

DISSERTATION

LATINAS: LIFE HISTORIES AND THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SUCCESS

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE DISSERTATION PREPARED
UNDER OUR SUPERVISION BY LORETTA E. GALLEGOS ENTITLED LATINAS:
LIFE HISTORIES AND THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SUCCESS BE
ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING IN PART REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY.

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

LATINAS: LIFE HISTORIES AND THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE SUCCESS

This ethnographic study identifies the factors and actions that influence the success of Latinas born and raised in the United States and living in the Rocky Mountain Region. In the context of this study, Latina is a nomenclature used interchangeably with Chicana, Hispanic, and Mexican-American. The participants have achieved advanced degrees and are in positions of leadership. They are first generation college graduates who come from working class families.

An emancipatory paradigm, a parallel concept to qualitative design, is the overall approach to this study which addresses social oppression at any level of occurrence. Participants' experiences are relayed through narrative life histories and further displayed using within-case analysis and cross-case analysis to present the research findings and themes.

The foremost themes that emerged from this study were identified as career, family, economic, and educational systems, ethnic identity, and resiliency. Within each of these major themes are numerous support themes that collectively illustrate the factors that contribute or hinder the advancement of Latinas. The support themes within the concept of career are leadership style, barriers to career, career mentors, and entrepreneurship. The support themes within the concept of the family system are the family unit, traditions, work ethic, and family resiliency. The support themes within the

concept of the economic system are the issues surrounding poverty and class division. The educational system illustrated multiple support themes within parental influence, the educational environment in the elementary, secondary, and college experiences, barriers to education, and mentors in education. The support themes within the concept of ethnic identity presented issues in childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and defining community. The support themes within the concept of resiliency produced information on significant life events, personality traits, and personal work ethic. The findings suggest evidence that strong family support and positive ethnic identity are among the key factors that attributes to the success of Latinas.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my children, Rosendo, Elissa, Miguel, Elianna, and Caleb. Throughout the years you have patiently observed my progress through higher education and have been there to help me celebrate a bachelor, master's, and now a doctorate degree. I too, have been present to watch you graduate from high school and insisted that you each participate in your own college graduation ceremonies. Some of the ceremonies are yet to come as I hope you will move on to acquiring advanced degrees. In everything you do, celebrate your accomplishments, celebrate love, and celebrate the gift of life. My hope is to inspire you to reach beyond your dream and know in your hearts that nothing is impossible.

I trust that this work will also give you a sense of pride in your cultural roots. Take pride in your Latino heritage and recognize that this heritage is a badge of honor. Hold fast to the strength of family, believe in your own ability make your dreams a reality, and acknowledge the courage instilled in you each day by a Higher Power.

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CHAPTER I: FRAMING THE STUDY

Overview

This study examines the life histories of 11 Latinas. I have used an emancipatory paradigm with an ethnographic approach to study their journeys through life from family background, to events in childhood, adolescence, and on to adulthood culminating with their current careers as successful, accomplished women. I conducted in-depth interviews with these women in an effort to identify the factors that influence success. As I traveled with them on their respective life's journey, I recognized social injustices and obstacles to education and career advancement that also are documented throughout the study.

In the context of this study Latina is a nomenclature used interchangeably with Chicana, Hispanic, and Mexican-American. I have chosen to use the term Latina when writing about myself or when presenting my thoughts about the study; on occasion the term is used by the study participants' or by a referenced author. When the terms Chicana, Hispanic, or Mexican-American are presented, the term is used by the voice of the person speaking or is a term that a referenced author has selected.

In addition to documenting the lives of these amazing women I have also looked inward and reflected upon my own journey; thus, this study has also become a process of self-discovery. As a member of this cultural sharing group, I present within this work an autoethnography which is a way to depict the events in my life to generate an

understanding for the reader that perhaps traditional research reports cannot (Ellis & Bochner, 1996). You will find my autoethnography in Chapter II: *Mi Cuento y Testimonio* (My Story and Testimony). Documenting my journey is a way of connecting my story to the stories of my participants and hopefully giving the reader a deeper understanding of the multilayered lives of Latinas.

To adequately set the framework for the study it is important to explain that the review of literature is woven throughout the study as opposed to concentrated in one chapter. In addition, this first chapter also includes the methodology framework which would traditionally be a separate chapter in some qualitative studies.

Significance of the Study

When women won the right to vote in 1920, many believed the struggle for women's rights was over. By the 1960s social and economic conditions had helped to expand the role of women out of the home and into the factories and offices. Also at the beginning of the 1960s a series of social trends such as society's acceptance of divorce, sexual freedom, and society's acceptance of equal opportunity for women and minorities began which moved Anglo women into managerial, professional, technical, and leadership roles that had been almost exclusively Euro-American male dominated (Carr-Ruffino, 1996). Thus, the beneficiaries of the women's movement have been middle-class Anglo women. They founded and ultimately led the movement, and it reflected their needs, concerns, and biases. In the process of establishing goals and priorities, the unique needs and concerns of minority women were not taken into account (Mirande & Enriquez, 1979).

The 1960s also gave rise to racial-ethnic movements across the country. Our country witnessed the Civil Rights Movement which brought to the forefront of America's conscious the gross injustices suffered by this country's Black citizens. Likewise the Chicano Movement became a dynamic force for social change (Blea, 1988). Chicanos knew that they were suffering from discrimination and racism.

The major goal of the Chicano Movement was to end the oppression common to all Chicanos, but in fact it too focused on male issues and ignored the problems of women. Mirande and Enriquez (1979) state that during the time of the Chicano Movement, women within the movement subordinated their needs to the good of the entire group. Chicanas believed that some semblance of equality had to be achieved for their people as a whole before female concerns could be voiced. Internal division within the Chicano Movement would be taken by the larger society as a sign of weakness or a lack of solidarity. The end result of this subordinate role for Chicanas resulted in benign neglect at the hands of their Anglo sisters as well as their oppressed brothers (Mirande & Enriquez, 1979, p.2).

I acknowledge and am ever so grateful for the road paved toward equality by my Anglo sisters. Furthermore, I honor and respect the mighty Chicano warriors who have left their footprint on the landscape of social justice: a footprint by which we Latinas can and must use as a footstep to the place where our own efforts can mark the landscape in the advancement of social justice and positive change for all Latinas. We Latinas are following the path of those who have traveled before us but the path is often obscured. Perhaps we must reinvent ourselves and create a new path to equity and ultimately to social justice.

The lack of equity is evident when I study, and discover that Latinas have not moved into managerial, professional, technical, and leadership roles at the same rate as all women (26 % Hispanic women, 36 % all women), or that Latinas are more likely to work in service occupations that offer lower than average wages (26 % Hispanic women, 18 % all women) (Census, 2000). Also, more Latinas are employed in low-wage service jobs than women in any other racial or ethnic group (U.S. Department of Labor, January 2000).

As I review information that describes the status of Latinas in the United States, I am overcome with emotion. The most powerful emotions are sadness and resentment coupled with an urgency to bring to the forefront of social consciousness the injustice experienced by Latinas. As I document the life histories of the women in my study, I not only search for the factors that contribute to their success, but I reveal the injustices they have experienced along their journey to success. I am saddened because I, as a member of this cultural sharing group, have first hand knowledge of the barriers and oppressive elements of the social, economic, political, and educational systems within which the Latina must maneuver on her journey to success.

The social, economic, political, and educational systems as identified by Mirande and Enriquez (1979) have always been controlled by White males. This control has led to the collective oppression of ethnic minorities and women that has resulted in their exclusion from prestigious, rewarding, and powerful occupations in the private and public sector. In 1979, Mirande and Enriquez observed the Chicana as experiencing a three-fold oppression: as an ethnic minority, as a woman, and through internal oppression

within her own culture. More than 25 years have passed since they made this observation, and Latinas today still face these same obstacles.

Latinas are one of the fastest growing population groups in the nation. In 1990 there were 7.0 million Latinas age 16 and older in the United States and 11 million by the end of 1999. Of the 64.9 million women in the civilian labor force in 1999, 6.1 million (9%) were of Hispanic origin. Projections for the year 2008 predict Hispanic origin women will represent 12 % of the female labor force (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2000).

A report released by the United States Census Bureau in December 2004, *We the People: Hispanics in the United States* revealed some disheartening data about the status of Hispanics acquired from the 2000 Census. In 2000, the median age for Hispanics was 25.0 years, compared with 35.4 years for the total population. Over one third of the Hispanic population was younger than 18 years, compared with approximately one-fourth of the total population. These disheartening data are not that the Hispanic population is younger than the general population, but that Hispanics under 18 years of age are more likely to live in poverty.

In 2000 over half of the Hispanic population aged 25 and over (52 %) had at least a high school diploma, and approximately 1 in 10 had earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Compared with the total population, Hispanics were less likely to have completed at least high school or college. Educational attainment is critical for the success of Latinos as it has a direct and positive impact on employment, earnings, investments, and savings.

As women crossed the threshold into the 21st Century, they are still paid 78 cents to every dollar earned by a White male. This figure, however, compares a White female to a White male. A Latina earns far less for comparable work. She earns 55 cents to every dollar earned by a White male. Latinas earn the lowest wage of any ethnic group at any level of education whether they have a high school diploma or a Ph.D. (U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau, 2000).

Research Purpose

The purpose of this ethnographic study was to understand the factors and behaviors that influence the success of Latinas in achieving educational and socioeconomic goals. Their stories illustrate how they have overcome obstacles and social injustices, and have arrived at a place of self-actualization. I describe self-actualization as the achievement of one's full potential through creativity, independence, spontaneity, and a grasp of the real world. It is within this description of self-actualization that I recognize these women to be successful. I use the voices of this culture sharing group, blended with my voice to describe the fundamental nature of Latina and to create a lens by which the elements of family, education, ethnic identity, spirituality, resiliency, and social equality are viewed.

Definitions of Terms

I have presented an explanation of terms that I believe to be important to facilitate understanding of this study. Throughout this document terms will be encountered that appear synonymous with one another. The terms Chicana, Latina, Hispanic, and Mexican-American are often used interchangeably. I have selected to use the

nomenclature Latina when I speak in my voice, and it is a categorization I have chosen for self-identify. When the other classifications appear throughout the document, I am referencing the chosen nomenclature of the participant or the referenced authors. The terms that I felt needed clarification follow in alphabetical order:

Chicana(o) – a term rooted in the Chicano movement of the Southwest during the 1960s and is a political, ideological term describing a group of people with shared cultural characteristics and shared political interpretations of their experience (Blea, 1992, p.xi). During the 1960s a group of Mexican-American students at Texas A&M began calling themselves *Chicano(a)s* as a badge of pride. The moniker became a way for young people to connect culturally with the Mexican homeland in much the same way that the change from *Negro* to *Black* had affected the civil rights movement in the South (Gonzales, 2000, p. 105).

Cuento – a story or tale.

El Valle – a region in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico that became known as the San Luis Valley (McConnell Simmons, 1999).

Hispanic – a term used by the federal government to define a person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race. Thus, Hispanics may be of any race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). The terms Latino(a) and Hispanic are often used interchangeable. Hispanic is a term imposed by those outside the culture to define those within the culture.

Stavans (1995) states that Hispanic is preferred by conservatives when the talk is demographic, education, urban development, drugs, and health. He further states that after years in circulation, it has become a weapon, a stereotyping machine. It is

synonymous with drug addict, criminal, prison inmate, and out-of-wedlock family.

Latino has become the option, a sign of rebellion, the choice of intellectuals and artists, because it emerges from within this ethnic group and because its etymology simultaneously denounces Anglo and Iberian oppression (p.26).

Latina(o) - is a term used to describe people from Spanish speaking countries of the Americas. *Latina/o* is an overarching term intended to include many aspects of cultural and linguistic identity. A Latina may be an immigrant or someone born in the United States; may have fair-skin or dark-skin; may be a professional or a day laborer; may speak Spanish, English, be bilingual or not speak Spanish at all; may be Catholic, Jewish, Pentecostal, Mormon, Quaker or agnostic. This term is a unifying term meant to include all people who share a common Latin American ancestry (Carr-Ruffino, 1996). *Latina(o)* is a self-selected term.

Mestiza(o) – refers to people of combined European (Spaniards) and American Indian ancestry (Gonzales, 2000; Stavans, 1995).

Mexican-American – Americans of Mexican origin who make up the largest group of Hispanics in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Mosaic – this is a term I use in the study to denote an amalgamation of Latinas each having her distinct cultural/ethnic identity but collectively making up the fundamental nature of Latina. In other words, the Latina mosaic is the assortment of values, ideas, experiences, histories, and dreams that collectively describe this culture sharing group.

Testimonio – testimony, statement; is a term often seen as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells

the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 13).

Theoretical Framework

An emancipatory paradigm is the overall approach to this study. This approach is seen as a parallel concept to qualitative research that directly addresses the politics in research by confronting social oppression at whatever levels it occurs (Mertens, 1998). Within this paradigm there are multiple realities shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender, and spiritual values. An interactive link has been established between the participants and me where knowledge has become socially and historically situated.

The tradition of inquiry is a *critical ethnography*, a style of discourse and analysis embedded within conventional ethnography that attempts to aid emancipatory goals, negate repressive influences, raise consciousness, and invoke a call to action that potentially will lead to social change (Creswell, 1994). Thomas (1993) states:

Critical ethnography is a type of reflection that examines culture, knowledge, and action. It expands our horizon for choice and widens our experiential capacity to see, hear, and feel. It deepens and sharpens ethical commitments by forcing us to develop and act upon value commitments in the context of political agendas. Critical ethnography is the process of describing, analyzing, and opening to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centers and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain (p.2).

Habermas (1971) states that:

Critical ethnography directs attention to symbols of oppression by shifting and contrasting cultural images in ways that reveal subtle qualities of social control. The critical figure of speech also provides hints for reconceptualizing behavior, values, or social institutions into meanings from which to *read off* deeper structural characteristics such as ideology, power, domination, and structural logic (p.20).

Carspecken (1996) argues that issues of power and inequality are unavoidably infused in social research of any type and at any stage. He also argues that highly value driven researchers most often feel compelled to conduct research as a way of bettering the oppressed and downtrodden.

I attest Carspecken's (1996) argument with the acknowledgement that I have felt extreme passion toward my research because in my worldview I see Latinas as women oppressed and subjugated for many generations. Thomas (1993) suggests that a would-be critical researcher begin developing an appreciation of eclecticism. Although I certainly consider myself a neophyte in the area of critical ethnography, I concede that my study is eclectic through the utilization of various methods (Thomas, 1993). Ethnographic research requires attentive observation, empathetic listening, and courageous analysis (Ely, 1991, p. 41).

In the process of conducting this study I realized that I had become a research subject myself. As a member of this cultural sharing group I went through a process of self-reflection, searching for the things in my life that might find similarity or contrast to the life journeys of the participants. I present my life journey, my autoethnography, in Chapter II: *Mi Cuento y Testimonio* (My Story and Testimony).

I have conveyed the experiences of my participants through narrative life histories, also referred to as biographical narratives that allowed me to study their major life events through in-depth case-by-case, also referred to as within-case, analysis (Rubin, & Rubin, 1995; Rosenwald, 2003; Weiland, 2003). The narrative life histories of the participants are displayed in Chapter III: *Cuentos y Testimonios* (Stories and Testimonies). I do, however, acknowledge the need to deepen understanding for the

reader of all the cases as they synergistically relate to one another; thus, I have also included a chapter on cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis is displayed in Chapter IV: Findings and Themes, followed by my reflections, implications, and recommendations in Chapter V. I conclude this study with an epilogue documented in Chapter VI.

Research Questions

This research was designed to address the overarching questions: What are the fundamental factors that contribute to the success of Latinas? How do the familial, economical, educational, and sociocultural systems influence or obstruct this success?

Data Collection

Good qualitative interviews are often a product of the interaction of the interviewer and the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 268). I had several interactions with the participants, many of which were initiated preceding our first personal meeting.

Prior to the interview I sent a letter to each participant explaining the purpose of my research along with a list of inclusionary criteria. In the letter I explained that I would be calling them in a few days to assess their interest and determine their eligibility. Allowing at least seven days from the mailing of the letter I contacted the participant by telephone.

During the initial telephone conversation I was able to screen those who did not meet the eligibility requirements and assess the interest of those who did. All of the women who met the eligibility criteria were willing to participate in the study. At this point I mailed a demographic form along with the consent form to each participant,

asking her to complete the demographic form and only read the consent form. They were instructed to refrain from signing the consent form until we would meet in person and I could answer any questions and witness their signature.

Qualitative Evaluation Interviews

The initial meeting with each participant followed a similar format. Some of the women I met for the first time, others I knew from past association. In either case we exchanged formalities and situated ourselves to begin the interview. I reviewed the demographic form and asked for clarification on any item that was unclear to me. Together we reviewed the consent form, and I answered any questions or concerns presented by the participant.

I met with each participant at a location of her choosing. Interviews were conducted in my office, her office, my home, or her home. Follow-up interviews were conducted by various means: sometimes over coffee, by e-mail, or over the telephone. All interviews varied in span of time. Some interviews lasted for one hour, others were almost four hours long. The participant and her desire to share personal information controlled the time allowed for the interview.

Upon signing the consent form I began the taped interview with a very broad question, followed by other broad questions, a characteristic of naturalistic research (Ely, 1991). I asked the participant to tell me about her life and the journey that had brought her to this point in time beginning with family background. This is an inductive model of research where questions evolved as each participant shared her life history.

As each woman began to tell me her story, I realized that I was the primary research tool (Ely, 1991). Although I had a brief interview guide and the participant was

freely sharing personal information, I was also observing what was not being said, probing for responses to certain questions (Ely, 2003). I became acutely aware that I was participating in the lives of my research participants and began to finally understand the words of Ely (1991) when she stated:

We face the people in our study directly and must look them squarely in the eye. Occasionally we blink and miss something important. We are the primary instruments, but we are not cool, automated instruments. As human beings with warmth and feelings, our pulses resonate with the heartbeat of our research participants. While we try to maintain distance and perspective, we, too, have personal responses to what we see and hear (p.108).

As a research tool, I learned in depth and detail how the participants view the successes and failures of life's journeys (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Often I wanted to add my own viewpoint, but I remained acutely aware that this was their story, and I vowed not to influence their response by my comments so I simply acknowledged that I understood and prompted them to continue.

Immediately upon concluding the initial interview, and in the solitude of my office or automobile, I wrote in my reflection journal the feelings evoked within me during the interview process. I reflected upon the moments when I wanted to make a comment but did not, and I recorded my thoughts about what the participant had shared. I also recorded areas that I thought might need further clarification at a follow-up interview.

Field Notes and Reflection Journal

I kept field notes and a reflection journal from the first point of contact with the participant up until the final data analysis was complete. In my field notes I kept a log of each contact with the participants. I began with the date the introduction letter was

mailed, when I made a follow-up telephone call to determine interest and eligibility, the date I mailed the demographic and consent forms, any subsequent telephone calls, and e-mail correspondences. I made note of every communication with the participant prior to, and after the interview.

As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), Rubin and Rubin (1995), and Carspecken (1996), I maintained a thick reflection journal where I recorded my observations of the setting in which the interview took place, and in some cases my thoughts as I traveled to that location. I included great detail about the participant's immediate environment such as office or home décor, description of artifacts, and personal mementos. I recorded information about non-verbal communication such as body movements, intonations or emphasis on certain words, facial expressions, and emotional responses to specific dialogue.

After the initial interview I reflected on the relationship that developed between the participant and me. I recorded my thoughts about what she didn't say, and pondered the issues she reverted to several times. I made note of areas that needed further clarification and wrote extensively about my personal reaction to some of her remarks and actions.

Data Analysis

There were 11 research participants in this study; therefore, 11 transcribed interviews in addition to follow-up interviews, which combined, totaled 425 transcribed pages. Each transcript underwent a series of preparations before loading into the ATLAS.ti software program which I used to assist me in organizing data. I will refer to this software as the *program*.

In the program, transcripts are referred to as *primary documents*. Primary documents must undergo a series of preparatory steps before they can be loaded into the program and the coding process begins.

Coding began by identifying quotations within the text and assigning a code or multiple codes to that quotation. The quotation can be a phrase, sentence, several sentences, or the entire paragraph. Throughout the process of loading and coding primary documents, codes were defined and re-defined, renamed, merged into other codes, linked with other codes and/or memos, and some were deleted. The code list was reduced from 360 codes to a final count of 102 codes. I created memos for certain codes that triggered my memory about related literature, notes from my reflection journal, and field notes. I will discuss the memo process later in this section.

As each primary document was loaded into the program, I would follow the same process of selecting quotations, coding, and creating memos. I selected a total of 1,021 quotations for coding and 148 memos were created.

The writing of memos became an important task. The memos were relatively long, explanatory, and descriptive text associated with other objects like quotations, codes, and other memos, networks of codes, journal notations, field notes, and supporting literature. Everything that eventually proved to be important was derived from the memos. I included my personal thoughts, and observations I had made about the participant's mannerisms, or immediate environment, along with questions that needed further analysis. What had been captured in memos, were often the puzzle pieces to be put together, thus creating themes for the writing phase about the research findings, reflections, implications, and recommendations.

