subject initials _____ Date _____

answer the questions to the best of your ability, openly, honestly, and in detail. It is expected that you will meet with the co-investigator at least two times and up to a third meeting if clarification is needed after the personal and focus interview is conducted. It is hoped that these meetings will be conducted in no more than a six-week time frame.

During the interview, it is necessary to audiotape the conversation between you and the co-investigator. The audiotaped conversation may assist in recalling the accurate details, statements and answers made during the interview. Upon completion of the interview, the audiotaped conversation will be transcribed. The principal investigator and the co-investigator will be the only two people who hear or have access to the audiotaped information. After the study is completed, the audiotapes and transcriptions will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the office of the principal investigator for three years, should this research ever be audited.

RISKS INHERENT IN THE PROCEDURES:

The only known risk to participants in this study may occur as a result of talking about sensitive, personal experiences in regard to participation in the Mi Carrera program. Participants in the focus group will be directed to respect the group process by agreeing to confidentiality regarding all comments made during the interview. Although no references to individuals will be used in the final report, confidentiality may be guaranteed only to the degree participants respect this direction.

It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

BENEFITS:

This study is important to add to the academic literature. A copy of the completed study will be given to Mi Carrera.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The confidentiality of this study is of utmost importance, and safeguards to protect the participants' identity, age, or any other information collected will be taken. Any personal information obtained or recorded in connection with this study will be kept confidential. The only persons viewing the information collected from the participants will be the principal and co-investigators. The audiotaped information will be destroyed three years following completion of the study. Any discussion of data from the participants will be in the context of the study.

Participants in the focus group will be directed to respect the group process by agreeing to confidentiality regarding all comments made during the interview. Although no reference to individuals will be used in the final report, confidentiality can be guaranteed only to the degree participants respect this direction.

LIABILITY:

The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury. Questions about subjects' rights may be directed to Celia S. Walker at (970) 491-1563.

Page 2 of 3 Subject initials _____ Date _____

PARTICIPATION:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 3 pages.

Participant name (printed)

Participant signature

Date

Participant phone number

Witness to signature (project staff)

Date

PARENTAL SIGNATURE FOR MINOR

As parent or guardian you authorize _____ (print name) to become a participant for the described research. You are satisfied that proper precautions will be observed in this study.

Minor's date of birth

Parent/Guardian name (printed)

Parent/Guardian signature

Date

Page 3 of 3 Subject initials _____ Date _____

Appendix B

SCRIPT FOR INFORMATIONAL MEETING

The script for the informational meeting is as follows:

- I. Hello! Welcome to this informational meeting regarding this research project that involves you.
- II. My name is Antonette Aragon and I look forward to talking with you in the next few weeks.
- III. I would like to inform you about my expectations of you should you decide to participate in this study.
 - A. First, I will need to meet with you for an individual interview that may last about 70 minutes. Then you will be asked to meet in a group interview that may last about 90 minutes. I may also need to meet one more time with you if I have additional questions of you. Are all of you available to meet with me at least 3 times in the next few weeks?

If you are not available, then I completely understand and we will ask someone else to participate. If you know at this time that you cannot commit to meeting three times for these interviews, please raise your hands. Those of you who are unable to participate may be excused from this meeting and thank you for your consideration.
 - B. Second, all information that you tell me in the interview is confidential. I will not use your names in order to protect your privacy. When the research project is completed, you may recognize the information you provide to me from the interviews, but made-up names will be used to reference your information. I must do this to protect your privacy—it is the law.
 - C. Are there any questions? [Answers to questions will be provided].

If you ever have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Since I am only here on the days that I am conducting these interviews, you can always ask the Project Manager, Susan Medina, and she will let me know what your questions are. I will then be sure to let her know the answers to your questions and she will contact you with this information.
- IV. Now at this time, I would like to review the consent form with you aloud. After we have gone over the consent form, I will ask that you sign the consent form and then take it home to your parents to sign.
 - A. This consent form must be signed and returned to Susan Medina, the Project Manager, by tomorrow. Can all of you stop by and drop this off to Susan tomorrow? It is very important that she receive this permission form before your first interview.
 - B. Is there anyone who is unable to drop this form off with Susan tomorrow? Please raise your hand and we will arrange for your interview to be scheduled after you return the form.
- V. Finally, I would like to ask each one of you if you could schedule with me for your first interview. Please make a line and I will ask you one at a time to let me know if the specific date and time will work for your schedule to meet with me for the first interview. Remember, this interview may last about 70 minutes.
- VI. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to meeting with you for our first interview. Remember, if you should have any questions, please contact Susan Medina and she will let me know your question so that I may answer it. Have a great day!

Appendix C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Information for students to be interviewed: The purpose of this interview is to find out how well you think your experience in Mi Carrera influences you. I am interested in finding out how Hispanic females from Denver experience being a part of the Mi Carrera program. I also want to find out common experiences you and your peers have by participating in this program. I need your permission to interview you in this research project. I want you to understand that you have the right not to answer any question you don't want to answer, and to stop the interview at any time. Do you understand? May I have your permission to continue with this interview?

Background Information (These questions will be asked during the 1st personal interview):

1. What is your name?
2. What is your age and grade?
3. What is your cultural background?
4. Tell me about your family—how many children are there and are you the oldest, youngest, middle, etc? How many languages are spoken at home? What are your parents' professions?

Interview Questions for High School Participants:

1. How do you think your identity as an Hispanic female influences your academic achievement?
- 2). How do you think Mi Carrera influences your scholastic achievement?
- 3). How do you think about your educational achievement? What do you value about your education?
- 4). How do you envision yourself in school? How do you envision yourself in your future?
- 5). How is Mi Carrera different than your general high school experience? What makes it different and why?
- 6). How does being in Mi Carrera help you compared to your experience in high school?

Interview Questions for College Participants:

1. How do you think your identity as an Hispanic female influences your academic achievement?
- 2). When looking back at your high school career, how do you think Mi Carrera influenced your scholastic achievement?
- 3). How do you think about your educational achievement? What do you value about your education, especially as you look back on your high school experience?
- 4). How did you envision yourself in high school? How do you envision yourself in your future?
- 5). How was Mi Carrera different than your general high school experience? What made it different and why?
- 6). How did being in Mi Carrera help you compared to your experience in high school?
- 7). What did it mean to you when you were in high school and you decided to go to college?

Focus Interview Questions:

- 1). Explain if you believe there are common problems you faced as high school students?
- 2). What is the most important skill Mi Carrera taught you and why?