Data Presentation

I had transcribed every interview, coded all of the primary documents, and written extensive memos as I thought about concepts related to the interviews. I had extracted themes and sub themes for discussion and have presented those in Chapter IV: Findings and Themes. However, I wanted to present the life histories of my participants in a format where the reader might feel the intensity of their stories. Therefore, prior to presenting the findings and themes I created a chapter where I present the stories of the Latinas in my study. You will read their stories in Chapter III: *Cuentos y Testimonios* (Stories and Testimonies).

Life Histories

At this point I believe it is important to distinguish between *oral histories* and *life histories*. Oral histories are written as the researcher chooses a period of time, such as the Roaring 20s, or a crucial event such as the Vietnam War, and asks those involved to describe what happened. In life histories, what is being studied are the major life events of those being interviewed (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) and this is exactly what I have done.

Rubin and Rubin (1995) write extensively about life history interviews. Weiland (2003) refers to life histories as biographical narratives, and Rosenwald (2003) explains that life history narratives are facing increased interest in today's social sciences. These authors explain that life history interviews are laced with stories that are intended to set a tone to help interpret the material with more depth and detail.

Depth and detail (Rubin & Rubin, 1995) differ but complement each other. To illustrate the difference between going after depth and going after detail I offer the following example from the actual interviews. When going after depth I asked questions

that required a thoughtful response such as Lydia's statement about her high school honors teacher who told her that attending a prestigious private college, one she had been accepted to, was probably not a good idea because Lydia didn't have the appropriate socioeconomic background. "What do you suppose this teacher meant by that statement?" I asked to search for depth. To suggest my concern with detail I solicited examples like when I asked Mari, "Give me some examples of your parent's involvement in your education?"

In life histories what is being studied are the major life events of each participant. I focused on the experiences of each Latina and what she felt as she passed through the different stages of her life such as schooling, marriage, career, significant life events, cultural connection or disconnection, and spirituality. Each story told me about her life's passages, and it also provided a window on social change (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Each history is then compared within and across this group of Latinas, comparing and contrasting different values, beliefs, and experiences.

Life histories involve a combination of narratives and stories that both interpret the past and make it acceptable, understandable, and important (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p.27). A question presented by Green and Davis (2003) asks, "How can one respect the integrity of a single story, even though research work, by definition, requires selection compression, and interpretation? What does it mean to say, 'The average of everything may not be a description of anything' (p.242)?" In pondering this question I have attempted to achieve balance between the power of individual stories and the analytical process. In so doing I extracted from each transcript the participant's life history blended

with both her voice and mine to create an artistic format that presents a different way of understanding experiences as described by Rubin and Rubin (1995).

Additionally, when relaying life histories in research, several authors (Denzin, 1997; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Gaitan, 2000) suggest that the researcher begin with an autobiography in which the researcher represents herself as much as she represents the other. Denzin (1997) states:

The reflexive, personal narrative or autobiographical text becomes a site for the expression of lived experiences, an epistemology of experience based on the standpoint of the self, a place where lived experience is articulated and given expression, often in great emotional detail (p.220).

I have taken the suggestions of these authors and started the narrative process with my own autobiographical narrative as relayed in Chapter II: *Mi Cuento y Testimonio* (My Story and Testimony). This is my attempt to look at individuals as living storied lives on storied landscapes as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2002).

These stories became a way for me to discuss complicated issues, but within their context I offer no solution. You, the reader, are often left hanging: left to wonder what is the point. The meaning is beyond what I can explain; it is in what you feel as you read. Everyone who reads gets a different feeling, and different sense of urgency. Some will be indifferent, some angry; some will feel sadness, and other perhaps joy. As I wrote about others, I wrote about myself. My story is central to my identity. We all come to inquiry with our own views, attitudes, and ways of thinking. They may be in agreement with, or cross the boundaries of what others view, believe, and think about the world, but certainly they present a provocative and artistic mode of inquiry.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is that aspect of quality control within the research design that speaks to the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research (Ely, 1991). Ely states that being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher means at least that the process of the research is carried out fairly, and that the product represents as closely as possible the experiences of the people who are studied (p.93). To establish trustworthiness I conducted follow-up interviews and member checks, utilized a peer support group, engaged in triangulation, utilized qualitative data analysis software, and negative case analysis. Each of these components of trustworthiness is discussed in this section.

Follow-up Interviews

I conducted follow-up interviews as needed. As I transcribed the interviews, I noted that information was either missing or unclear. On such occasions I contacted the participant for follow-up interviews. I often repeated the same question I had previously asked and later compared the participant's response to the same question. Comparing their answer to the same question was a method I used to verify the accuracy of the information. Most of the follow-up interviews were conducted over the telephone or through e-mail, but there were occasions when I met with the participant again in person. Each participant was provided multiple opportunities to confirm the accuracy of the information gathered.

Member Checks

I transcribed each audio taped interview verbatim creating an intensive set of thick notes on each participant. To check for credibility I used member checks (Carspecken, 1996). I mailed the completed interview transcript to each participant asking her to review the document for accuracy. Each woman was asked to make corrections, deletions, or additions if necessary. Many of the participants used a variety of dialects and bilingual code switching (alternating between Spanish and English words within the same discourse); therefore, I asked for specific clarification of meaning and spelling of these words to insure accuracy. I included with each transcript a self-addressed stamped envelope so the participant could return the edited transcript. If I did not receive the transcript within ten days I telephoned the participant to confirm receipt of the document and inquire if there were any corrections. I made corrections where necessary and upon confirmation of transcript credibility I began the coding process.

As noted earlier, in addition to coding the transcribed interviews and conducting cross-case-analysis I also created a narrative which relayed the life history of each participant in story format. To further insure trustworthiness I sent each participant a copy of the narrative created from her transcribed interview. I explained that all identifying information had been removed and a pseudonym was selected in telling her story and whenever referencing her story or statements in the explanation of findings. I asked each participant to review the narrative because it also included my observations and opinions. I asked for feedback and permission to include the details of her life, some of which were emotionally or physically traumatic. In every case the participant accepted my narrative and granted permission for its use.

Peer Support Group

I identified a small core group of individuals who have years of experience in researching, and writing about Latino issues. During the process of analyzing the data and throughout the process of identifying themes and writing about the emerging findings, I presented my ideas to this group for feedback. They provided a comfort zone where I could express my frustrations and seek guidance. I am a neophyte in both the process of research and the study of Latina issues. Therefore, this group offered its support and direction in both the research methodology and the subject content. Group members prompted me to look at data from a different perspective and challenged me to ask further questions of the participants to clarify certain issues. On occasion they suggested alternative explanations and certainly acted as auditors of the research process.

Triangulation

Triangulation is basic in ethnographic research. It is the heart of ethnographic validity (Fetterman, 1989, p.89). Triangulation as a strategy provides a rich and complex picture of what is being studied, but rarely does it provide a clear path to a singular view (Mathison, 1998, p.15). Triangulation can be different data sources and gathering techniques such as observations and interviews that enriches our evidence and sometimes allows us to identify errors (Denzin, 1978; Ely, 1991; Thomas, 1993; Creswell, 1998). Ely (1991) and her associates found that triangulation also occurs with data gathered by the same method over time. In addition, triangulation can be based on different reports about the same event such as study logs, reflection journals and of course the interview itself.

As I analyzed the primary interviews I recognized areas of weakness where the response from the participants was not clear. Every interview led to follow-up interviews and the analysis from the follow-up interviews was compared to the primary interview. On occasion I identified errors where I had previously coded and interpreted a segment of the interview in a certain direction when the follow-up interview led me in a different direction. I also coded my field notes and reflection journal entries and utilized these notes to crosscheck the interpretation of data. My observations, assumptions, and feelings about the interview process were recorded in the software program described below. These various data sources: interviews, follow-up interviews, field notes, and reflection journal were utilized to verify the accuracy of the research findings.

Visual Qualitative Data Analysis Software

To further establish trustworthiness I used visual qualitative data analysis software – Atlas.ti. This software helped me to analyze massive amounts of textual data that manually could have made the process of data gathering and analysis unmanageable. For coping with the inherent complexity of the tasks and data, the software offered a powerful and intuitive environment that kept me focused on the analyzed materials. It offered tools to manage, extract, compare, explore, and reassemble meaningful pieces of information from extensive amounts of data in a creative, flexible, yet systematic way.

Negative Case Analysis

Ely (1991) states that sometimes data stand out like a sore thumb, they seem inconsistent and contradictory to the findings. This contradiction is often referred to as a negative case. A negative case refutes a construct. Within this study the data on one

participant, Alicia, did not support the emerging findings surrounding several themes.

Note that throughout the chapter on Findings and Themes there are many areas where her experiences were different from the rest of the participants.

Sampling

The initial choice of participants came about through professional networks and personal contacts. Immediately the initial contacts led to other like contacts until I had qualified what I felt to be a sufficient number of individuals to conduct an in depth study. This type of sampling is referred to by Miles and Huberman, (1994) as a snowball or chain strategy. I identified Latinas who met a certain criterion and these women referred others whom they thought met the inclusionary criterion. I contacted 15 Latinas of whom 11 met the inclusionary criteria described within the participants' description in the next section.

Participants

The participants in this study were eleven successful professional Latinas who live and work in the Rocky Mountain Region of the United States. They were all born and raised in the United States and range in age from 43 to 63. They are all first generation college graduates and all have achieved advanced degrees. Five women have acquired a master's degree, two have a J.D., and four have a Ph.D.

The women hold either a middle or upper level management position in both public and private sector entities. Their occupations are as follows: public school principal, department chair of a community college, community college administrator, university administrator, lawyer in private practice, vice president of a social service

agency, CEO of a health care organization, vice president of a college, judge, community college president, and a university vice chancellor.

The women self-identified their ethnicity by the following nomenclatures: four identified as Hispanic, two identified as Mexican-American, two identified as Chicana, one identified as Latina, one identified as Latina-Hispanic, and one identified as Chicana-Latina.

Researcher Role and Perspective

I am concerned about social inequalities suffered by Latinas. These inequalities are exposed as I identify the factors that ultimately lead to their success. I have directed my work toward positive social change that will empower other Latinas who are searching for the path to success. My primary role in this study is to be a research tool (Ely, 1991) who listens intensely, observes intuitively, records judiciously, and analyzes courageously. This inductive process of research has shaped me as a medium for the discovery and interpretation of meaning as described by Josselson, Lieblich, and McAdams (2003).

I bring to this study my personal biases for which I do not apologize. As a member of this culture sharing group I cannot be blind to the characteristics of my research participants because I find my own characteristics in one way or another in each of them. Personal bias is a way of knowing, it is that difference between *connected knowing* and *separate knowing* as described by McVicker Clinchy (2003). My ideologies and values enter intrinsically and inseparably into the methods, interpretations, and epistemology of the research (Carspecken, 1996). I agree with Ely (1991) when she states that studying the familiar can be an asset rather than a liability since the insider

expertise provides a continual validation in the field and is a positive influence toward the advancement of the study (p.124). I have first hand knowledge of the struggles faced by Latinas and I believe that my personal experiences coupled with the experiences of my research participants will add to the credibility of this study.

CHAPTER II: MI CUENTO Y TESTIMONIO (*My Story and Testimony*)

Introduction

To begin the presentation of this study I will observe the suggestion of Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and start with my own autobiographically oriented narrative. Gaitan (2000) refers to this literary genre as autoethnography. He explains that this form of writing allows social scientists to deal with the complexities of selves in a way that depicts events in a powerful way that connects the research puzzle. Denzin (1997) states:

The reflexive, personal narrative or autobiographical text becomes a site for the expression of lived experiences, an epistemology of experience based on the standpoint of the self, a place where lived experience is articulated and given expression, often in great emotional detail (p.220).

I present the story of my life with the details of self-expression as I share my journey of life's struggles and victories. You will find that my life's story is not so different from the other Latinas in my study, but yet it is very different. I have tried to open my heart and share the depths of my experiences in the hope that you will have a deeper understanding of the multilayered lives of Latinas. As you read my story, and the stories of the other women, my hope is that you will be moved if to no other place then simply to a place of better human understanding.

Who is Walking on the Glass Ceiling and Can They Hear My Voice?

I was lying in a bed – a hospital bed, but the bed was not in a normal hospital room. Instead my bed was in a damp, dimly lit cave. I could sense that the ground was

uneven because I felt that my bed was tilted thinking that I might slide off onto the ground covered with stones and dirt. I wondered if I had the strength to hold on to the bedside rails, but I realized that there were no rails. I became acutely aware of my surroundings.

The walls of the cave were composed of large boulders, and I could see and hear water dripping as if it were seeping through the cracks in the boulders. I could feel the dampness and smell the mildew. I wondered why I had been placed in this cave, and who would hear my call for help?

A nurse walked in and glanced over to my bed but did not say a word. She turned instead to a nearby sink and appeared to be engaged in her own duties. I tried to speak but no words would come out of my mouth. She turned and walked toward my bed and adjusted some tubes and medication drip bags. I tried to move or speak, anything to get her attention, but nothing happened; she walked away. She departed through a narrow dirt corridor. It was a passageway much like the ones I remembered as a teenager exploring the caves in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. I was alone.

I looked above me and the ceiling was made of glass. I could see outside through the ceiling and knew that the sun was shining, and the sky appeared to be bright blue. It must be a summer day, I thought, because the foliage in my line of vision was green.

There were many people walking on the other side of the ceiling (to those walking this would be their floor or ground). Everyone seemed to have a destination as no one stopped to visit with one another. No one was standing still. I saw mostly men walking on the ceiling. They were dressed in business suits and carried briefcases. A few women passed by, but not many.

I felt a sense of panic come over me. How could I get their attention? If they knew I was down here, surely someone would come and help me. How can I get them to notice me? I looked around the room. Maybe I could find a long pole or rod of some sort, something to tap on the ceiling. The people walking above might hear the tapping sound and look down and someone would see me and come to help. But I couldn't move and I couldn't make a sound. No one could hear me. No one could see me. I was alone and invisible.

This story is not fiction. It really did happen, but only in my reality. This may, or may not be what some qualitative researchers refer to as multiple realities, but allow me to explain how this reality happened.

Two years before I started my doctoral studies I was in a brutal motorcycle accident. It was a beautiful May afternoon, a Friday afternoon to be exact, and I had just finished a spring semester of teaching at a university. It was an impromptu decision to go for a ride on the motorcycle. In fact I was packing for a Mexico vacation I would be taking with my two daughters scheduled to begin that following Monday. My partner suggested that we go for a ride because the day was absolutely gorgeous.

I left the suitcases opened on the bed, not yet fully packed, and hopped on to the motorcycle behind my partner. My oldest son and his family lived in the house next door, and he was outside playing with the children. We exchanged greetings and then drove away; that was the last memory I have of that day. I would return to my home three months later; suitcases out of sight. My partner's funeral was now three months past and all of his personal belongings were gone from the home we shared together. I

was incapable of mourning his loss. I was barely able to feed myself; survival was my only focus.

This is what I know happened from the police and medical reports. My partner and I were riding on an isolated country road approaching a bend and upward grade. Coming from the opposite direction was an 18-wheeler, an open bed semi-truck loaded with gravel. My friend must have been focused on something other than the road, and he veered over onto the other lane of traffic. As both the truck and the motorcycle approached the curve we collided head on. Both my partner and I flew numerous feet in the air like objects launched from a catapult. My partner survived a couple of hours but died on his way to the operating room. It would be six months or so before I would have the capacity to mourn his loss; however that story is for another time.

I sustained life-threatening injuries: a torn femoral artery, compound fracture of the femur, crushed pelvis, a broken arm, fractured knee, open wounds, and a head injury that affected my memory and my vision. I won't go into all the gruesome details of the injuries, but I will tell you that I flat-lined on three separate occasions within the first hour of the accident. Each time I was revived. I was bleeding profusely and at one point my family was told that the medical staff had done everything they could for me, but my chances of survival were dismal.

Several hours after the accident my family was informed that I had no brain activity, and that the life support equipment was all that was keeping me alive. The doctor who approached my family asked for permission to harvest my organs. My family, traumatized by the pervious hour's events, refused. Instead they rallied friends

and acquaintances and a prayer vigil began. At approximately 2:00 a.m. the following day, I began to respond.

You might wonder why I have chosen to share this story as part of my dissertation. My reasoning is multifaceted, and I will illustrate the comprehensiveness of doing so as I demonstrate how my life experiences correspond in many ways with the life experiences of my study participants. I have chosen to elucidate the concept of resiliency in the lives of Latinas and my life embodies this very concept. My dissertation has been an odyssey of self-discovery in many ways, but I never expected that the life experience I shared at the beginning of this section would serve as a metaphor for what, to this point in my life, had been a most challenging endeavor.

Perhaps some additional elaboration is in order. Prior to the accident I had begun the application process to a doctoral program. The accident of course put a halt to the pursuit of anything except survival. The healing process was very long and disheartening at times. I remained supine for over six weeks and experienced extreme muscular atrophy. I was not the same person mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically, and to some degree intellectually. Everything was different.

Because of the head injury I could not remember many things and my vision, although improved, was far from its pre-accident condition. I was missing a chunk of my vision field that affected my ability to read and certainly my comprehension. As I attempted to read a sentence, letters would appear to be chopped off and it would take me several minutes to make sense of what the letters meant. I had approximately eighteen surgeries over the course of two years to repair my body. My brain, however, was on its own with little help from the outside.

Today I am unable to perform certain physical activities that I once took for granted; it is a reminder that I now have certain limitations. I sometimes wonder if my brain is functioning properly, but how do I know that? I believe it takes me a long time to complete a project and sometimes I have difficulty thinking things through. Is what I see as a mental handicap just normal human behavior? It is not important that I find answers to these questions, but more important is the knowledge that every day and every breath is a gift from a Higher Power. The strength of the human spirit to endure has been manifest in my life, and that is one thing I know for certain.

Because of a culmination of limitations both physically and mentally, and the extreme trauma experienced at an all-inclusive level, I was told by my doctor that I would never be able to function at the capacity I had once experienced. "You are disabled and you have to accept the fact that your life will be forever changed. You will not be able to handle stressful situations. You will not be able to drive or teach," he stated. This was the prognosis from my doctor. A dismal forecast at best, but one I refused to accept.

I embraced my faith in a Superior Power and searched deep within my soul for every bit of determination, stubbornness, and inner strength to regain my life. One year after the accident I went back to work. Still using a cane to steady my gait, I began by teaching one class at the university.

I had many fears that needed to be overcome. I couldn't see half of my classroom so I had to depend on focused rather than peripheral vision. I wondered if I had mentally retained the content knowledge in the subject matter I knew well. Would I be able to maintain focus? Could I physically endure the one-hour class time standing in front of my students? These and many other questions at times seemed to paralyze my functionality.

I survived the first semester and when the second semester rolled around I taught two classes. Thus the progression went until I was back to my pre-accident schedule. Then I decided to pursue a path I thought was obscured forever: the journey toward a doctoral degree.

Once again I felt extreme anxiety and the fear of possible failure. In my mind I heard the voice of my doctor, and I could see his face as he said, “You can’t put yourself in stressful situations, you will not be able to succeed.” The more I thought about what he said, the more I was determined to prove him wrong. I would allow myself to listen to his voice only because his words were the motivation I needed for success. I believed I could do anything I set my mind to. So I applied and was accepted to this doctoral program. Success in this program from day one has become a very personal victory. A victory exemplified by the concept of resiliency, the belief in education, and the fervor for economic equity; three of the factors highlighted in my study. These factors have a deep personal connection to my life, and I suspect a like connection to the lives of other Latinas.

I must regress for a moment to those first few weeks following the accident. I had many setbacks that included infection, the probability of amputation, and drifting in and out of consciousness. I had many spiritual experiences, too many to discuss at this time. I never imagined that I would use the experience of who’s walking on the glass ceiling as a metaphor for this dissertation. My reality of being in a cave had a very spiritual significance, and it was contrasted by another experience of being in a grassy meadow. I will not go into the details of the latter experience, and I mention it only to illustrate that the former experience had multiple significances. The most relevant connotation to this

work relates to my career path and the struggles I have faced in my journey to acquire a position of leadership in higher education.

I did mention that this project had become an odyssey of self-discovery in many ways. I decided to write about Latinas who are in leadership positions because I could envision myself in a similar position, but it seemed that no matter what I did, I just could not arrive. I sought women who, by my standard as well as their own, were very successful. They are Latinas at the top or very near the top of their organizations. I did not seem so different from them but surely there must be something different I thought. We are all of the same generation, and we have similar educational and family backgrounds, so I needed to take a closer look at their life histories and contrast them to my own. Maybe somewhere within the stories of their lives I could find the path I believed I had missed somewhere along the way. I began to search for the path in my own family background so I could compare it to that of my participants' families.

Family

I am the youngest of four daughters. I've been told that when I and my next older sister were born my father, on both occasions, was very angry with my mother because neither one of us was born male. My father, being an only child, desperately wanted a son to carry on the family name. His anger toward my mother was evident my entire life. I don't ever recall my father showing any affection toward my mother, my sisters, or me. He was a good provider, but I never knew him to be a good father. He would go to work each day, come home to dinner that my mother had prepared, eat and complain about the days events, then leave to the local bar until he returned home to sleep. Thus was the daily routine I remember as a child.

I was born and raised in a very small community in southern Colorado; a Latino community where life was simple and where everyone knew everyone. I really don't remember much about my early childhood other than being a tomboy and never wanting to play with the girls. I found their activities too boring. The boys, in my opinion, did much more exciting things. They were the risk takers, and I had more fun playing Tarzan and swinging from trees than playing with dolls. I don't recall ever spending much time with my sisters. I was pretty much a loner if I wasn't with the boys in my neighborhood.

When I look back at my life as a young girl, I have no memory of living with my oldest sister, and only a vague memory of living with my second oldest. My sisters were twelve and ten years older than me so when I was entering kindergarten my second oldest sister, I'll call her Katarina, was graduating from high school. They both moved away upon graduation and never returned home except to visit on holidays. I do recall however, that Katarina often became my protector.

When I was four or five years old I must have often done things that irritated my mother because she would swat my bare legs with a wire flyswatter. I remember that Katarina would pull me away from my mother and demand that she stop beating me. I recall the welts on the back of my legs and the burning pain that ensued. I cannot imagine what I did as a four-year old that angered my mother to this degree. I do know that this type of punishment occurred more than once and I don't remember if it happened after Katarina left home. My other sister was two years older than I, but we seemed worlds apart. It was not until we became adults when grow close to one another.

As a child we lived in a small house that had two bedrooms, a living room, kitchen and a bathroom. Our lives were no different than anyone else in our little town.

My dad worked for one of the local shopkeepers and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. My mother planted a huge garden and I remember summers walking barefooted in the ditches as the neighbors, along with my mother, irrigated their gardens.

The neighborhood streets were not paved and summer rains created mud puddles for the neighborhood kids to play in. Life was very simple. Neighbors shared food with one another, some from their gardens, others from their orchards, and some came around selling milk, eggs, or cheese from the nearby farms. When I was about nine years old my parents move from their home to live in, and manage the only hotel in town. As a family we lived in this hotel until I was a junior in high school.

I lived in a hotel until I was 17. I never realized how strange that seemed until this very moment as I write about those years. We had no home; we had rooms that we slept in and a kitchen where my mother cooked. Our rooms were not even close together and we had no living room where we could congregate as a family. We watched television in a common room that was open to all the hotel guests. As I think about it our family life was very abnormal, but I didn't know that it was.

My parents never spent time together. My mother would clean the hotel during the day while my father worked at the hardware store. After the evening meal my father visited the local bar as had been his custom for many years, and my mother sat alone watching television and drinking beer. My parents must have lived in their own realities because as a young person I do not have any recollection of them ever being involved in my school or in my life. I had complete freedom to do whatever I wanted, and if they ever set boundaries for me, I simply do not remember. I would be well into my adult years before I realized that both my parents had an alcohol problem when I was growing

up. Their relationship was not very solid although they were married for over forty years at the time of my mother's death.

Education

I have always been a high achiever. I thrived on competition as a young girl and always did well in school. I'm not sure where this desire to achieve came from. I know that my parents never pushed me to do well academically; I pushed myself. I would have to say that my personality traits are those that fit a natural leader. I am definitely an extravert, outer-directed, people-oriented, high-energy, take-charge person. These traits have served me well throughout the years, but they have also gotten me in trouble more times than I wish to admit. I thrive on challenging situations and bore easily if activities or pursuits fail to push me to new limits.

I can recall my early school experience in kindergarten, and the memories that stand out in my mind are the many times I spent in the corner along with three other friends because we wouldn't go along with class activities. I for one always wanted to do my own thing. I advanced through the primary school years with these same friends. We were four bundles of energy constantly getting into trouble, but I always maintained high grades. I also got involved in many school activities.

I was involved in band, student council, sports, and was a cheerleader all through junior high and high school. I was always on the honor roll, many times with a four-point average. I do not have a single memory of my parents attending a school play or a basketball game to watch me cheer. They were never involved in PTA, nor do I ever recall them volunteering at any school event. Consequently, I have been self-motivated my entire life. I guess it never bothered me that my parents were removed from my life.

Their behavior was simply normal to me so I never questioned their lack of involvement. I was going to do something with my life and the energy and vision I had toward success was never in doubt. I really believed that nothing was impossible for me to achieve, and I would be limited only by my own lack of effort.

When I was in high school, I knew that I would attend college. The high school had many Latino teachers and administrators. Some of them were excellent role models and very encouraging. I remember a high school counselor who was the father of one of my best friends. He helped me complete the college admission paper work and the financial aid application. I was awarded several scholarships and grants to attend the state's largest university. I don't think I ever discussed college with my parents; I just told them I was leaving home and where I was going.

After I left for college my parents remained detached from my life. They never inquired as to how my life was going, and I don't recall ever discussing my academic progress with them. Every now and then my mother would send me twenty dollars, but their financial support was minimal. I guess that never bothered me because I don't recall ever being bitter at their lack of interest. I lived at least two hundred miles away from my hometown. I remember one trip home, maybe it was during a break, I really don't recall. Anyway when it was time to return to the campus I had no money. My parents seemed unconcerned that I had no way to get back to college. I had no car and although I could take a bus, my parents offered no financial support. I decided that I would hitchhike. I look back at that experience, and I wonder how my parents could have been so unconcerned about my safety. This was not the first time, nor would it be the last time I would hitchhike as a means of transportation during my early college

years. However, getting to college the first time involved packing up a Volkswagen beetle with two of my male friends and driving across state, to our new home.

College was an incredible culture shock. I left a small Latino community where everyone knew everyone, and we were all the same in terms of ethnic culture and socioeconomic status. I graduated from a high school class of forty-three seniors and went to a freshman college class of approximately six thousand students. There were students of every ethnicity and socioeconomic status. I would be housed in one dorm and my two friends would have a dorm across campus. The university campus was bigger than my hometown. It would be four or five days before we would see each other again. I vividly remember the first week at this campus.

I didn't know a soul, and I didn't know how to reach my two friends. I wandered around trying to find my classes. Everyone seemed to know where they were going except me. I'm sure I wasn't the only lost freshman, but it sure felt like I was the only small town fish in a big pond. I do not recall ever being advised, but certainly I must have been. I would not have known how to pick a course or plan a schedule. My freshman experience was a very long time ago, and although I have forgotten many incidents, I do remember that I had no mentors to guide me along the way. Colleges today that incorporate freshmen seminars into the curriculum for first-year students are on the right track to creating an atmosphere of inclusion and nurturing students in one of life's most significant events. However, freshman seminars are one element among many that are needed to help all students succeed in college. I will discuss these elements later in this document.

My first semester was an amalgamation of cultural experiences. I realized how very sheltered my life had been and how little I knew about the world outside my isolated small town. First was the great number of students in many of my classes. I remember an English class that was held in an auditorium, and there were probably more students in that venue than the entire population of my hometown. My life to this point had been constant in terms of friendships. I had gone from kindergarten through high school graduation with many of the same friends. We traveled together from early childhood to adolescence, but now I was only a face with no identity among a fresco of other youthful faces melded together.

The next cultural experience came as I was exposed to the many dynamic forces of social change vibrating in the 1960s. Until this time, I absolutely had no awareness of the many social movements in America. The university environment became a platform for political voices to be heard. The many social movements articulated ideologies, and I was an outsider to them all because I lacked understanding of their causes.

This would be my first exposure to Black militants, contrasted by the followers of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his nonviolent ideology toward the advancement of social justice. I saw an active component of the women's movement, and I observed the predominately White hippie movement criticize the American norm. I also witnessed for the first time the heated anti-Vietnam War protests. I was benighted to the ideologies behind each of these movements, but my naivety was never more evident than in my exposure to the Chicano movement.

I grew up in a Latino community where I had heard us referred to as Chicanos, Mexican-Americans, Spanish-Americans, Hispanos, Hispanics, Mexicans, and perhaps

other nomenclatures that simply had no meaning to me. I was simply normal. I spoke Spanish that I had learned from my grandparents and practiced traditions handed down from generations. I never imagined that my traditions were not part of the American norm. I soon realized that my traditions were not only outside the American norm, but they were also outside the Chicano norm. I had never heard of the Chicano movement until my first year of college and I knew nothing about its philosophy.

I had a Spanish surname and my skin was brown, but other than that I made no connection to those who called themselves Chicanos. I began to listen intently and tried to understand the cause. I was so impressed by a group of young men who called themselves the Brown Berets. I never saw them in class, but they were very visible and vocal around campus. They moved about like a pack guided by a few leaders. The young Chicanas also moved with the group but always followed behind. The leaders stood on platforms wherever one might exist among the campus ecology and spoke about the injustices suffered by Chicanos.

These young Chicanos articulated their suffering from discrimination and the many injustices that led to economic and educational disadvantage. I would witness for the first time the physical expressions such as thrusting a fist and fully extended arm into the air and yelling Chicano power and viva la raza. These and other expressions such as murals, music, theater, and poetry became symbolic of Chicano pride and resistance to Anglo domination. These expressions sought equality, justice, and freedom as they are promised in America. But for me, these ideologies were very strange.

I didn't know what discrimination was. I had always been treated as equal to everyone in my environment. I always had fit in with others around me, and I had never

felt that I was less than. I never had been treated differently because of my name, my skin color, or my economic status. But now, on this university campus, I did not fit in anywhere.

I didn't fit into the Chicano culture. I didn't have their same experiences. I was not angry at the system, and I had no vendetta against the Anglo. Perhaps those active in the movement did not recognize my differences; on the outside I looked like one of them, but on the inside there was no similarity. I also did not fit in with the mainstream culture because they saw me as part of the Chicano movement. So there I was a young girl who always had been popular and a natural leader suddenly trying to find a place to belong.

I formed associations with those in the movement but always stayed on the outer edges never wanting to become fully absorbed by their values perhaps because those values remained illusive. Their approach to antidiscrimination and injustice was confrontational and included open criticism, protest marches, boycotts, sit-ins, and the use of the media, all of which I had never been exposed to. Many years would pass before I understood the positive impact of the Chicano movement and the cultural and ethnic pride it instilled in Latinos, especially across the Southwest.

The college experience also included a culture of drugs and alcohol. Multiple cultural, social, and political forces that drew me away from academics epitomized my freshman year. This would be my first experience with marijuana, and although alcohol was not a new experience, it became more intense as the parties continued every day of the week. The social scene consumed my life and after a year and a half, I left the university to pursue a career. Needless to say my grades were terrible. I take responsibility for the academic failure, but I wonder if I would have had some type of

academic counseling or mentoring had the result been different. I may have actually graduated in four or five years instead of fifteen. But I'll get to that later.

I decided to move to a large metropolitan city and look for work instead of continuing with college. I soon acquired a job in the mortgage banking division of a large bank. The job was challenging and I was the only person servicing a special category of government mortgage loans; the potential for job advancement was good. Working for this bank would be the first time in my life I would experience the casting of aspersions against my ethnicity.

One day someone had delivered a large box of chocolates to the office, and I proceeded to distribute them from one department to another. As I entered the office of one of the bank officers he was on the telephone and said to the caller, "A little Mexican girl just entered my office with candy." At the time I just ignored the statement, but I recognized that it made me feel bad, but I didn't know why. I had never felt that before, and I certainly didn't understand those feelings. It would be many years later before I would recognize that experience as a form of marginalization, but the memory of that statement, though minor by what others have experienced, would remain with me for the rest of my life. After a couple of years I left the job, and the big city. I married my high school sweetheart and we moved to a small rural community.

My husband and I purchased several acres of land, built a house, and started a family. We soon acquired some horses and other farm animals. We planted a large garden, and I was a stay-at-home mom for a few years. We were comfortable in our little country home. I harvested and preserved the vegetables, made jams and jellies, and sewed all the clothes for the children. I decided during this time that I would like to

return to college, but the nearest college was sixty miles away.

I enrolled despite the distance and drove one hundred and twenty miles round trip three times a week, but the commute was exhausting so I completed the semester and decided to wait for another opportunity. My husband and I decided to move to a mid-size town where we would have easier access to a college.

We moved with three small children, and my husband enrolled in a community college while I worked part-time as a cashier to make ends meet. He completed an associate's degree in carpentry but the job market in the late 1970s was tight and finding a good paying job was difficult. He worked several construction jobs. Some jobs offered decent wages, but I recall one company that paid him with bogus checks. I would work for short periods of time to add to the family income but having three small children made staying in the job market difficult. Two years later we had a fourth child.

Raising four children was a definite challenge but everyday was filled with joy coupled at the end by sheer exhaustion. We never had extra money; just enough for food and household items. I made most of the clothes for the children, and we planted a large garden that provided many of our vegetables. We were able to purchase a large old house and with much sweat and muscle, we turned it into a beautiful home.

Our fourth child was about to enter preschool, and I began to make the necessary preparations to return to college and complete my bachelor's degree. It had been almost ten years since I started the degree, and I was certainly tired of working for minimum wage and getting nowhere. I had completed all the necessary paperwork to go back to college and even petitioned the local university to accept my credits from ten years ago.

Then to my surprise I discovered that I was pregnant again. The four children had all been planned pregnancies, but the fifth child caught us by surprise.

All of the baby furniture and the baby clothes that had been handed down from one child to the next had all been given away. I was mentally prepared to return to college and certainly looking forward to acquiring a better job through the process. I was not mentally prepared for another child. I was filled with disappointment and mixed emotions. Ending the pregnancy was not an option but finding a way to cope with the news of another baby was traumatic. My husband was loving and kind; always reassuring me that everything would work out for the best. But what about college I thought? If I went ahead and enrolled, the baby would be born midway through a semester, and I feared the adjustment to a new baby and caring for four other children would spell failure so I decided to wait again.

I would like to take a moment and tell you about my fifth child and how I know that he was a gift from the Universal Power and part of a larger plan for my life. When I became pregnant, I was using a contraceptive device that had been inserted into the uterus. This device is no longer used because it has proven to be unsafe. At the time, however, the assumption was that this device was safe. Because I became pregnant with the device, it was necessary to locate and remove it. Removal would mean that there was a fifty percent chance that I would miscarry and lose the baby. Leaving the device in was also dangerous. It could cause damage to the fetus and lead to multiple complications including brain damage and/or birth defects.

I was almost three months pregnant when news of this fifth child entered our lives. I was sent to the hospital for an ultrasound so the contraceptive device could be

located and then removed. The ultrasound revealed no foreign device in the uterus so it was assumed that I had somehow lost the device. The ultrasound, however, revealed something much more significant; a tiny human being alive and complete. I could see this little baby completely formed with all his fingers and toes, kicking the side of my uterus and floating in perfect peace. At that moment I fell in love with my little boy and accepted the fact that I would have another child and that college, for the moment, would have to wait.

The pursuit of my education would once more be delayed, but it didn't seem to matter. After the birth of my son the contraceptive device was discovered. At that very moment I knew that there was a greater plan for this child who was protected in the womb. The Universal Power would continue to protect my son through many turbulent times.

When my son was three years old I went back to college. It was now thirteen years since I started my bachelor's degree. I was working full time and attending college full time. My four older children were all in elementary school, and my husband took over many of the household chores. My study time occurred after 9:00 p.m. when the children had been bathed and put to bed. I usually went to bed about 3:00 a.m. and was up by 6:30. Many nights were spent at the dining room table as sleep would overcome me, and my notes reflected a hand guided by a dozing mind. I certainly didn't have the highest grades, and I narrowly made it through many courses. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration two years later when my youngest son was starting kindergarten.

Career

I was working as a bank teller when I graduated from college. I thought that perhaps the banking industry might be an area where I could advance. I always had dreams of becoming a manager of an organization, but I soon realized that women in the banking industry progressed very slowly. I had a late start in my career, and I was not willing to wait around for the banking industry to recognize the value of women. I applied for a management position with the U.S. Census Bureau during the 1990 Decennial Census and was hired as Administrative Manager. The position, although temporary for about fifteen months, would be my first management position. When my contract expired, I decided that it was time to return to school for my master's degree. My children were now in middle school and high school, and my youngest son was completing elementary school.

By this time the children were doing many of the household chores and the obligations associated with college were more manageable. I completed a Master's in Business Administration in two years. While attending graduate school I worked as a graduate assistant and enjoyed the academic environment. Upon receiving my degree I applied to work as an adjunct faculty in the school of business where I had received my degree. I enjoyed working with students and soon discovered that I was a good teacher. After one year of teaching I applied to a university in Mexico to teach for one semester believing that the experience would be enriching.

I packed up my books and some personal belongings along with two of my sons, and we headed off to Mexico City and then eventually to Puebla. My husband was very supportive. He would manage the household for four months while I was gone and care

for our oldest son and two daughters. The plan was for my two sons who accompanied me to attend an American school while I taught at the university. I would teach business courses to three different departments, but my charge was to teach these courses in English so the students would be forced to speak the English language they had learned from childhood but seldom practiced.

Our plan was to spend a couple of weeks in Mexico City before heading off to our final destination. We visited historical sites and ancient pyramids but perhaps the most fascinating aspect was the political climate of Mexico. We arrived in mid-August when the country was experiencing serious political tensions. Besides the millions of people who lived in Mexico City, the city was also overcome by political activists from around the country committed to the support of their political party. It was a turbulent environment, and we were instructed by the military to stay off the streets after dark. This took no convincing and after two weeks in Mexico City the university in Puebla sent a van to pick us up at the hotel.

The trip from Mexico City to Puebla was about a three-hour drive through the mountains. The drive was wonderful, and it allowed us to see more of the beautiful country. Once we arrived in Puebla, we were taken to our apartment that was provided by the university and after a few days we settled in.

The city of Puebla was very quaint, with narrow streets and little shops throughout the village. However the political environment was also turbulent in this city as it had been in Mexico City. Armed military guards patrolled the streets at night and all the buildings had iron bars on the windows and doors. My apartment was just across the street from the university so I felt fairly safe walking the short distance to the university.

I found it odd, however, that the university entrance was protected by armed guards and an eight-foot-high rock wall enclosed the entire university. On top of the wall was broken glass that had been placed into the cement. I was told that it was placed there to prevent anyone on the outside from climbing the wall to get into the university grounds.

Life was very different from my American way of living. Meetings were set but no one ever arrived on time. All businesses, including the university, shut down about 2:00 in the afternoon and opened again at 4:00. Most people worked until 9:00 p.m. and then went home for the evening meal. One of the presidential candidates was assassinated in Mexico City and the country became very unstable. In addition, the Mexican state of Chiapas was experiencing its own revolution, and the Indian population was fighting to establish its own government. Puebla is situated about half way between Mexico City and Chiapas, and I decided that staying in the country would not be safe either for my children or me. I explained to the university that I could not fulfill my obligations and instead returned to the United States.

Coming home I felt like a failure. I had promised that I would teach for one semester but only stayed a few weeks. I look back at the experience now and realize how callow I was when I should have been more sophisticated in my choices at the very beginning. However, the experience did enrich not only my life but also the lives of my two sons. I returned to the university in Colorado and resumed teaching as an adjunct faculty.

I was still teaching as an adjunct instructor and had assumed other positions within the university, all temporary, when the accident I related at the beginning of my story occurred. I want to take you back for a moment and fill in another detail that I

deliberately delayed sharing until this point. I told you about my fifth child, my son that was an unexpected surprise. I also mentioned that he would experience turbulent times in his young life.

When my son was six he began experiencing problems with his kidneys. I won't go into the details of his long medical history, but I will only say that throughout the years he endured approximately thirteen surgeries and eventually lost a kidney to his disease. I spend many days with him at Children's Hospital and hours at home trying to ease his pain. When I had my accident he was fourteen. When I came home from the hospital, he was working a summer job and quit that job so he could stay home and take care of me. The tide had turned and I was once more aware of why this child had entered my life. The children and my now former husband who had stood by me as I struggled to get my college degrees also stood by me in the darkest hours of my life.

It may appear that I am skipping around as I relay the story of my life but that is not the case. You see we are back to the point where I returned as an adjunct faculty, could not get a permanent teaching position so went on to get the doctorate degree except now my pursuit was twofold. First the doctorate was to be a personal victory, a continuation of resiliency displayed, and second it would be my doorway to a leadership position I had so long desired but which life's circumstances had continuously denied.

Once more I must state that this project has become an odyssey of self-discovery. I have selected women who represent what I hope to accomplish. What have they done that has made them successful and how can I, and other Latinas emulate them?

CHAPTER III: CUENTOS Y TESTIMONIOS (*Stories and Testimonies*)

Introduction

The tribe called *women of color* is not an ethnicity. It is one of the inventions of solidarity, an alliance, and a political necessity that is not the given name of every female with dark skin and a colonized tongue, but rather a choice about how to resist and with whom.

Aurora Levins Morales
(The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 102)

Cuentos y testimonios is my way of presenting the lived experiences of the women in my study in an artistic story format to create an alternative understanding of identity and community, much like the individual *testimonios* in *Telling to Live*, a project produced by The Latina Feminist Group (2001). I have chosen to express the lived experiences of the women in my study by presenting a variety of dialects and bilingual code-switching (alternating between Spanish and English words within the same discourse) that is specific to each participant. Through the *cuentos y testimonios* I began to see common themes and parallel experiences despite differences in backgrounds. The themes are discussed in detail in the subsequent chapter.

Lewis (1961) wrote the life stories about the children of Jesus Sanchez in “The Children of Sanchez”, and he made reference to being in agreement with Henry James that “. . . life is all inclusion and confusion while art is all discrimination and selection, then life histories have something of both art and life” (p.xxi). My presentation of *cuentos y testimonios* is therefore an illustration of both art and life.

Cuento is the art of telling a story while *testimonio* is a term often seen as a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, p. 13).

Testimonios are bona fide statements, evidence of knowing, and witness to lived experiences. These stories are the products of narratives lodged in memory, shared out loud, recorded, and transcribed word for word. The stories pulled from the transcripts became narratives. The narratives then went through an intense process of recasting, expanding, deleting, clarifying, tightening, and polishing. These stories reveal a world of poverty, violence, death, suffering, broken homes, and discrimination. They also reveal a world of intense faith and spirituality, love of family, humor, beauty, resiliency, empathy, and courage, all of which create the fundamental nature of Latina and a lens by which the elements of resiliency, education, and social equality are viewed.

I present these stories because I did not want to reduce the experience of these Latinas to variables. I wanted their testimonies to engage the reader with the hope of revealing the complexity of Latina identity and community. Sharing our stories becomes a process of empowerment in which the complexity of what it means to be Latina is revealed as a mosaic (assortment, mixture, medley, variety, montage) of values, ideas, experiences, histories, and dreams. My hope is that these *cuentos y testimonios* will evoke powerful feelings in other Latinas whose voices have not been heard and that their *papelitos guardados* (documents; journals; pieces of paper guarded and hidden away) will emerge in yet more stories that will capture Latinas' complex, layered lives. It is

also my hope that non-Latinos from diverse fields will garner a valuable understanding of women within the Latino culture.

Latinas function within complex intersecting systems of power. They must move between ethnicity, nationality, race, class, gender, sexuality, age, and other ever-changing environmental forces (Blea, 1992; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Within these *cuentos y testimonios* you will read, and I hope feel, the intensity, despair, confusion, disassociation, poetry, commitment, love, and clarity of power revealed in their lived experiences. These stories are not simply celebratory or nostalgic; these stories also capture the ironies and difficulties of becoming successful, accomplished women.

I have tried to be a good listener and systematically cover a wide range of topics. I often began by seeking information about their childhood and family life, and then moved on to gathering information about their educational experiences from elementary school through higher education. I sought information about their personal relationships, their work force experiences that brought them to their current positions of influence and power, ethnic identity, and eventually concluded with information about their spirituality. Some of the women were very courageous in bringing forth painful memories of their lives, other were more guarded in the elements they shared. I honored their degree of openness at whatever level they chose to share.

I have created eleven life histories that together created an ethnographic study, a mosaic of lived experiences. Their personal experiences contain larger political meaning. These women's stories are individually unique, yet when seen as a group of Latinas telling their stories, one can see certain patterns emerging that coexist in their lives as they connect to their culture and mainstream society.

The women come from different personal, political, professional, and some may say ethnic backgrounds. What comes from these *cuentos y testimonios* are the collective vision of family, work ethic, social networks, communities, relationships, political groups and social movements, cultural identity, and faith that communally form the bases of equality and respect as also illustrated in the testimonies chronicled in “Telling to Live” (2001).

The women in my study are the daughters of secretaries, maids, housewives, field workers, shopkeepers, factory worker, farmers, laborers, ranchers, and meat cutters. These Latinas have participated in various movements that denounce social inequality including the Chicano movement, civil rights movement, anti-war protests, labor, and human rights movements. They have taken part not only vocally but also artistically through writing, speaking, and through *teatro* (street theater) that together create a language to celebrate their *Latinidades*.

Regarding religious influence, this group includes Catholics and Protestants. Some are affiliated with an organized church and others are finding their own way to connect to a source of spirituality. They are all spiritually connected to a power beyond their own. They all claim a spirituality that transcends institutional religions.

All the participants speak English as their primary language; some also speak Spanish fluently while others struggle to learn the Spanish language. I have presented their individual stories using a combination of their voice and mine along with my observations for the purpose of giving the reader an inside view of what it is like to grow up Latina in a working class family with aspirations of independence and success.

I hope that by using this method of story telling I have preserved for you, the reader, the emotional satisfaction and understanding, which I have experienced in working with these women over the past two years.

Alicia

It was a very warm summer afternoon. Saturday was a day that Alicia selected for the interview and suggested that she come to my house. She anticipated that there would be fewer interruptions, without the phone ringing or grandchildren dropping in. I poured us each a cold drink, and we sat at my kitchen table. After some small talk, I turned on the tape recorder and thus began the story of Alicia.

Alicia is the vice president of a non-profit service organization. Her journey to the vice presidency has been a road paved with abuse, abandonment, illness, poverty, loneliness, and shame, but it has also been paved with victory. I envision in my mind a four-lane highway: two lanes going one direction and two lanes going the opposite. I would say that Alicia's journey has occurred on two lanes heading in the same direction. One lane is paved with the rudiments of hardship as previously mentioned; the other lane is paved with the fundamentals of faith, resiliency, love, hope, family, friendship, and success. Life circumstances have forced her to change lanes along the way, sometimes stopping for a while. At other times she has taken a detour, but never straying from the path. To present a better understanding of the highway analogy, I ask that you travel with me through the mile markers of Alicia's life as we begin the journey.

Alicia was born and raised in a small Hispanic, and predominately Catholic community: population six hundred. The community is located in the San Luis Valley. I will offer you her description of the culture of the Valley later in this *testimonio*, but for the moment I will focus on the community. The population of this small town is ninety-nine percent Hispanic. She recalls that all of the teachers in the school district, including

administrators were Hispanic. The authority figures in the community were Hispanic. The Catholic priest, perhaps the most influential figure in the community, was also Hispanic. This was a very safe and secure environment where life was quiet and simple. Neighbors took care of each other sharing food from their gardens in the summer and foodstuff they had preserved in the winter. Relatives lived next door to one another and it seemed that in one way or another everyone was distantly related: if not by blood then certainly by their unique culture. Alicia refers to the culture of the Valley as a *manito* culture, loosely translated to mean a sense of brotherhood or sisterhood among the people; a term of endearment.

Alicia's father worked in the local hardware store for many years, and he was also the town's handyman. For several years he was the town's mayor. Her mother was a homemaker. The family was close knit with grandparents from both sides living just blocks away. Alicia's father was an only child so consequently she and her siblings (three sisters) were very close to this set of grandparents. Her mother came from a much larger family so the extended family was quite large with many cousins living in proximity to one another.

Alicia shared an interesting story about family gatherings on Sunday afternoons:

My mother had five sisters and two brothers who lived in this small town. Every Sunday afternoon we would gather at my grandmother's house. My aunts and uncles had many children and the whole clan would descend on grandma's house. At any given time there were probably a dozen cousins running around. The adults would congregate in the kitchen while the children played outside: either in the orchard or out back around the pigpen. In the house my grandma would be making tortillas on a large wood-burning stove. Around the table the aunts and uncles sat feasting on warm tortillas with butter and homemade jams. They would tell stories, gossip, but mostly complain about the most trivial of things. We remained connected for a long time until the cousins became teenagers and wanted to do their own thing. Then Sunday afternoons at grandma's house became a time to talk about old age and the illnesses that came with it. Today we

only see each other at funerals, as most of my aunts and uncles have now passed away.

The smile on her face suggested that the memories of her large extended family were indeed fond memories of times gone by.

I wanted to find out about Alicia's education and her school experiences. "How involved were your parents in your education?" I asked. "Did they help you with homework, read to you, or visit the school?" I wanted to know about the school environment beginning with kindergarten.

"The earliest memory that I have of school was when I was four years old," Alicia said. She told me about a cousin who lived next door to her and they were very close: always playing together and even dressing alike. Her cousin was a year older so consequently she started school one year before Alicia. When her cousin started school, which was a block away from Alicia's house, Alicia became very sad, and she would run away from home and end up in the kindergarten classroom at the school. Her mother would come to retrieve her and tears would flow down Alicia's young face. After several days of this repeated ordeal, the kindergarten teacher told her mother, "Just let her stay, I'm sure she'll get tired soon and won't want to come anymore." Well that was not the case as Alicia explains:

I never got tired. I would go to school every day. At the end of the school year I had completed all the work just like the other kids and so I was passed on to the first grade. As a result of this experience, I was always the youngest person in my class and I graduated from high school when I was sixteen. Now let me backup to your original question about my parent's involvement.

Alicia thought for a moment and then told me that she could never remember a time that her parents were involved in her education. She never needed help with homework. She was very active in co-curricular activities like drama and cheerleading but never

remembers her parents attending a school play or a basketball game. They just let her do whatever she wanted. She enjoyed learning and her desire to excel was completely self-motivated and therefore she always did well in school, graduating in the top five percent of her class.

I asked Alicia to describe her level of self-esteem when she was a young girl:

When you grow up in a community where everyone is the same, in other words everyone was Hispanic, I never knew minority thinking. It was just not a part of my life. I was never a minority; I was a majority. So a sense of identity of being Hispanic was always very solid, there was never a question or a doubt about being Hispanic. That was a very strong and positive piece of my identity. My self-motivation and the ability to excel in school also enhanced my self-esteem.

Alicia also talked about having low self-esteem. The low self-esteem did not come from being Hispanic, but was initiated in a dysfunctional home environment. She became a caretaker very early in her life and the role of caretaker became prominent in her life and a career was secondary, as I will elaborate later. I became confused about how she could have high self-esteem and low self-esteem at the same time so I asked her to discuss the family dysfunction; hoping that this would enhance my understanding she offered the following details:

My mother had suffered from depression all her life. When I was about twelve years old I noticed that my mother had begun to drink alcohol quite often. No one knew that she was drinking, and it wasn't until later in life that I understood my mother was a closet drinker. She would hide bottles of whisky throughout the house, and when my younger sister or myself discovered the whisky, my mother would say, "Oh, that must belong to ... just put it back where you found it." I was very in tune to what was happening in my environment and I became aware of the times when she was drinking. I know now that she was self-medicating to deal with the depression.

My mother would leave the stove on or leave burning cigarettes throughout the house so I was constantly taking care of her. The role of caretaker became my identity at age twelve. I wanted to make sure she was safe.

I also remember being very angry. I was angry with my father because he was the head of the family and I felt he should be able to fix this situation. But nobody talked about it. There was no discussion. I guess the thought was if you

don't talk about it, it would go away. But it didn't go away. My mother continued to drink for at least another twelve years and my role of caretaker became solidified.

"What about college?" I asked. "At what point did you decide that this was something you wanted to do?" Alicia thought for a moment and then responded that college was something she always wanted, but she did not want to go away for four years. She wanted to do something quick and return home because she remained concerned about her mother. "I always had that struggle. My identity and my self-esteem was really lost in being a caretaker and not focusing on what I needed," she said. It was the middle of the 1960s and she felt that the career choices for women were to be teachers, nurses, or beauticians. Selecting the quickest route she decided to go to beauty school.

Alicia left the small and safe town with three of her girlfriends and moved to a large metropolitan city. Together they acquired an apartment in a rather dangerous area of the city, but apparently they received no guidance as to where they should or should not live. She laughed when she shared the experience of these four young girls from small town USA who didn't know how to ride a city bus or manage money:

Our experience in the city was unreal. No one ever told us what city life would be like. I guess my parents didn't know about the city and what I might encounter there: or maybe they were just so removed from my life that it just didn't faze them, I don't really know. My friends and I didn't know that we had to pull this cord along the cab of the bus whenever we wanted to stop. So we would just keep going until the bus stopped to let someone else off and if it was close enough to where we were going than we would get off the bus too. We learned the technique to stop the bus soon enough after a couple of trips around the city. Perhaps our naivety kept us safe because nothing bad ever happened to us.

We had no idea how to manage money. Whenever we had money we would go out to eat and buy things that we wanted and by the end of the month we had no food and no money to buy food. We learned rather quickly how to budget our money. We were all so naive.

During the time that Alicia was going to beauty school, she became pregnant and married her high school sweetheart; she was seventeen, he was nineteen. He had joined the military and was in Germany when her baby was born. Alicia finished school and moved back home where she established her own beauty salon, financed with a loan that was co-signed by her father. The business did well. Alicia quickly established a strong clientele and ran the business successfully for approximately six years.

Alicia's husband returned from Germany after fourteen months. He came home to a baby daughter and was home for two months. During his short furlough Alicia became pregnant with their second child and again her husband was gone: this time to Vietnam for another fourteen months. When her husband returned he had two small children whom he really did not know. The experiences in Vietnam coupled with an alcohol addiction made him a changed man: a very violent man.

Upon his discharge from the military, her husband decided that he wanted to move to California. Alicia sold her business; they packed up the children and moved to California. After eight months her husband once again decided to return to Colorado. During their time in California his violent behavior towards Alicia worsened. It was not only physical abuse that she suffered but also mental and emotional abuse. With sadness in her voice Alicia said that whatever positive self-esteem she had left had quickly reached its lowest point. Her primary focus in life was to survive and protect her children: the caretaker role had once again become a solid component of her identity.

Alicia and her husband moved back to her small hometown, and a third child was born. The business that she had run so successfully was now gone so she had to seek other employment.

She was hired by the local school district as a teacher's aid. A benefit of being a teacher's aid was that the district would pay for college courses if the degree would be in elementary education. Alicia wasn't very interested in becoming an elementary school teacher but the opportunity to attend college was paramount, so she accepted the challenge and drove eighty miles a day, two or three days a week, for two years and completed the first two years of a four year degree. This was a very difficult time for Alicia. The ability to focus was constantly interrupted by the abuse from her husband as she explains:

There were many instances when my husband would be gone for days and I wouldn't hear from him. He couldn't hold a job. He was seeing other women and using drugs and alcohol extensively. On one occasion he pulled me into the car and drove away beating my face with his right hand. He hit me so hard that he actually broke his hand in the process. On another occasion he arrived home very drunk and shoved the children and I into the bedroom where he threw us on the bed. He proceeded to get the hunting rifle from the closet, loaded and cocked it, pointed the rifle at us and said; 'I think I'll just kill all of you.' He laughed and walked away. I called the police and my husband spent the night in jail. There were many situations just like this one that happened over and over again. He was totally unpredictable, and I lived in fear both for my children and myself.

Alicia's husband got a job in another town so they moved again. She returned to the hair salon business and decided that she would attend the local university to complete her degree. The physical and emotional abuse continued at the hands of her husband. He continued to leave for days on drinking binges and exhibit no concern for her or the children. Alicia worked to pay the bills and feed the children while attending the university. After seventeen years of marriage she divorced her husband.

At this point in the interview I needed a break. We stepped outside on the patio and talked about what a beautiful day it was. The sky was a deep blue color, and we could hear the birds singing in the nearby trees; everything was so peaceful. It quickly

became evident that the heat of the day would draw us back inside to continue the interview. I filled our glasses with fresh ice, more tea, and set out a small dish of cookies.

I wanted to change the focus of our conversation and delve into her experience of returning to college after surviving such traumatic events. Alicia continued to respond to my questions and explained that in her return to college she decided to change her major to psychology, she said, “I wanted to be a caretaker. I wanted to help people, but not as a teacher.” She wanted to enter the social service field either as a social worker or as a counselor.

I asked Alicia about her college experience, “As a non-traditional student did you feel included in the campus community? How did you experience the college environment both in and out of the classroom?” Alicia was silent for only a moment, took a sip of tea, a deep breath, and continued:

I was scared to death because the campus was so big and there was so much activity. I was in my mid-thirties with three kids, and I felt very alone and detached from what was happening around me. In addition to experiencing a troubling divorce I had also gone through an illness at this time. No one reached out to me, but perhaps I didn't let anyone know that I needed help. This was a time in which I referred to myself as, the walking wounded. I was not involved or engaged in any way. My focus was to care for my children. I would go to class, take notes, keep to myself, go to work, and return home. The only reason I was in college was because I needed to make a decent living to care for my children and I knew that getting an education would make that possible.

“Did you ever have a mentor in college,” I asked, “someone to give you advise or guide you through the journey of academia and life circumstances?” “No”, Alicia replied, “I was always alone and very lonely.” She went on to say that any barriers to education she may have experienced were self-made. If there were cultural or political

barriers, she was unaware of them because she just wanted to be left alone. Alicia put up walls (invisible) around her; she wanted no one to see her wounds or to feel her pain.

Alicia graduated from college with a bachelor's degree in psychology. She wanted to find a job in the social work field but there were none to be found in her city. Instead she ended up with a seven dollar an hour job in a detox facility. The job netted her approximately \$700 per month: it was not much, but certainly better than welfare. This experience began her career in the substance abuse field. She recounts these first few months as both a frightening and a healing experience. She never imagined that a place treating alcohol and drug addicts would bring healing to her soul. After the experiences with her mother and her husband, this was not the vision she had in mind in association with a career. After six months in the detox unit she moved into outpatient counseling.

Alicia has been in the substance abuse field now for twenty plus years. She began as a detox case worker; moved into outpatient services as a counselor; progressed to supervisor, program director, and most recently was promoted to vice president. Her career in this field has not been with the same company, but she remains within the same industry.

Accepting challenges has been the pattern of Alicia's life. Many of her job assignments have involved establishing programs or departments where none existed. She was hired into her current position, and asked by her employer to create a self-sustaining department within one year. She succeeded beyond expectations and now controls numerous programs and supervises several staff.

Alicia decided a few years ago that she would pursue a master's degree with a Christian emphasis. She selected a private university and entered an accelerated program: completing the program in one year. "This time it was different," she said, "the learning process was different because by this time I had received so much emotional healing. I wanted to experience the process of education by choice rather than by need." The goal to pursue a master's degree was not based on career advancement but rather a personal goal to celebrate a renewal of her mind and spirit.

Alicia told me that she never displayed her bachelor's degree in her office. It reminded her of a time when she was emotionally wounded and scared. Alicia felt that doing so would bring attention to her and this was something she absolutely did not desire. She felt that this display of her accomplishment would prompt questions from the observer and this was a time she did not want to revisit. Alicia received many awards for excellent performance from agencies throughout the State but those symbols of accomplishment also found their place in a box, hidden from sight. I felt overwhelmed when she shared with me that graduating with a master's was really a graduation from the torment of pain. A sense of peace and joy came upon her as she stated, "I have my degrees on the wall now, and all the other awards are proudly displayed."

I directed the conversation toward a discussion about her leadership style. "Tell me how you would describe your leadership style," I asked? Alicia responded with confidence in her voice:

My leadership style is inclusive, much like a web. I always build my department with individuals who have very strong skills in whatever area I need them. I select people who are very confident and efficient. I like to get their input but I also know, and they know, that I have the final word. I write many grants and as the author of these grants I know the direction they (the staff) need to take to stay within the parameters of the grant, therefore I give them direction.

I asked Alicia how she developed that type of leadership style and if she had any mentors along her career path. She paused for a moment and said, “That is a very interesting question. I have absolutely no idea where I developed this style. And mentors, (she chuckled) I have never, never had any mentors.” Alicia told me that about a year ago she read a book on female leadership style and as she read through the pages she reflected on the books philosophy and thought, “That is exactly what I do: that is how I manage.” She could not recollect the name of the book.

Our conversation switched again as I asked Alicia to describe her personal cultural. She had self-identified as Hispanic on the demographic form and I wanted to know what that meant to her and how she would describe her personal culture to others. Without hesitation, as she sipped a drink of tea, she said with great pride:

I am very, very proud of my culture. Being raised in southern Colorado my ancestors came from Spain. Both my maternal and paternal grandparents have come from Spain; however, my grandfather from my mother’s side was an Englishman. My ancestry is mixed, I’m sure I also have some Native American within my ethnic makeup. We were brought up with a lot of pride in our culture. We are of Spanish decent instead of Mexican: always taught that we were not Mexican, we were Spanish. Our food is different. That entire region of southern Colorado and northern New Mexico fashioned a kind of food that was not Mexican food.

“Explain what you mean by that. I’m not sure I understand,” I said. Alicia paused and thought for a moment. I noticed her eyes shift as she gazed at the glass of tea. Looking around the room her eyes eventually made contact with mine. She hesitated and was having difficulty finding the words to express her meaning then eventually she said:

It was like when I came to this area...they would say something like ...they were going to eat...let me see if I can remember. Well for us we ate a lot of beans. We ate beans, and potatoes, and meat: that was our meal. Sometimes we ate chili, sometimes we didn’t. Sometimes we ate tortillas, sometimes bread. So it was just...we came here and it was like a lot of chili: everything was chili, green chili.

We had *posole* (hominy) with beef; here they make *posole* with *menudo* (tripe). We had food like *torta huevo* (egg pancakes) with red chili, and *arvejaron* (yellow pea soup). This was food that was local to the region and I have not found this type of food anywhere else.

Alicia went on to say that her culture involves many traditions centered on the Catholic Church. In July of each year her small town has a two-day celebration to honor the patron saints of the town and surrounding communities. There is a mass in honor of these saints followed by a parade on Main Street but mostly it is a time for old friends to congregate from around the country and connect with the people and memories of times gone by.

Alicia said she had never heard of *Cinco de Mayo* (May 5th) that celebrates a Mexican victory over the French in 1862, or *dieciséis de Septiembre*, (September 16th, Mexican Independence Day) until she moved further north. She said her community never celebrated Mexican holidays although the population of the area was almost 100 percent Hispanic. Alicia recalls that at some point in her life she heard the culture of her region referred to as a *manito* culture, roughly translated to mean little brother or a sense of brotherhood/sisterhood with people from the area.

Alicia went on to say that the language or dialect of the area is different. Almost everyone there speaks Spanish but certainly with a distinct dialect, words that are common only in that region. There is also something about the accent in which people speak. In some people it is very prominent and in others it is subtle. It is not uncommon to meet a perfect stranger and after a few moments of conversation one or the other asks the question, “Are you from El Valle?” It is this uniqueness that Alicia says is common to the culture of her birthplace and common to her personal culture.

At this point in our interview I turned our conversation to a final topic. I wanted to know her views on spirituality. “Tell me how you see your own spiritual life,” I asked? She sat back in the chair, relaxed, and smiled as she quickly responded:

I was born and raised Catholic so the thought of religion was always engraved. I always went to church on Sunday and had to go to confession. As I grew older I knew that it was more than religion I was seeking. I began to hunger for a true relationship with God and to find my own spirituality. It has been 25 years now since I left the Catholic Church. I left because the traditions and the rituals were meaningless to me, I didn't want tradition I wanted true relationship. We could talk for hours about my spiritual journey but just let me say that my spirituality has brought me healing: healing of the emotional scares that have been so traumatic in my life. My spiritual connection to God has brought me stability; it has given me a solid foundation. I know who I am, I know what I believe, and I know where I'm going, and why I need to go there. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

I knew from a previous conversation that Alicia had recently started her own business. I was interested in her latest endeavor because I recalled that over 30 years ago she had started her own business. A few years ago she became an ordained minister, and she indicated that her desire was really to have her own ministry. Through much prayer and soul-searching she has started a not-for-profit counseling ministry. At the time of this interview, her ministry had been in operation for six months. As she talked about her vision for this ministry, I could sense the excitement in her tone as she told me of the people who are volunteering their time and expertise to establish a Christian based counseling center. “I have received such tremendous healing in my own life that I wanted to bring this healing to others,” she stated with great conviction. Alicia is the founder and chief executive officer of this organization but she continues in her current position as vice president for a social service agency.

Liana

I was driving over the beautiful Colorado Rocky Mountains on my way to interview Liana. It was a gorgeous early spring day. The mountains were covered with fresh snow from a spring snowfall that is so common at this time of year. The sun was shining. I was enjoying the beauty of the snow covered pine trees and mountain peaks. Although the drive was long, I had no doubts that this trip would be worth the effort. I wanted the women in my study to be from different geographic areas in the Rocky Mountain Region.

I arrived in this mid-size town about an hour before the interview. I located the address where we were scheduled to meet and then proceeded to grab a bite to eat. I arrived at Liana's office fifteen minutes ahead of schedule. I identified myself to the receptionist and waited until a woman came down the stairs, introduced herself as Liana's assistant, and asked that I follow her to the second floor.

This was an old building that had obviously been converted into office space. The stairs to the second floor were narrow and steep, and the rooms seemed awkwardly positioned. As I entered Liana's large and beautiful office, she came from around her desk and greeted me.

Her personal work area was set toward the back of the room surrounded by large bookshelves filled with books, manuals, and artifacts. There were two large windows that overlooked the street below and a very large oval table was placed in the center of the room. Several large chairs encircled the table, and there were many pictures on the walls. I observed that one of the walls displayed awards and pictures of Liana with other individuals. I noticed a picture of her and former President Bill Clinton. I made a mental

note to be sure and ask about the picture. I noted another wall that had pictures that seemed to come from different parts of the world. On another bookshelf were pictures of her family.

Liana was very gracious and expressed great interest in my study and pleasure in meeting me. I, too, shared my gratitude for her time. She asked that I sit at the large table and offered to get me a cold drink. I set my note pad and tape recorder on the table; she asked her assistant that we not be disturbed.

Liana is the Chief Executive Officer for a major health organization. I wanted to know about her background, education, and work history hoping to gain an understanding of her journey to the top position in this organization. We would talk in great detail about her position and the company she manages, but first I wanted to know about her family background and education.

Liana grew up in a small and prosperous country town. She said that the community was a very safe and healthy place to grow up. A predominant attribute of this community was the presence of two equally strong religious sects: Catholic and Mormon. We would talk in more detail about the community dynamics of this one attribute later in our interview.

Liana is the fourth child in a family of six children. Her mother was a homemaker, and her father was a barber. She remembers as a child that her father would earn a dollar for each haircut he gave. She spoke briefly about her father's career choice when I asked if either of her parents had ever attended college. Liana stated that her father is a very intelligent man but never attended college; both parents graduated from high school.

A smile came upon her face as she expressed the amazement of the family's economic status. "We still lived pretty well," she said. "We always had new cars. We had a television. We were the same as everybody else in our town." Liana's grandparents from her father's side of the family lived in a small farm outside of town. Liana elaborated on the times she spent with her grandparents as she was growing up:

I recall that my grandparents had this huge garden and a lot of animals. There were days when I would ride the school bus to my grandparent's farm and stay with them for a few days. That time of my life was always special.

I asked Liana to describe her parent's involvement in her education. She thought for a moment and then responded that she had no recollection of her parent's involvement in her education. She does not recall any pressure to get good grades. Liana stated that she was never academically challenged, either by her parents or by her teachers. Her parents were mainly concerned that the children stay out of trouble. Liana said she was self-motivated to get good grades, and her parents certainly encouraged education in general and encouraged all the children in the family to attend college. The secondary school did not direct her into studying math and science, but instead tracked her into social studies. "I would have loved to study the sciences and math," she said, "but there was no way we were going to be pushed in that direction." She addresses this issue later in our interview.

Liana went on to say that her family was part of the social structure of the community. Her parents were very involved in the community. They were active in the Catholic Church, the school board, the Boy Scouts of America, and various other community organizations. Her father ran for several political offices within the county and city government and was always successful in his political pursuits. Her mother was

also involved in teaching catechism at the church and was part of the women's auxiliary at the local hospital. Public service was a critical value that was instilled in the children at an early age and became part of the family's identity within the community. Liana believes that the children were given a very strong social foundation from which they grew and were nurtured because of her parents' involvement in the Catholic Church and in the community. She remembers that her older siblings were always involved in numerous school clubs and extracurricular activities so this level of community involvement became the norm for Liana and her younger siblings.

The value of community service instilled by her parents was evident in Liana's involvement in school activities. She was active in student government, numerous clubs, and took advantage of any opportunities that would allow her to travel. Liana talked about one of these experiences that she looks back on with fond memories:

When I was in high school, one of the best things I ever did was become an officer for the Future Homemakers of America. I had the opportunity to go to a state university for a week to participate in the state convention and for me that was simply amazing because my family really didn't have the money to travel, or go on vacations, or anything like that. I would join competitions through this club and soon I discovered that I wasn't any different from any of the other students and I was as smart as them, and I could compete right along side them.

I entered a cooking contest when I was a senior in high school and won. I was awarded a scholarship from Sigman Meat Company to attend one of the state's finest universities. I was so excited because I would be able to go away to college. My siblings attended the local college close to home so this was really special.

I was so happy to arrive at this competition that just the experience of being there would have been sufficient. I am the kind of person who likes to celebrate the small accomplishments and that's what I was doing. I was very relaxed with the judges, and I'd see these girls who were making beautiful fancy dishes and doing all this stuff, and I felt once I got there there's no way that I can compete with these girls so I decided that I would just relax and have a good time. But my ability to talk with the judges, and engage them, and have them sitting down and laughing, I think is really what helped me win, and so then I had a scholarship to attend the university.

I was completely engaged in the story of how she arrived at this university and than she went on to tell me about her father's enthusiasm and his perception of this opportunity:

My father wanted me to be an astronaut, and he thought that the best way that I could do that would be to become a dietitian. A very traditional kind of job because he thought, 'Well what could a woman do? You could cook for the astronauts,' he said.

I struggled to keep the thoughts that flooded my mind in some kind of order as I processed her father's statement. I was grateful that our conversation was being recorded because I could not focus on the next few moments of conversation and knew that I had missed some very important details about her father's character. Liana said that her father was very supportive of education and encouraged her to go into nutrition. She did start out in the School of Home Economics but soon discovered that she was more interested in child development and psychology so she changed her major. It was the discipline of psychology that became her passion and the emphasis of her continued education.

I asked Liana to discuss her experience at this university. I suspected that the change from a small rural community to a large university environment would present cultural and academic challenges. She described the experience as mind opening and mind boggling. The experience was mind opening because of all the cultural clashes and mind boggling because she felt academically unprepared. Liana offered the following explanation:

It was my first experience with people who truly had a lot of money. On my dorm floor there were a lot of girls that were planning on joining sororities and that is probably when I felt the most division because I knew that I wasn't going to do that. There was just no way that I could afford to do that nor did I think I

really wanted to. This was my first exposure to people who could jet off for a weekend of skiing. This class division was perhaps the greatest cultural shock.

Academically I was unprepared, especially for the math and science classes. I did all right but I really had to study hard, I had no foundation in these areas. As I look back at my high school experience it angers me that I was not challenged in these areas. Teachers need to encourage students to pursue these fields and not let them slack off. We are bright enough and we can learn this stuff. We cannot allow kids to just pass their way through school. I could really talk my way through anything and sometimes that was not the route to go. I should have been pushed more.

Liana also explained that she was first introduced to the Chicano movement at the university. She describes this introduction as a push-pull experience, stating that it was wonderful to be with other Chicanos and the experience of the movement was empowering, but she was not comfortable in their world; she could not relate to their cause. She was also considered an outsider to other Chicanos in the movement because she did not speak Spanish well. Liana stated that she struggled with self-doubt about her own ethnic identity because of her inability to speak Spanish fluently. She said there were times when she felt like she wasn't a bona fide Chicana, and other people in the movement had categorized her as becoming Anglicized. Expanding on the concept of becoming Anglicized, she stated that perhaps she hadn't suffered enough or wasn't angry enough to be part of the campus Chicano movement.

I asked Liana to explain what she meant by an empowering experience, in her reference to the Chicano movement? She went on to explain that she would observe groups of students around campus, usually dominated by males with a few females in the background. It was the females who did all the work and basically served the men; this of course, was not the empowering piece of her experience. She attended several meetings about civil rights, and the campus was still vibrating with protests aimed at the Vietnam War. It was the culmination of passion for diverse causes within the Chicano

community that she felt were empowering, yet she remained detached. She described the push-pull experience she referenced earlier in the following details:

I was trying to find my place in the larger campus community and within the Chicano community. I remember participating in a demonstration where we carried a coffin across the campus to protest the war. I registered for the first time to vote, and I registered as a Republican because that's what my father was. My sister loved Richard Nixon. Now we look back and we laugh at what that was all about. I guess I was just trying to decide where I fit in the bigger scheme of things.

One of the most significant adjustments to a large college environment came in getting used to the great number of students. We both laughed quietly when she said, "There were more kids in the cafeteria than there were people in my hometown." She went on to say that the students appeared to be very sophisticated, especially the Anglo students, and there were times when she felt very country, and very small town. She quickly adjusted to the university environment, took advantage of all leadership opportunities, and was able to hold her own. As was a common avenue for her, she became involved in various groups and soon had developed a strong support system.

When Liana was a sophomore in college, her mother became very ill. She had been battling breast cancer since Liana started college, but her condition had worsened. Liana wanted to be closer to her mother so she transferred to a local college near her hometown.

Liana entered the local college and quickly became involved in various campus organizations including those focusing on Chicano issues. Within the environment of the smaller campus community she felt a greater comfort level with the Chicano students as many of them were just like her; coming from similar backgrounds. The focus of the Chicano groups was mainly to assist the migrant families in the area rather than larger

civil rights issues and war protests. She was comfortable in this environment, and she was able to help her immediate family with caring for her mother.

Liana and her mother were able to spend some quality time together; however, her mother died before she graduated from college. The death of her mother was a real turning point for the family. One brother was married but the other children were still relatively young. Liana had two younger sisters who were still in junior high school. The family had always been close but the tragic loss of their mother brought the family even closer. They became a support system for each other and were very protective of one another. Her father is still alive and healthy and the siblings remain very close. Liana said they spend all holidays together and even vacation together.

At this point in our conversation I wanted to back up and inquire about her secondary school experiences. I asked Liana to describe the school environment and her response proved fascinating. She said that the ethnic breakdown of the school was half Hispanic and half Anglo but the major division within the school was based on religion, not ethnicity. Approximately one half of the student body was Catholic and the other half was Mormon, although the Catholic students were predominately Hispanic and the Mormon students were all Anglo, ethnicity was never an issue according to Liana. She stated that because the two groups were equally distributed, any ethnic dynamics within the two groups was at a minimum. She did state, however, that her parents were firm about not allowing the children to attend any of the Mormon Church functions. Liana stated that she did learn as much as possible about the Mormon religion, and this knowledge allowed her to do battle, and win religious arguments. She referred to this process as early political strategizing.

Up to this point I concluded that I had a good understanding of the educational component in Liana's life. One final element was that she had gone on to pursue her Master's degree in Counseling Psychology immediately upon receiving her undergraduate degree. "What happened after college," I asked?

"I got married," she stated. Then Liana's husband wanted to attend graduate school to study Sociology so they moved to Mexico City where he would attend a socialist school. At this time they were both actively involved in a radical movement, and the school had recently emerged out of Nicaragua. They believed that the philosophy of the school would line up with their own personal philosophies on social issues. However, upon arrival in Mexico City, they found that the entire system was disorganized and they knew instinctively that it was not a good place to stay.

Liana and her husband returned to the Southwest, and he took a job as a public defender investigator and Liana went to work for a mental health center. Liana had her master's degree but she had never really worked at a career. She explains her experience with this first job interview:

I had never really done anything. They interviewed me and asked if I knew how to do psychological testing of children and I said, 'Oh sure, of course I can do that.' In fact I had never done anything like it, but I thought, 'how hard can it be.' So I found a book about psychological testing, read about all the different tests, and went and did it. It wasn't that hard. You read, following instructions, and figure it out.

Liana got the job and at the same time started her own counseling practice. Then her husband decided that he wanted to attend graduate school in another state so they left the region, and relocated for two years. She regrets that she never pursued a Ph.D. in public health while her husband was pursuing his master's. She attributes this in part to the lack of mentors who might have offered her direction.

Liana gave birth to a son while they were out of state. Upon completion of her husband's degree they moved back to their home region, and Liana gave birth to a daughter. She stayed home with her children for about one year and then once more went to work in a mental health center and again started her own counseling practice.

It was through the process of one-on-one counseling that Liana began to see that she would have little impact on the lives of individuals when the real problems were systemic. She could see major problems within the department of social services, the school system, and the courts. Liana decided that she would take a job with the District Attorney's office and set up a perpetrator program for child and sex abusers.

"They were amazed that I could develop these programs," she said, "but it was no big deal for me; the thought process came easy." Liana developed both a child abuse and a sexual abuse perpetrator program that was eventually replicated throughout the state. After a few years she became frustrated with government bureaucracy and once more saw an opportunity to be creative and use her entrepreneurial skills.

Liana heard through the grapevine that the hospitals in the area were being forced by the state government to open up social service departments. She did some research on the needs of the surrounding areas coupled with the resources of the hospitals and developed a proposal that she would present to hospital administrators. In her proposal, she acknowledged the state's social service mandate to the hospitals and illustrated how she could provide these services on a contractual basis at a significant savings to the hospitals. The area hospitals bought her services and eventually she sold her services to every nursing home in the area. She hired a few people and her business continued to do well until once again she was presented with a new challenge.

Liana was a member of the Board of Directors for a major health organization in the area. This organization became the center of a class action lawsuit, and the director of the organization asked Liana to come and work for the organization and implement two new federal grants that had recently been awarded to the organization. The director explained that he would be tied up in legal state of affairs and needed someone to administer the grants. Many individuals close to her, including her husband, advised Liana to refuse this offer, but she found the challenge irresistible. She sold her business and took the job as assistant director.

Liana remained assistant director for three years. During this time the director of the organization became her mentor, and eventually he resigned and Liana was appointed executive director. She has been in this position for 17 years. I found it interesting when Liana told me that she learned through operating her own business that she wasn't a social worker but instead a good business person:

My master's degree was in counseling, but I was good at administration. I really didn't know anything about business or administration so over the years I taught myself through reading books, going to different seminars and workshops, and talking to people who could guide me. I think I really have an instinct for what works and I know how to read and implement regulations.

Here was an opportune time to ask Liana to describe her personal leadership style. "I believe that I use the servant leadership style," Liana stated as she continued, "I was raised to serve others and I believe that I am no different from anyone else around me." She referred once more to her family influence of community service and explained the importance of serving others. She believes that everything she does evolves from her sense of service to others. Liana also described her leadership style as being very inclusive. "There are no secrets here," she said.

Liana firmly believes that by sharing information the burden of running the organization is equally distributed among her team, but ultimately she is the person responsible and accountable for the success or failure of the organization. She is not afraid to make decisions and admits that sometimes she has made a wrong decision stating that, “Any decision is sometimes better than no decision, and it moves us off square center so we can keep moving.”

I realized that we had been talking for over an hour, and I still had a couple of areas I wanted to address. In addition I remembered the picture on the wall I wanted to inquire about so I looked at my watch and expressed my concern that we had approached our scheduled time for the interview. Liana indicated that it was okay to continue and that she was enjoying our time together. I kept thinking about how difficult it was not to add my own experiences to our conversation, and I kept reminding myself that this was a time for me to learn about Liana and not a time to tell her about my experiences.

I asked Liana to describe her culture. I referred to the demographic form that she had completed and I said, “You stated your ethnic identity as Chicana. What does that mean to you?” Liana thought for a moment, paused, and seemed to struggle to find the right words, then she stated:

Ok, lets see...I think its not...my culture is...my culture goes back to the importance of history, knowing where you came from and strong family values. We are very proud that we have lived in the Valley for seven generations. I feel very powerful when I can say that all I have to do is go to Costilla, New Mexico, *La Plaza de los Manazares*, and that is where my family was from and they lived there at the same time that Thomas Jefferson was president of the United States.

Liana went on to say that the culture of the Chicanos in *El Valle* is very unique and as she has traveled around the world she has been with Cubans, South Americans, Spaniards, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans, but the culture of *El Valle* remains unique. She

explains this uniqueness in the language, both Spanish and English, that has distinct characteristics that only someone from the Valley could detect. She also expressed this uniqueness in the food that is not Mexican food, but Valley food. She further explained the family traditions for weddings and the celebrations for various holidays as unique to her culture. In all the traditions the central focus is the strong family unit.

Aware that our time together was quickly coming to an end I wanted to know how Liana would describe her spirituality. Without hesitation she told me that her degree of spirituality was also a part of her culture but explained that her spirituality was not connected to the Catholic Church but was an entity separate and personal:

I believe that in everything I do, God is a part of that plan. I don't necessarily go to church all the time or practice religion but I don't need that to feel, and believe that God is guiding my life and directing me in life choices. Everyday is a gift. I acknowledge and respect that, and will treat others, as I want to be treated.

"You have been so gracious with your time and all of the personal information you have shared," I stated as I drew the interview to a close. "Please tell me about the picture on the wall – the one with you and President Clinton?" Liana smiles as she stood from the table and we walked over to the picture, where she explained:

I had been invited to the White House as part of a focus group to discuss rural health care issues and this photo was part of the public relations piece. I don't know if any of my input was ever considered but I want to believe that my experiences will somehow have a positive impact on how we serve our patients – after all, that's what it's all about.

I thanked Liana for the interview and indicated that I will be calling her if I needed further clarification, or needed to ask additional questions. She expressed her willingness to assist me.

Mari

Mari and I had known each other for a few years. We met at a university where we were both employed as adjunct faculty and instantly became friends. We would visit often in our shared faculty office and express our dissatisfaction with the lack of resources offered to adjunct faculty, but more importantly, we would share our enthusiasm for teaching; a love we mutually enjoyed. Over the years we had gone our separate ways and lost touch with one another. I was thrilled when I received a phone call from Mari.

Mari had seen the announcement about my study and wanted to express her interest in being a participant. “I know that I meet the inclusionary criteria, she said. Are you still looking for women to participate?” My response was an affirming, “Absolutely.”

I was very excited. First, because I had heard from my old friend, and second, because she was genuinely interested in what I was doing and wanted to be a part of the process. Why did I seem surprised that intelligent Latinas’ would want to take part in my study? The answer would come but not for some time. After exchanging small talk and getting each other up to speed on our careers, we set an appointment to conduct the study interview. We decided that a quiet place for the interview would be at my office. I was no longer teaching and my office was located in a secluded research department where interruptions were minimal.

Mari arrived at my office early one morning on a cold winter day. I took her coat and scarf, poured us both a cup of coffee, placed the telephone in do-not-disturb mode and thus began our journey of exploration. Did I say Mari was an old friend? Well, I

realized how much I did not know about her until we got into the interview. Of course I knew what Mari was doing now. She is the department chair at a community college, but I didn't know anything about her personal life and her accomplishments, so I began with an inquiry into her family background.

Mari grew up in what she referred to as a very traditional family with a father, mother, and four sisters. She is the middle child. Her mother was a stay-at-home mom for the majority of Mari's school years until her youngest sister started school. Her father worked his entire life as a printer in a factory. The family was by all standards a working class family living from paycheck to paycheck. All of the children went to work at a young age learning to be responsible as modeled by their parents. Each day after school the children did homework, on weekends they did chores, and on Sundays the family attended church. Sunday was also a day devoted to family activities.

Mari is very serious as she begins to tell me her story, answering only the questions I ask and providing me with very brief responses. She does begin to lighten up as I ask her to share a story or two of those family activities. A smile comes across her face as her memory goes back to a time when she was a child:

Sundays after church, we had a home manner day, and the winner of the best manners for the day got the quarter from my dad. With five girls you had to set the table, the napkin, and the silverware just right. You had to learn how to cut your meat with the right knife, and eat your salad with the right fork, and place the glass properly, and the cups for coffee. It was from a young age that we would have manner day.

Mari shared with me that her oldest sister has a disability, and she couldn't do a lot of physical activities so her life mainly focused around books. Her mother would tape words inside the kitchen cupboard doors, and when the children would do dishes at night they had to open the cupboard and there would be words like megalomania, ebullient, and

discriminatory. “Does talking about yourself make you a bit uncomfortable,” I asked? Mari laughed and said, “is it that obvious?” We both made light of the situation and I teased her that she just needed to relax and let it all flow out. Perhaps we could meet again over a libation and that would loosen her up. “Maybe,” she said with a grin, but then went on to continue with the story of the words on the cupboard doors:

At the end of every week, you had to pronounce the word correctly, and you had to know how to spell it properly, and know how to use it in a sentence. Now grandma (my mother) has gone way beyond the one word thing. I think there are six of them now (words). My nephew is six and he is spelling words like personality and dictionary. My dad plays spelling games with my nephew every week and without fail my dad will miss a word, on purpose of course, so my nephew can win.

Mari remembers learning the words on the cupboard from as early as age seven all the way through high school. As we talk about family, Mari remembers several lessons taught by her parents as she was growing up. She related an activity that taught the children about financial management:

Daddy would come home with his paycheck and give each of us girls \$100 in cash. I don't know where he got this idea from, but parents today should still do this. Anyway, he would begin to take it all back. He would say, ‘This much has to go towards the house payment, this much has to pay for the heat bill, and this much has to be put in the savings account so we can all go to Disneyland this summer, and this much has to be paid because someone needs a new pair of shoes, or new this, or new whatever.’ Not everybody together needed all this, but someone needed something. When he was finished, he put the \$100 back in his pocket and we were left with our forty-five cents allowance and happy to have it; remember we were a family of seven.

Mari recalls one occasion when her parents decided to teach the children about discrimination, and her father would be the first to play the game. The concept was that he would be discriminated against so that the children would learn the meaning of discrimination. He had to eat in a separate room in the back away from the rest of the family. After the family was finished with their meal, the leftovers were given to the

father and then he could eat, but throughout the meal he remained alone. None of the other family members ever got to play discrimination because they remembered how hard it was on their father and how badly they felt for him. Mari doesn't ever remember playing discrimination again but does remember the impact of that one learning experience.

She doesn't know where her parents came up with the lessons taught to the children, but with great admiration she says they were always in sync with one another. Her parents have been married for 53 years.

The community in which Mari grew up was an urban setting with a large Hispanic population. She felt that the community was unique because it had a diverse ethnic population. After a brief pause she said, "Maybe it isn't so unique maybe I just think it is."

Mari recalls that her mother was involved in the school for five out of the six years of her elementary education. Her mother's involvement included being president of the PTA over the years, and she was also head of the Girl Scout troop activities.

Mari is certainly a high achiever, I have known her to be the very best at whatever she does, but I did not know about her school experiences of which I found to be very amusing, but not surprising. Mari could not recall ever needing help with homework. A smile came across her face when she told me that she probably got her first B the second year into college. She firmly stating, "If I couldn't be first in class, I was going to be second." I asked her where she might have developed this desire to be a high achiever. She replied that it probably came from her mother and then her two older sisters. I prompted her to think about why she thought this personal characteristic was acquired

from her mother and sisters. She paused for a moment to contemplate her answer and then she said, “I really believe that my mother was born before her time because she valued education and she saw the need for competition between us girls.” The children were expected to do well and their best was always good enough, but her mother continually raised the bar and expected that their best would get even better. The expectation to achieve came from her mother but was always reinforced by her father.

Mari attended college immediately out of high school. She chose to attend a local college so she could live at home while attending school. She started at age 18 and received her bachelor’s degree when she was 21. She recounts taking an English composition class with her mother. We both laughed as she told the story, and I tried to imagine the sense of this experience:

My mother started college when my oldest sister went to college. She (sister) has a disability, so that was a comfort level to have mom in the classroom. My mother finished her two-year degree fourteen years later when my youngest sibling graduated from college. She had to repeat a lot of classes because the credits don’t stay on the books and records that long. Well it was my turn somewhere in there. We had English composition together and in the class you could take two routes. You could either prepare the outline and the bibliography and turn in your notes and be graded through the entire process and all you had left to do was turn in the paper. Or you could take route two which of course was my route because I was 18 or 19 years old and I would just stay up the night before and write my paper and turn it in. Well we both got A’s and my mother called the professor and turned me in stating: ‘Mari doesn’t deserve an A because she stayed up all night and there were no note cards, and there was no real effort.’ And the professor said, ‘I can’t take the A away from her because it really was a well-written paper.’

Mari shook her head as she recalled this experience. She said her mom denies that she ever did such a thing but Mari swears it’s the truth.

I asked Mari if she had worked during the time she was attending college. She indicated that she had always worked but recounted a time during her senior year of

college when she worked as a co-op student for the Internal Revenue Service. This was a time when there was a great need for female employees in the IRS, and they wanted her to forego her education and work for them full time. She felt that she was too far along in her education to stop so in an effort to complete her degree as quickly as possible she attended a school in Europe for ten weeks where she would complete several needed courses. Mari went to Europe with a handful of students from her college. She recalls that she was very young and very brave. With a chuckle in her voice she says that if she had to do it all again, she would not because today she is afraid to get gas in the dark. Looking back she recounts the experience as a wonderful one. Upon graduation she went to work full time for the IRS in a town just forty-five minutes away from her home.

Our coffee cups were now empty, and I excused myself for a few moments while I went to get us refills. On the way back to my office I'm thinking that a job with the IRS was probably a good job for young women at that time, but I would have considered it too boring. So I asked, "Was that a boring job with the IRS?" "Not really," Mari responded, "I liked things to be very black and white, and the IRS certainly fits within that category. But let me tell you about my first day of work, you'll get a kick out of this story." And she was right.

Mari told me that her dad went with her on her first day of work. He wanted to know if she could drive to this other town on her own and park her car correctly. He wanted to know where she worked, and whom she would be working with. Her father went into the IRS office and introduced himself to her boss. Mari could not recall if the event caused her any embarrassment but stated that if this happened today that it would be terribly embarrassing. Once more we laughed at her experiences.

After receiving a bachelor's degree, Mari decided that she would take the CPA exam to become a Certified Public Accountant. She took the test and passed only one section of it. Mari acknowledged that this was the most humiliating experience of her entire life, "I didn't get one hundred percent correct therefore it was failure," she stated with such conviction. It was at this juncture in her life that she decided instead to pursue a masters' degree which she accomplished while working days and going to school at night for approximately five or six years. Mari has never displayed her diplomas on the walls in her office.

I asked Mari to recount her college experience. I asked, "What was the college environment like? Did you feel included and welcomed on the campus and in the classroom?" Her response was that she didn't want to be in the college environment so she didn't pursue any co-curricular activities that may have contributed to that sense of inclusion. Her goal was to complete the degree as quickly as possible, so carrying 21 semester hours and working 25 plus hour per week was all part of the process. She didn't need or want any of the extracurricular activities associated with the college experience. She does, however, remember that before receiving her degree she did become vice president of business and finance for Associated Student Government, but there is no recollection on how that came about.

I asked Mari if she could recount the ethnic breakdown of the campus or more specifically in the classroom. She tells me that her memory of the classroom is not focused on ethnic breakdown but rather on gender, and minimally at that. In the 1970s, when she was pursuing her undergraduate degree, few women were entering the accounting field so the presence of men dominated the classroom. The women had a

tendency to be quiet and shy and Mari, being very young did not attempt to participate. Again her goal was to study, do the homework, take the test, get the right answers, and leave. Returning for her masters' degree a few years later was different.

The number of women in advanced accounting classes had increased significantly and most had been in the workforce for some time. The women in general were more participative because they had lived experiences to relate to the subject being discussed. In addition, participation was forced upon students through projects that combined small groups and the expectation to participate was essential and valuable to the group as a whole.

“How did you pay for your college education,” I asked? She said she received scholarships, her parents paid for part of the costs, and she paid for her book and a car payment so she could get back and forth to school.

I wanted to move Mari back in time with regard to her work experience to see if perhaps there was something left out of the career portion of her story. I asked her to walk me through her career path from that first IRS job to where she is today. She pulled me back further than I expected taking me to a time when she was 15 years old and no longer wanting to wear her sister's outfits. Telling her parents that she wanted to get a job, Mari got on her bike and rode two miles to a Burger King that was just opening in her town. She got a job at Burger King and rode her bike wearing the bright orange and gold uniform associated with the restaurant. She finds humor in the thought of someone having pictures of her on the bike in that outfit; “It's just horribly embarrassing,” she said.

Mari learned to type and take shorthand in high school, becoming very proficient and as a result was able to get office occupation jobs. She went to work for a medical clinic where she typed medical charts for incoming patients and worked her way through college: her senior year working as a co-op student for the IRS. At age 21 she went to work full-time for the Internal Revenue Service where she stayed for 18 years. Mari did indicate however, that she usually had two, three, and sometime four jobs simultaneously; always accepting challenges and wanting to learn new things. She left the IRS to become the controller for a state organization remaining in that position for approximately five years.

Mari loved to teach. As she moved within her multiple careers she often taught classes either as a corporate trainer or as an adjunct faculty member at various institutions of higher education. When a full-time job became available in higher education she felt that she had already worked a lifetime in a short span of time and decided that as a teacher she would work less hours (she smiles of course when making this statement). So she applied for, and got the position as a full time instructor. However, as was the pattern for Mari, she also decided to teach as an adjunct faculty member at other institutions because one teaching job just wasn't sufficient. Mari quickly moved into the department chair position of her college and remains there at this time.

As we moved through the interview process, I asked Mari to describe her leadership style. Without thought or hesitation she tells me that she had to learn her leadership style. The years at the IRS were involved knowing the law and codes, and left no room for exploration, or the development of leadership skills. Things were either right or wrong and she was involved with books and records and in the education of the

taxpayer; but that was not leading. She had always thought of herself as a very good technician but not a very good manager. After a brief discussion about her relationship with her employees and how she trusts them to do their jobs, she describes her leadership style as participative. She believes in making herself available to answer questions and does not hesitate to assist when a project needs more hands. She states, “The one thing I value more than anything, in any manager, or from myself is consistency: inflexibility and inconsistency is hard to work with in any environment.”

Our interview took a wide turn as I moved the conversation from leadership style to spirituality. I asked Mari if she could talk about her spirituality. Immediately she said, “I never do. It’s just something that’s not shared very much. It’s private. It’s there. It looms large in my life but I don’t seem to talk about it and I’m not sure why.” I probed further. “What does it mean to you,” I asked? “I think its foundation she said, it means everything.” Probing a little deeper I asked how she would describe it. “I don’t know. No one has ever asked me that question,” she said. After a brief moment, she went on to say that her sense of spirituality had probably been passed down from her parents, and it was centered on the concepts of right and wrong, doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, and compassion: all fundamental pieces of the whole person.

We concluded our interview going back to the topic of family. Mari has a large extended family that is mainly from her mother’s side. Her mother and aunts are first generation to move from Mexico to the United States, and they maintain close family ties. They live in proximity to one another and often spend the holidays together in large family gatherings. Mari’s cell phone rang and it was her mother. They had a lunch date and her mother wanted to know if she was about ready to go pick her up. Mari informed

her that she would be there shortly. I asked one final question, “Mari, now that you are the chair of your department, have you placed those diplomas on the wall?” She said, “No, they’re in a box somewhere.” I shook my head in friendly disappointment and said to her, “We will definitely have to get together for that libation I talked about and discuss this matter further.”

Lydia

Lydia is a bundle of energy. Her passion for life and her ability to harness all of the energy in her universe is absolutely amazing. I was mesmerized by the accounts of her life, and I must admit that by the conclusion of our interview I was exhausted: but not Lydia, I think she could have talked for another three hours. To set the stage, I will tell you that Lydia is a judge, an attorney, a president of a school board, a community activist, and at the time of our interview her long-term goal is to be the first Latina elected to the United States Congress.

Lydia had invited me to her home to conduct the interview. It was a warm July afternoon as I drove through beautiful tree lined streets where large mature trees shaded entire city blocks. The homes in the area were all older Victorian style with perfectly landscaped yards. Lydia's house had a wonderful full porch that wrapped around the front and side of the house. There was nicely placed furniture on the porch. Everything was green and there were multiple flowerbeds throughout the large yard. I rang the doorbell and quickly Lydia appeared.

We had not met prior to the day of the interview. All of our communications had been first by mail, then by telephone. I knew of Lydia's standing in the community because I had constantly read about her accomplishments and political views in the newspaper, but I had no idea what to expect as we would sit face-to-face and discuss the intimate details of her life.

Immediately after I introduced myself, the telephone rang and Lydia was engaged in a few minutes of conversation. She motioned to me to have a seat on the couch in the

living room. While she was engaged in the telephone conversation, it gave me an opportunity to observe the surroundings.

Lydia's house was a beautiful multistory Victorian home in an old neighborhood. The house was filled with many mementos and artifacts that collectively told a story of her life. There were numerous ceramic dolls that had been collected over the years, I was later told. There were books everywhere. The rooms were filled with antiques, and the walls had coordinating wallpaper. Throughout the house were pictures of family and many artifacts.

Lydia finished her telephone conversation and turned off the ringer. She sat with me on the couch and we both turned toward each other. Lydia was very cordial. After a little small talk she told me that she was very interested in my study and also wanted to understand the factors that might influence the success of Latinas, hoping that whatever was discovered could be shared with other Latinas coming through the ranks.

"My life is an open book," she said, "I will tell you anything you want to know but I do ask that any information about my family be kept confidential." I assured her that I would certainly honor her wish and only understood her request weeks later as I reviewed the transcript several times.

There are significant emotional events that happened to Lydia at a young age: 12 to be exact, which collectively set her destiny in motion. Her story would not be complete without some mention of these events. I have shared this *testimonio* with Lydia and was granted her permission to include the information that follows.

My question to her as we began the interview was wide open, "Tell me about your life wherever you want to start is fine," I said. Without hesitation Lydia began her story:

I am the older of two children. I have a brother who is four years younger than I, and a sister who is 24 years younger, but she and I never grew up in the same household. My sister was born from my mother's second marriage.

This was the point where Lydia began to relay her story to me. She was 12 years old and up to this point she lived in a very intact and secure household with both her father and her mother. This was a working-class family. Lydia's father was a meat cutter, and her mother was a stay-at-home mom. They lived in a lower class neighborhood with grandparents and extended family living in proximity to Lydia's immediate family unit. Lydia attended Catholic school from first to ninth grade, stating once again that her environment to this point was very stable and secure. Then her world began to change.

Her father became very abusive towards her mother. Lydia became witness to the domestic violence through both sight and sound. Eventually a divorce between her parents was unavoidable and in the process an ugly custody battle ensued. Lydia shared the following account of this situation and how, at age 12, she became the caretaker for her younger brother and her mother:

I knew that my parents needed to be away from each other because it was not a good situation. They never had fights in front of us; it was always at night and after we were asleep. But when you go to sleep you are not dead. I would hear my parents and instantly I would become the protector. I remember fluffing up pillows around my brother's ears so he wouldn't hear what I was hearing. Or when things got really ugly, physically walking into their presence because I knew that if I appeared the fighting would stop, so I became my mother's protector as well. Those memories are very, very clear.

I asked Lydia if the situation with her parents had affected her schoolwork in any way. She paused for a moment and then said, "Yes, yes it did. There were two things that happened but I have never made the connection between the two until you asked that question." Lydia told me that she had a fifth grade lay teacher who was simply awesome.

This teacher taught her wonderful study skills and made sure that Lydia could read and do math with the greatest of accuracy. The situation in Lydia's family occurred when she transitioned into the sixth grade. She conveyed to me that academics and books were always a secure place for her, a soothing place, and a place where she would find comfort.

During her fifth grade year she was a B-C student, but moving into the sixth grade she became an A-B student. She became a star. I found Lydia's analysis of this transition to be very thought provoking as she explained:

I had decided at that point that academics were important. I don't know that if in my own child's mind I was attempting to make everything perfect, and if I was perfect, then maybe my life would become perfect again and everybody wouldn't be mad, and separated, and all those things. So from the sixth grade on, I was on a roll. I became an A-B student. There is a demarcation line in my life; you can see it there between the fifth and sixth grade. This was the point in my life when I became a high achiever, and I continue to be a high achiever in everything I do. Maybe their divorce actually helped me. I never thought of that until now.

That same year, my sixth grade year, I could also tell you that everyone who knows me would tell you that I wanted to be a lawyer since I was 12 years old. That's why I decided also to do well academically. I could visualize it in my mind. I could see myself on the bench. I could see myself in the courtroom. I knew I had to get good grades. I knew I had to go to college. I knew that these were the rules of the game.

Lydia went on to say that during that same year, both of her grandfathers had passed away. It was indeed a year engulfed by significant emotional events and perhaps even more traumatic for a 12 year-old child. Not only did Lydia experience the strain of her parent's divorce, and the death of her grandfathers, but also it became a time in her life when she would experience being an outsider.

Recall, if you will, that she was attending a Catholic school, and divorce in those days was considered very much of an upheaval. Lydia explained, "Among all my

friends, and in my entire world, no one's parents were divorced. At age 12 I became an outsider.”

I wanted to know about her parent's involvement in her education as a young girl. Lydia said that her mother never graduated from high school, but she was a very bright and outspoken woman. Her mother pushed education from a very early age. In fact, Lydia told me that there is a picture of her when she is about three or four years old. She is sitting on a towel on the front porch of their house. Her appearance is very neat and clean, and she is sitting next to a pile of Golden Books. “Now any adult looking at that photograph could detect a lot of interesting things,” Lydia said. “My mother had me clean and wanted me to stay that way so while she hung clothes up on the line, I sat with my little pile of books.” Lydia went on to explain that her mother read these books to her every night and she knew them by memory; still remembers the stories even today.

Lydia's mother was firm in her belief that education was important; therefore, she established a household rule. The rule was that if Lydia was studying or reading she did not have to do any housework or chores. The condition to the rule was that studying or reading needed to be done in a public place, like the kitchen table where her mother could be witness to the process. Lydia pointed to the table in her dining room, part of it obscured from view by a partial wall, and said, “If you look on that side of my table you will see the laptop computer, school books, and work stuff. It has become part of the legacy of this family and the rule still stands; I use it with my own children.” Lydia stated that the rule created two strong attributes in her life: she was always studying and she was always reading. These attributes pushed Lydia through the school system, and as

a result she graduated from high school when she was seventeen and was accepted to a prominent private college.

She left home to live in the dorms and was very bright but with a chuckle she states, “I didn’t know how to cook, I didn’t know how to do laundry, or clean house, but I did know how to study.” I’m getting ahead of her story. I need to back up here and tell you a bit more about the transition happening to Lydia when she was 12 years old that set the foundation for her community involvement as she transitioned into her teen years and eventually into young adulthood.

Lydia told me that as a 12 year old, she would go to the public library and read books that greatly influenced her life. Among her readings were the following books; *Malcolm X*, *The Children of Sanchez*, *Black Like Me*, and *Revolt of the Cockroach People*. Her mother didn’t know the content of these books or whether they were appropriate for a young girl but never-the-less these writings began to influence her thinking and Lydia began to question, “Why aren’t people treated the same?”

Lydia’s first experience with feeling different came at a very young age while playing in her neighborhood. She recounts the experience:

I remember the very first conversation I had with my mother about being different. We had neighbors next door who were Anglo and a fight ensued between the brothers, my little brother and their little brother. The older siblings got involved and words were exchanged between the two sets of siblings; it was the first time anyone had ever called me a dirty Mexican. I recall going into our house and crying to my mother, ‘John called me a dirty Mexican.’ My mother said, ‘Well you go back outside and tell John that ‘yes’ you are a Mexican but you’re not dirty.’ My reply was, ‘I don’t want to be a Mexican; he said it wasn’t nice.’ My mother laughed and said, ‘well it is nice, and you go back outside and you tell him so.’ So it was like, ok, well I’m going to go do exactly what my mom told me.

The sense of feeling marginalized was compounded, as I stated earlier, because Lydia attended a Catholic school and the divorce of her parents placed her in an outer circle. The Catholic school environment did not allow the casting of aspersions among students so race and ethnicity was never an issue, but being a child of divorced parents carried an unpleasant stigma. As Lydia was growing up she experienced further marginalization of a political nature.

Lydia's mother re-married when Lydia was fifteen. Her mother and stepfather were very involved in politics, predominantly in the Chicano movement. Lydia recalls walking precincts when she was fourteen and has a scrapbook that contains pictures of her mother and stepfather carrying picket signs and protesting in front of a newspaper publishing company. The Catholic school did not look favorably on political activism and considered the family's behavior indecorous. In fact, one of the Catholic nuns was very vocal in her belief that political activism was inappropriate for nice Catholic girls. Once again Lydia was placed in the outer circle, this time because of her political beliefs.

Lydia transitioned into the public school environment during her last two years of high school and that was only because the Catholic schools in the community only went up to the ninth grade. She describes the climate of the public high school as very turbulent:

There were race riots going on in the hallways, and there were armed police officers trying to keep the peace. Many Latino students were active in the Chicano movement and the school revealed a strong Brown Beret presence. The high school I attended was divided almost equally between Latinos and Anglos, but the division was also economic. The Latino kids came from the lower socioeconomic side of town and the Anglo kids came from the more affluent neighborhoods. There were a lot of clashes happening simultaneously: economic clashes, race clashes, social clashes, all coming together inside the building. We may have been integrated in the same building but we were certainly not

integrated in the classrooms. The same situation still holds true today. Let me explain what my situation was like.

I walked into that school knowing that I was going to go to college. I selected what I wanted as college bound classes and they were not at all integrated. I took trig and I took an excelled English class, and I was one of two Latinos in these classes. It was common that we would be the same small group of Latinos in all the advanced courses. Now the Anglo kids would see the masses outside rioting and say, "You're not like them." But there was no difference and I've always been the one to say that.

Through Lydia's experiences growing up in a large Latino community, and the events that had transpired in her life, it was clear that she had many situations in which to analyze the issues surrounding exclusion. "The real issue here is fitting in nowhere," she said, "we are stuck in the middle, and I believe we remain in the middle on many issues." Lydia explained that as a Latina professional she has often felt alone and unable to fit into the mainstream culture as well as the Latino culture. She believes that this holds true for many Latinas because the vast majority are not into higher education and those who are tend to be looked upon as different. Even among her own extended family, she is looked upon as different. It has taken her many years to become comfortable in this awkward middle position, but Lydia confirms that she has come to peace with this situation and will not dwell on it because doing so hinders her productivity.

I must backup again and share an incident that happened to Lydia at the public high school she had attended. She had been constantly harassed by another Latina student; this harassment eventually lead to a physical altercation and when her mother confronted the other family to resolve the issue, Lydia was told by her assailant that she [Lydia] thought she was better than any of the other Hispanic kids because she didn't take the same classes, and she dressed differently. As an adult she regresses to this memory and firmly stated:

This mode of thinking expounds on institutional racism. If you are academically successful, you must think you're White, and you are not Latino if you choose their way. Therefore, you have to pretend that you are academically stupid to be Hispanic. This logic gets all real strange, but those pieces were always there in high school.

It was evident by the conviction in Lydia's tone that she believes this illogic still holds true today for many Latinos. Whatever negative experiences she may have had in elementary and high school were overshadowed by her extensive involvement in many clubs and co-curricular activities.

Next we talked about her college experience. Lydia was recruited to apply to a private liberal arts college. The time was during the mid 1970s, and this college was beginning to make an earnest effort to recruit a diverse student population. Lydia was very excited about the possibility of going away to college and living in the dorms, so she proceeded with the application process. This was a small and very exclusive college where only one out of ten people who apply actually get accepted. Lydia told me with great detail the events that transpired on the day she received her acceptance letter:

I had gotten my hopes up that I would be accepted, and I really wanted to attend this college. When I received the acceptance letter, I was so excited that I took the letter to school to share with my excellent English teacher. I was certain that because she taught excellent students certainly she would appreciate and understand the significance of being accepted to this college; after all, she had told me the admission process was very rigorous. With great enthusiasm I showed her the letter and she was very cold. 'Honey,' she said, 'I think you're going to have some problems. I think you're going to have some academic problems.' She continued, 'those kids come from private schools, not public schools, and they are all very wealthy and it might be very difficult for you there. If you get accepted to another school you might want to consider that instead.' I was stunned. I wanted to cry, but there was a room full of students and I was too embarrassed. I was an 'A' student, I was also just a kid; I was sixteen. How and why would she say that to me? I remember thinking, 'I'll show you I can do this', and I did. My mother had always told me that I could do anything I set my mind to, and I believed that completely.

As an adult Lydia has reflected many times on this incident and has used it to encourage other young students to never allow other people to belittle their hopes and dreams. Lydia also believes that this teacher downgraded the public school system and subverted the efforts of public school educators in preparing students to compete with private prep schools.

The first year that Lydia attended this private college was the first year that a large (20) Latino population of students had been accepted on this campus. Lydia explained her experience in two words, culture shock. The culture shock was not only in the ethnic realm but even more so in the economic realm. Ethnically she said that the Latino students were never treated in a derogatory way either by faculty, administrators or other students, but it was just a sense of discomfort. She said, 'I think they felt as uncomfortable around us as we did around them.' The obvious disparity between the Latino and the Anglo students was in the arena of economics and this divide, according to Lydia, was very great. The students who attended this college came from around the world and their families were very wealthy.

Lydia presented an interesting observation about the blending of race and class within the confines of this prestigious college:

As Latino students we were not invited to join such clubs as the drama club or to be part of any sororities. We were just not invited to the table. We lived within their midst but we did things on our own. I describe it as being invisible, and I think that is how Latinas are on many levels. Others know we are there, but they don't invite us to be a part of their social thing. We just didn't fit in.

The experience of being in the margin of activity was acceptable to Lydia. She explained that the cultural difference between the Latino and Anglo students was very evident in their individual interests. The Anglo students cared about weekend ski trips and the

Latino students cared about social issues. The Latino students never tried to fit in because they knew that economically that was impossible, but they never felt cheated or left out because the desire for those types of activities was not within their realm of experiences. The Latino students introduced the campus to its first MECHA (*Movimiento Estudiantial Chicano de Aztlan*) organization and became engaged in social activities like putting on parties for low-income community children.

I inquired about ethnic breakdown of the faculty and administrators. “There were two Latino professors,” Lydia said, “and no minority administrators.” The administration did, however, give them resources to start organizations like MECHA. “I was at this college for four years and during that time there were two Latino professors,” Lydia concluded. Both of these professors became important mentors during Lydia’s college career.

After graduating from college Lydia applied and got accepted to law school. At this point she decided to wait a year before beginning law school and got married. She married a young Latino lawyer who had graduated from Stanford. They moved to the San Francisco Bay area where he was practicing law, and she would eventually begin her studies. She completed one year of law school in San Francisco then the marriage ended, and she returned to her home state. Lydia presented these events so matter-of-factly that I knew there had to be a story within the constructs of these statements. I wanted to know what she wasn’t saying. “What ended this marriage?” I asked. Lydia’s response was extremely enlightening, and I must exercise restraint in analysis as I relay her experience:

My husband and I looked very, very compatible. If you just saw our resumes it would seem like a match made in heaven. But we were very, very different. My

husband's family was in many ways opposite from my own family except in the fact that we were all Latinos. I am fifth generation American and my husband's parents were both immigrants from Mexico. His family was migrant farm workers and during our marriage his father still worked in the fields. The family had eight children and also at the time of our marriage two of the children were already lawyers and one brother became a medical doctor. Our biggest issue was the role of women in society and in the home.

My husband was a very good speaker, and he espoused all those beliefs in women's rights and understood the fundamental nature of the women's movement, but he didn't own those beliefs. He held to the old fashion Mexican belief that women exist to serve their men. It was clear that although we were both Latino, our cultures were very, very different. His family spoke only Spanish in the home, and I spoke almost none so whenever we visited his family, these were my silent weekends because no one spoke to me. He referred to my family as an abnormal Hispanic family run by women.

With great fervor in her voice Lydia expressed herself with no hesitation:

My grandmother and my mother both overcame great hardships, and they never backed down, and they never took anything from men, and I had been raised that way; this resiliency he called abnormal. I knew it was time to cut our losses and move on.

We had been in deep conversation for over an hour. I knew that we still had extensive topics to cover so I moved the conversation into her career life and wanting to know about her work history. Lydia told me that she had always worked during the summers when she was in high school, but she never had a good job, a decent job until she became a lawyer. In addition to doing the jobs that most teenagers do, like working at fast food establishments, Lydia's mother always encouraged and pushed community service. Lydia did a lot of volunteer work for various community organizations as she was growing up, and this community involvement has become the norm in her life.

Lydia graduated from law school and with a desire to serve the community she went to work as a legal aid lawyer. She remained with legal aid services for several years and moved into various supervisory positions and eventually accepted the position as director of her county's legal aid department. Lydia remained as director for a couple of

years but realized that she liked the hand-on approach to law more than the administrative aspect. “I needed to have this experience,” Lydia said, “that 12 year old girl did not only want to be a legal aid lawyer, she wanted to be the director of a legal aid department. “ I had to try it.” Lydia felt that without going full-circle she never would have been satisfied.

Reading the want ads of the local newspaper one day, Lydia saw an advertisement for a municipal court judge. She applied for and got the part-time position as a night court judge. Eventually her reputation spread and other municipalities began to request her services. She continues to serve as a municipal court judge for different jurisdictions. A few years ago Lydia opened her own private practice and is now able to select the type of cases and clients of her choosing.

As Lydia was moving through her career, she did remarry and had twin sons. I have offered this information because it leads to an amusing illustration about Lydia’s character and stamina. She said that when her boys were growing up, they had a paper route and she would get up every morning at 4:00 a.m. to help them deliver the newspapers. We both laughed when she said, “I’m probably the only person on the face of the earth who did a paper route with my children at 4 o’clock in the morning and then put on a judicial robe at night.” Lydia attributes her strong work ethic to her mother and believes that as a Latina professional it is her responsibility to be a role model to others.

I felt like I was missing a piece of Lydia’s life journey; her life history as it was turning out. I backed her up a bit and of course I was curious about her current marriage. “When did you remarry,” I asked? “This is my third marriage,” Lydia said. “I got married shortly after getting out of law school. My second husband was Iranian and we

were married for about six years.” I was not at all surprised when Lydia said that she and her second husband had some cultural issues. Lydia said that her second husband’s family culture was very much like her first husband’s family, very old world. I tried not to laugh at the irony of this situation and only did so after Lydia herself shook her head and laughed. “Didn’t I get it?” she said. “What was I thinking?”

Lydia is now married to an Anglo and they have been together for ten years. She says he supports all of her ambitions, and they are very happy in their relationship. Lydia reminded me that she is not good at housekeeping so they share the chores, and her husband actually irons her clothes. More important for Lydia is that her husband accompanies her at all the many functions in which she is involved.

The day was getting late and Lydia had been so gracious by sharing her life story, but I still had some questions. She gave me permission to continue so I asked her to describe her personal culture. “How do you define yourself ethnically?” I asked. “I am a Chicana,” she said. When I asked her to explain what this meant to her I could sense the struggle in her mind as she searched for meaning. “Would you like something to drink?” she asked as she stood up and retreated to the kitchen returning with two iced teas. Sitting down again she began to tell me about the things she would do in college and her mannerisms, but she was really having a hard time trying to paint a picture of her culture. I asked her to think about customs, rituals, artifacts, values, and traditions, even foods that were unique to her as a person. “I’m having a hard time answering this question and I don’t know why,” Lydia responded. Lydia talked in great detail about family recipes and gatherings for the holidays but was never really able to nail down a response to my question about culture.

I decided to move the interview along so I asked Lydia to describe her leadership style. Her response required no contemplation as she quickly said, "It's dictatorial. Definitely coming from a domineering mother and then being in the courtroom, I don't ask anyone for their opinion. I make the decision. I'm the boss and that's the way it is." I had no doubt that Lydia was indeed her own person and it was obvious that because of her resolute nature she had probably endured some harsh criticism because of her individual style.

During the recent past Lydia was elected as president of a local school board. She shared with me that being a member of the school board has changed her life in many ways and most significantly in the area of her leadership style. "I think in threes now when I used to think in ones," she said with a smirk on her face, "now I only have a one fifth vote and I am learning to be more collaborative," she continued.

My final question to Lydia came as I asked her to describe her spirituality. I could see that this was an area of her life that was very special to her as her response came without any forethought:

Complete and deep; my entire life centers on spirituality. I have a natural belief in God. I believe that he doesn't make mistakes and that there is a design. I believe that I wasn't just slapped onto this earth and left to see where I would go. I believe that we have a destiny and I believe that I am living my destiny. I am where I need to be, in a community that I know and understand and can serve. I really see myself as a vessel these days, a vessel between many worlds. I really do believe that what I do for the least of my brethren, I do unto God.

Suddenly Lydia paused, and then she said:

Maybe that's what culture is. It's that piece of what you've learned and how you've learned it, and how it is embedded in those early childhood pieces of what you see as fair and good. I think that culture is the essence of going outside of your little safe secure environment and taking on the challenges that you were trained to do.

Juanita

I had scheduled an interview with Juanita early one morning. Actually she scheduled the time with me. I was so thrilled to get this interview that I would have met her at 4:00 a.m. if that were the only time she had available. You see Juanita is the president of a college and she is a fast moving, no-nonsense woman. I had set the appointment with her assistant, so until the day of the interview we had never met.

The interview took place in her third floor office where an entire glass wall overlooked the city. Looking below one could see the campus with the tree-lined walkways, and the busy flow of students moving between classes. This was an environment I had always favored, and for a moment I wondered if I would ever have the opportunity to be a leader among leaders that I believed Juanita to be; but enough of that. I wasn't there to presage my own future, I was there to learn the life story of this amazing woman and hopefully garner some insights into the success factors of Latinas.

We sat at a large oval table in her office. There was nothing extraordinary about her office, as things appeared to be neatly in their place. Juanita was very convivial as we spend a few minutes exchanging small talk, and then we got right to the business at hand. Juanita had scheduled one hour for the interview so it was imperative that I move things along quickly to assure that we would cover all the areas of importance.

I began the interview by asking about her family life when she was growing up. Juanita said, "I had a wonderful childhood and we were a very strong family, even today we all remain very close. We are a very traditional Catholic Hispanic family." Juanita is the middle child and the only daughter in a family of five children. The family owned several acres of land and the family business was cattle ranching. Juanita said that her

family did not have a lot of extras, they never went on vacation, and they had a pickup truck for the ranch work and a station wagon as the family car. Juanita spoke with such endearment about her family and she laughed when remembering the station wagon that served to transport groceries as well as the family to church on Sundays. “If we were poor, I didn’t know it,” she said, “we never lacked anything and we were just the same as everyone else in our rural community.” She recalls Christmas as a special time:

Each of us kids would receive two presents for Christmas. One present would be something fun or frilly, and the other would be something we needed like a pair of pants or a shirt. We were very content. Our family was strong and very proud.

Juanita appeared nostalgic as she spoke of the family values that perpetuated the values she embodies today. “My mom and dad taught us a lot about self-respect and pride, she said, there is just something about our pride; I can’t explain it. We are a very proud family.” Juanita certainly evoked a sense of pride that lacked any semblance of arrogance but instead was very genteel.

She grew up in a very small rural community. Juanita illustrated the size of the community by describing the school in the following manner:

We went to school in a tiny little schoolhouse. It was a two-room schoolhouse and I excelled there. I attended this school until the eighth grade, at which time the school was closed, and the children were bussed to another town about an hour away. I had the same wonderful teacher from the fifth through the eighth grade.

Juanita is a first generation college graduate, as are all of her brothers. They are all first generation because neither of her parents were college educated. Her parents wanted all of the children to achieve a great deal and expected them to do well in school; in fact all five children were high performers academically. Juanita had a high level of self-esteem as she was growing up. Her parents believed that she was very smart and

capable, and that she could accomplish anything she desired. She embraced this belief and while growing up she never felt any obstacles to her achievements. Juanita recalls that after dinner her parents would make sure that all the children sat at the kitchen table and did homework. She was always a good student.

Affectionately she talked about her parents:

My mother is a native of Mexico and has never been real comfortable with the English language, but she emphasized the importance of education. All of us children learned to speak Spanish right along with our learning of English. My dad is half Anglo and half Hispanic and our family held strong to Catholic Hispanic traditions. My parents lived on the ranch until all the children moved away. They were married for 66 years.

I marveled at the concept of anyone being married for so many years. I could see that Juanita was very proud of this fact. She talked about the security of the home, the community, and the school where she grew up. She always felt loved and cared for. “Rural communities are that way,” she said, “always taking care of each other because one doesn’t have a lot of resources.”

Juanita described the rural schools as often lacking personnel and because she was such a good student she would often be left in charge of the library, and also took charge of classrooms for younger children whenever their teacher was absent. She had a lot of responsibility and loved the privilege and the challenge of being in charge. She spoke lovingly about a wonderful teacher she had for her fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth grades; signifying that this too was common for small rural schools. “This teacher really mentored me. She gave me books and really encouraged me,” Juanita said. “We remained in touch until she died.”

High school was also a very positive experience for Juanita. The high school averaged about 300 students and she remained at the top of her class until her junior year.

She laughed as she said; “I had been the valedictorian of my class until a kid from Texas moved in.” This kid from Texas moved into the valedictorian slot but she still graduated as the salutatorian of her class.

In addition to being a member of the National Honors Society, Juanita was enrolled in several honors courses including math and science. She said there were only three students in these courses and the honors teacher taught them outside of the normal school hours. The honors teacher was very encouraging and tried to influence Juanita to pursue an engineering degree because she excelled in math and science. He took Juanita and the other honors students on several trips to visit engineering schools but the idea of being an engineer did not appeal to Juanita.

Juanita started college directly out of high school. She was awarded several scholarships that paid for tuition, room, and board. She also worked throughout her college career because her family simply did not have the means to support her through college. Juanita stated that the scholarships themselves became a good motivator because in order to keep them she also had to keep her grades up. Excelling in college was no problem because Juanita had always loved school and she loved learning. Juanita selected computer science as her major but quickly determined that this was not a field she could be passionate about. She indicated that it just wasn't a good fit. At the end of her sophomore year she changed her major to education. “The decision to go into education came from a decision not to pursue a degree in computer science,” Juanita said. “I did not have a plan to become any great educator; it was just a good fit.” She referenced the times in elementary and middle school when she would be placed in charge of a classroom by her teacher and how positive she felt about the experience. It

was the concept of being in charge that gave her the drive to pursue a degree in education but her goal as a college student was simply to graduate in four years.

As we discussed her college career Juanita related that her entire college experience was very positive. She attended a small state university with a highly integrated foreign and domestic student body. Juanita was involved in many co-curricular activities and student organizations allowing her the opportunity to meet a wide spectrum of students from various cultures. As much as Juanita could recall, there were a few minority faculty and administrators. She does not recollect any hostilities among the students or against the administration. She was a member of MECHA (*Movimiento Estudiantial Chicano de Aztlan*) but does not recall specifically any direct issues surrounding this organization during the early 1970s when she was earning her undergraduate degree.

During her senior year of college, Juanita was recruited at a college career fair, and offered several contracts, to teach high school at various school districts around the country. She accepted a contract with a large school district because this would fulfill one of her desires to live in a large metropolitan city. Living in a city was something she had always wanted even while growing up in a small rural community.

Young, courageous and adventurous, Juanita moved to one of the largest cities in the United States without knowing a single person. She was placed in the city's largest high school and remained with that school district for sixteen years.

The pursuit of her master's degree began immediately after acquiring her bachelor degree. She worked during the day and went to school evenings and weekends. Juanita earned her masters in a year and a half. She was twenty-four years old when she

completed graduate school. Deciding to continue with her education, Juanita enrolled immediately into a doctoral program.

Her Ph.D. would be in educational administration but unlike her master's degree, taking occasional classes would prolong the path to the doctoral degree. Juanita set her goal to complete the Ph.D. by the time she was thirty and true to her nature, this goal was achieved.

I was fascinated by the details of her educational career as she relayed that she was passionate about her beliefs concerning the role of public education. This passion led her down the track to prepare for what she thought would eventually be a superintendent position. Her career in education progressed through various positions, each bringing new challenges and responsibilities; both of which fed her passion for her chosen field. Juanita started out as a teacher, was promoted to an athletic director, then assistant principle, followed by principle, and eventually to assistant superintendent. Before I move on to what happen next in her career I would like to add a note about the athletic director position. Juanita recounts the experience of this assignment:

I was never an athlete and I knew nothing about the position of athletic director, but when I was assigned this responsibility I took it without a second thought. I could always handle being in non-traditional roles, and this certainly was the case. I believed my parents when they told me, 'you can do anything you set your mind to.'

I smiled and nodded in agreement as she continued, "nothing ever worried me, I knew I would succeed." Juanita recalls the skepticism from the athletic department personnel when she was assigned to the director's position. Immediately she began studying the state activity rules and soon gained the respect and trust of the department.

Juanita had no experience in higher education leadership so naturally I wanted to know how she became a college president. Her path to the presidency was certainly a non-traditional one. Recall that Juanita had previously stated that she never had a problem assuming non-traditional roles; well the position that would lead to the presidency was no exception. Functioning in the role of assistant superintendent, Juanita spoke at a conference and after her speech a gentleman approached her from a national organization that establishes education policy. He asked Juanita if she would like to go work for this organization. “What do you do?” she asked. He explained that the organization formulates educational policies for all of the United States. Juanita explained that the school district in which she was currently employed was going through major transition and she decided it was time to leave, and chose instead to work with this policy organization. Again, Juanita didn’t know much about education policy but accepted the challenge and became director of policy for the organization.

She remained with this organization for five years during which time she worked with governors and legislators across the country, testified before thirty-eight different legislatures. “Being in the policy arena I learned a lot about what states do and how their policies affect the quality of education,” Juanita said. She was also appointed by the governor to her state’s commission on higher education.

It was the combination of these two positions; working for the policy organization and serving as a commission member, that brought Juanita to the realization that higher education was the track she should pursue. She applied for, and was selected as, the president of an institution of higher education. Juanita expressed her feelings of the presidency role by stating:

It all feels right to me. One of the things that I have always believed in is that all of the different experiences I have had make me a stronger president. I know that some of the traditions within higher education are the expectations that people will progress from faculty, to department head, to dean, to vice president, and eventually to president. I do believe that we need some of that step-by-step progression but we also need divergent thinking and we must realize that other experiences also prepare us for the presidency.

I certainly admired her for having this thought, since I know that should I ever aspire to a presidency, it will most likely be through non-traditional means.

“What’s next?” I asked, wanting to know where her future aspirations might lead. “I don’t know,” Juanita replied, “I have always thought that the best thing to do was to do a fabulous job wherever you are and let the work speak for itself.” My observations concluded that Juanita was enjoying her role as president and had no intention of moving on; at least not yet. Juanita’s words inspired me.

As I sat across from Juanita I could see the confidence in her character. She was relaxed, and indeed professional. Unaware that she, at this very moment, had given me valuable advice I was sure to remember for the rest of my life. Prepare, always prepare, for the challenges will be presented at a time and place presently unknown to me; prepare.

Wanting to know more about her personal life I asked, “Are you married?” I was uncertain if she would be willing to share this information but without hesitation she informed me that she had been married twice. Both her current and former husbands are Anglo.

The first marriage occurred after she received her master’s degree but lasted only a short time. I inquired if she thought the pursuit of her educational goals had a negative impact on the first marriage? “Yes, I think he was actually not as understanding or

supportive of my goals and tried to minimize them,” she said. “He thought that my pursuits were not as important as what he did,” Juanita continued, “it just didn’t work.”

Juanita remained single for many years and then met her second husband who she described as being very supportive and encouraging. She laughed as she stated, “He is a terrific man. Always encouraging me to do whatever I want; of course he knows I would do it anyway.” They have been married for fourteen years.

We discussed the state of women in leadership positions and agreed that many are not married. This is a phenomenon that remains elusive although one could infer its basis; something neither of us chose to speculate upon at this time. Instead Juanita began to discuss the many women who have mentored her throughout her career. She indicated that at every major turning point in her life a woman has played a significant role in offering her direction and advice. Although there have been certain males who have also assumed the role of mentor, Juanita believes that it has been other women who have either pushed or pulled her through the major transition points in her life. Juanita credits both women and men in her life who have seen certain attributes in her and have encouraged her to take on challenging roles; from the school teacher in the two room school house to the administrator from the state department of education. All encouraged her to take risks and assist in defining new roles for women.

We talked about her doctoral studies and I inquired about her dissertation work. Juanita shared that her dissertation was a comparison of leadership development in the educational arena verses leadership development in private industry and the investment that private industry makes verses the little investment that education makes in preparing its leaders. “Perfect,” I said, “that leads me to my next question. How do you define your

personal leadership style?” Juanita adjusted herself in the chair, getting into a comfortable position as she began her response:

My leadership style is principle centered. I have always defined it by my personal beliefs and values, and also the beliefs and values of the organization. I believe that leaders make a huge difference in terms of the culture of an organization, and the culture is driven around the values both of expression of what we believe in, and then do we manifest those values in how we behave and how we work and interact. In addition to being value driven it is also participatory; though in the higher education arena I would say it is not shared governance to the degree that I think groups want it to be. I believe that I encourage people to take risks and I think people have to believe that they can take risks and fail and not be punished if things don't work out the way we would like.

I clearly understood Juanita's philosophy on leadership so I moved our conversation to a question on ethnicity.

“You have identified your ethnicity as Hispanic,” I said. “Would you describe what this means to you?” I continued. Juanita did not pause as she meticulously described her ethnic culture. “It means a lot,” she said. “It is distinguished by the language, by valuing family, by traditions, and an incredible sense of pride,” she expressed with great conviction. Juanita's mother insisted that all the children learn to read, write, and speak Spanish fluently and the language has become a great sense of pride for her. The respect for family, and close family ties are also part of the Hispanic culture that Juanita values. She added that Spanish language music and Mexican food is also a defining factor in her life, although these are somewhat superficial in nature they all contribute to the totality of what it means to be Hispanic.

Juanita had been amenable to all of my questions and by simply observing her I could anticipate her response to the following question but of course it was imperative that I ask her to describe her spirituality. Again, without hesitation Juanita responded:

The spiritual dimension of my life is an essential part of who I am. Not only the affiliation with the organized church, which is very much a part of my life. I believe that spirituality is an important part of leadership in terms of integrity and meaning of the work being a reflection of the person.

My inquiry was over, as was the time allotted for the interview, but it was evident that Juanita and I would connect again. I felt a bond of sisterhood as I left her office and drove back to my home.

Reyna

Reyna is a genteel, humble, and extremely confident woman. She is an administrator at a community college and has been in her current position for several years. When I contacted her with information about my study and the factors I would be exploring in an attempt to understand the success of Latinas, she readily agreed to an interview.

The campus where Reyna's office is located is perhaps the most halcyon of all the places I had visited on my journey of discovery. The buildings are constructed of golden brick and red tile roofs with artistic sculptures strategically placed throughout the campus. The buildings also display large glass windows and an outdoor theater is visible from the walkway. Hundreds of mature trees line the walkways and I felt somewhat utopian as I approached her office building.

As I entered the building I was captivated once again by the serenity of the physical environment. In the lobby of the building was a huge fountain where the flowing water made a gentle sound like that of a mountain stream. There were many coins tossed into the fountain and I wondered how many were symbolic of the hopes and dreams of students not unlike me. Several students sat in the lounge chairs placed throughout the lobby; some reading, others napping, and some just visiting with one another.

I located Reyna's office and thus began the story of a magnificent woman. You may think that magnificent is too strong a word and perhaps should be applied to someone who has acquired great fame or accomplished tremendous deeds. Reyna is a

survivor and it is her resiliency that I attribute to her magnificence; that alone is a phenomenal feat.

Reyna was born into a poor family. Her father completed an eighth grade education and her mother graduated from high school. She has two brothers that she shared a bedroom with as they grew up in a two-bedroom house. Reyna has a very strong sense of family as will be illuminated by the story she tells:

My childhood was perfect. I was born and raised in a lower socioeconomic area and my family was very poor. The amazing thing is that I never knew we were poor because I was just like everyone else around me. Everything was perfect, but I really must explain why I saw my world as perfect.

Reyna went on to explain that the area where she lived was completely colonized by her extended family. All of her aunts, uncles, and older cousins were her next-door neighbors. Within a two or maybe three block radius there were probably twelve separate families, but all of them were related. It was a family neighborhood, a *vecindario*. As she was growing up everyone she knew, and all the children she played with were part of her extended family unit. She continued to explain the dynamics of the family interactions:

The cousins were raised as brothers and sisters. I remember just walking into houses and getting fed, and getting disciplined if I needed it. It was wonderful. We shared food and as one child grew out of clothing it was passed on to the next. We played together, we prayed together, we went to church together, and we did everything as a family. We really were one family. You're familiar with the phrase, 'It takes a village,' and in our case this was absolutely true. We were a village that took on the responsibility of raising all the children in the unit.

Reyna spoke affectionately about her extended family and explained that as the children grew older and started their own families some moved away but they maintain close ties with each other. They often enjoy the holidays together and it has become a family tradition that on Thanksgiving they rent a local hall and all of the extended family

joins in a huge Thanksgiving Day celebration where everyone brings their favorite foods, they listen and dance to Mexican music, and enjoy their communal presence.

I asked, “What was your self-esteem like as you were growing up?” Reyna replied, “We were all accepted for who we were. We were always praised and we were not allowed to fight with our cousins or put them down in any way.” She went on to explain that the family always followed Catholic traditions and the Catholic faith also played a very strong role in the emotional and spiritual development of the children.

Reyna and her two brothers attended Catholic school until they reached the eighth grade. I inquired as to how her parents were able to pay for Catholic school? Reyna’s parents were totally committed to the Catholic Church and volunteered in every way possible. Their volunteer work reduced the cost of tuition for the children but they also accepted a very simple lifestyle. They wanted their children to succeed and saw education as the key to that success. The family just did without many possessions so that private education could be realized.

Reyna explained that the extended family was all very active in the church and all of the cousins attended the local Catholic school until they reached the eighth grade. She explained her Catholic school experience as fun. The wearing of uniforms and the discipline received from the nuns made for a very positive experience according to Reyna.

The transition to public high school was a culture shock for Reyna, and it was the first time in her life that she recognized people in her community were different. She explained the realization of difference not in terms of ethnicity or race but in social class and economic status:

I remember very vividly that my cousin and I went to a study group at another student's home. When we walked into his house it had wall-to-wall carpeting. I had never seen carpeting. I thought everyone lived like us. This was the first time I recognized that I was different.

It was during her high school years that Reyna experienced discrimination for the first time. She attended high school during the late 1960s. It was a time when her community was experiencing a lot of unrest because of the Chicano movement. Her family environment, coupled with the sheltered environment of the Catholic school, never permitted her exposure to discrimination or racial tensions. In fact, it was not until years later when she realized that she had been marginalized in the public school environment. I sensed my own discomfort as the reality of social injustice gripped at my soul while Reyna told me of her experiences:

I had always been a good student and high school was no different. I was always at the top of my class but I was not allowed to participate in classroom activities or even to take the classes I wanted. I recall one time that my English class was going to perform a classroom play. It wasn't anything rehearsed, it was more like a skit, and the teacher selected everyone in the class to perform a part except four students who were to be the audience. Those four students were all Latinos and I was among them.

I also recall wanting to register for an advanced math class and I was told that I could not; no explanation, just no. I was placed in a basic level math class even though I had the ability to take an advanced course. I guess it was my Catholic and cultural upbringing that never allowed me to question authority so I just went along with whatever I was told to do.

I felt great sorrow as Reyna continued her story:

I graduated among the top students in my class with a gold cord. My parents were proud of me just as I too was proud of myself. The terrible thing is that neither the teachers nor the school counselors ever told me that I could qualify for scholarships to go to college. I was never asked if I was interested in attending college and this was my intention all along. My parents didn't know about grants and scholarships so they sacrificed everything they had and paid for my college education when it was totally unnecessary. It angers me that no one ever told my parents or me that I could get scholarships. This was during the late 1960s and early 1970s when there was a lot of Pell grants available along with other financial aid resources.

Those in authority did not only exclude Reyna from academic access, but her peers also excluded her from social events. She said the school was equally divided among Latinos and Anglos but teachers and other authority figures were predominately Anglo. The Anglo students formed clicks and often had parties because their families could afford such gala events, but Reyna was never invited. She attributes that exclusion to her socioeconomic status. I found it interesting when she said that the athletes, whether Anglo or Latino, were always included. Athletics was their ticket into certain privilege. "I didn't have a ticket," Reyna said. "I was not part of the in crowd."

She concluded the saga of this period in her life by saying that her friends were also marginalized. Her friends also had good grades but none of them were ever given information about college, nor were they given information about vocational schools. Many of her male friends were told that they should enlist in the military or go to trade school. Higher education was never presented as an option to Reyna and her circle of friends.

Despite the barriers to education Reyna went on to college immediately out of high school. She attended a local college in her hometown and overall her college experience was positive. In retrospect Reyna would have enjoyed the experience more had she been given the opportunity to attend college away from home. I asked about her involvement in the campus community and she indicated that she had no time for co-curricular activities. "I worked part-time while I attended school so my schedule was very tight. I worked, attended classes, studied, and that was my life," she said. Reyna graduated with a bachelor's degree in three years.

I asked, “Were you treated equitably on the college campus?” Reyna responded that for the most part she never felt any type of discrimination except on one occasion.

She explained:

I was taking an independent study class along with two other females; both of them White. Our final exam was oral. I recall sitting outside the door of this professor’s office and the two other girls went in before me, one at a time. As one female came out she stated ‘That was the easiest final I ever had. He only asked me one question.’ The second female entered his office and after five minutes she also returned with the same account of what had transpired. Next it was my turn. I went into his office thinking that the exam would be a piece of cake. He quizzed me for almost two hours. He picked up the book and he would read a phrase and expect me to come up with answers. He raked me over the coals. I realized that this was blatant discrimination and after the humiliating ordeal I filed a formal complaint with the dean of the department but nothing was ever done. Again, I submitted to that authority figure and never pursued the matter further.

Ironically, years later, after Reyna had earned an MBA, she was appointed to an administrative position at a college where (I’ll call him ‘Bob’) was employed. I asked, “Did he recognize you?” “Oh, yes,” Reyna replied, “he remembered me very well and immediate began to make my life miserable.” Reyna discussed Bob’s bilious behavior with her immediate supervisor but the situation with Bob’s misanthropic attitude was ignored. The response from her boss was “Bob is like this with everyone. He is ill tempered with all the employees; just ignore him.” I immediate saw the parallel between Reyna’s encounter with Bob in college and the results of her approach to the dean, and her current situation in bringing Bob’s inappropriate behavior to her supervisor. I wonder why, in both situations, her requests for corrective action were ignored?

We regressed for a moment and Reyna stated that when she was studying for her MBA she was working fulltime, attending school full time and raising two children as a single parent. Since I was very interested in the coping mechanisms of my study

participants, I wanted to know more about this chapter in Reyna's life. The story she told about her married life illustrated her unfettered ability to survive:

My ex-husband is an alcoholic and we had a typical alcoholic relationship although at the time I didn't know what that meant because I had never been exposed to alcoholism. I was in my 20s when we got married. He was a teacher and I assumed that because he was a teacher that he was a good person. Again, I believe it was my religious and cultural upbringing that taught me that only good people are in certain professions. Throughout my life this has been a hard lesson for me to learn; that not everyone who is in a position of authority is worthy of our respect.

"How long were you married?" I asked. Reyna explained that they had been married off-and-on for about eight years, but it was more off than on. "Was your husband abusive?" I inquired. Reyna continued with her story:

Yes, he was very abusive and he was very weird. First of all when I returned to college to get my MBA he was very cynical. He tried to make me feel like I was neglecting the children and my responsibilities around the house. He continually degraded me by saying things like 'You will never get promoted so I can't see why you want an advanced degree. It will never benefit you in any way.' He had a very *machismo* attitude that was instilled in him by his own parents; that however, is another story.

I asked Reyna if she would share a personal example of what her life was like with her husband. I never expected that she would be as open with me as she recounted the following episode:

This incident is very emotional to talk about. He would get off work at 2 o'clock in the afternoon and either go to his favorite bar or hang out with his drinking buddies until 10 o'clock at night. By the time he would get home this was already eight hours of drinking. Whenever he would come home I would always pretend to be asleep. This particular night was no different. He got home about 10:00 p.m. and I was pretending to be asleep. I could hear him talking to someone and I thought that he had brought someone home. I peeked down the stairs and there was no one with him. He was talking to himself, 'Look at what I have; look at this house. You didn't think I was going to have anything, but just look at what I have.' As I listened to him have this conversation I remained in bed, with my clothes on (I always slept with my clothes on because I was afraid of what he might do), and I was very afraid. I could feel my heart beating under the blankets.

He made his way up the stairs and began to scream at me. The next thing I knew he had grabbed me by the hair and pulled me out of bed. My bedroom was on the top level of the house. He broke the bedroom window and tried to push me out the window. My bedroom was a mess. The curtains were torn, the rods and lamps broken, everything was a wreck. I tried to get away from him and I remember trying to scream but nothing would come out of my mouth. I wanted so badly for someone to hear me but I just could not scream for help. My kids were asleep and they never woke up; thank God for that.

I remember trying to get to the front door but every time I got to the door and tried to unlock it, he caught me and would just start beating on me. It seemed like this episode lasted forever. We were running throughout the house and I would get away from him and he would catch me again. I tried to get the phone to call 911 and he ripped it from my hands and tore the cord away from the wall. At one point he grabbed my arm and bent it so hard behind my back that I thought he would break it. He made me get a trash bag from beneath the sink and he began to describe in detail how he was going to cut me up in a million pieces and no one would ever find me. He held a knife to my throat and I could feel the cold, sharp blade against my skin.

I don't know how this happened, but I got away from him. I went to the front door and I remember thinking that it was locked with the dead bolt and I wouldn't be able to open it in time. Then all of a sudden the door opened. I never touched it. I never even reached the doorknob. The screen door was also locked with a deadbolt and it too just opened. All of this was happening in what seemed to be slow motion and it was just one of those unexplained phenomena, certainly a miracle. I know he would have killed me that night.

I ran out into the street and my voice returned. I was screaming hysterically and one of my neighbors came out of his home and quickly called the police. They arrived within seconds and tried to calm me down. My entire body was shaking. Within a few moments of the police's arrival my husband appeared as calm as could be and said, "Honey, there is no one in the house trying to kill you. There are no ghosts or monsters trying to get you, everything is okay." He told the police that I was on drugs, but they knew he was drunk and arrested him.

I thanked Reyna for sharing this story with me and she indicated that there are many more stories but perhaps this unpleasant incident is the most traumatic. She once again credits her family and her faith for carrying her through this time in her life. When she realized that she could no longer stay married to her husband, she approached both her family and her priest for advice concerning the action she should take. Her family acknowledged that she needed to leave the relationship for her own safety and her priest told her that a wife should never suffer physical abuse from a husband. Reyna needed

permission from the two most influential factions in her life and once that had been obtained she could move on. I was looking for information that would speak to the resiliency of the women in my study and certainly Reyna's story speaks volumes.

This was a good place to shift the interview from her personal life over to her professional life. Reyna did not have multiple careers' as did most of the other women in the study. She got into her current field immediately after earning an MBA and was rapidly promoted through the system until she arrived at her current position. She did inform me, however, that she had to work very hard and prove herself to many people. There were many in the organization that questioned her knowledge in her specialized field and she stated that it took perhaps a year to gain their acceptance.

I asked about any mentors she may have had along the way on her career path and she indicated that indeed she had several mentors. All of her mentors were White males that nurtured and directed her along the path. I make reference to White males because I asked specifically if any of her mentors were Latino, and more specifically Latinas. Her response was, "No, there were few Latinos in upper level leadership positions within this field and few in administrative positions within higher education, and certainly no Latinas to my knowledge." She did indicate that all of the men who mentored her have remained her friends although they have moved on to other institutions. She went on to express great admiration for these gentlemen.

I asked Reyna to describe her leadership style. "I am very down-to-earth; very honest," she said, "I think that all comes from my upbringing." Reyna went on to describe her style as being personally organized and very straight forward with her employees and peers. In fact she often used the phrase, "I lecture to my employees," as

she described certain situations when work needed to be done within a given timeframe. After further discussion Reyna described her leadership style as being very top-down, a bureaucratic style of sorts. She welcomes the input of individuals but feels that to be inclusive sometimes takes too much time. “I know that balance is important and I have to be patient,” she said, “I just want to get things done quickly.” She is not a fan of the shared governance model and believes that trying to implement the model leaves too much work undone, or at best delayed unnecessarily. “I don’t like work sitting on my desk, everything has to be done and in order. Everything has its place,” she said. My observation of her office spoke to this truth. Everything looked neat and orderly and I saw no stacks of paper anywhere. She mentioned that her mentors also had an authoritarian style of leadership but they were by her definition, movers and shakers.

I had a good description of Reyna’s work ethic so I transitioned the conversation to her personal culture. Reyna self-identified her ethnicity as Hispanic, and I wanted to know how she described her culture. “Tell me,” I said, “what does being ‘Hispanic’ mean to you? What would ‘it’ look like to someone from the outside,” I asked? Without much hesitation Reyna quickly responded:

Personally the term doesn’t mean that much to me. Some people use Latino, some use Hispanic; others use Mexican. I am very proud of my culture. I love that my culture is centered on the Catholic faith and the unity of family. I love Spanish music and the combination of faith, family, and music weaved throughout the events in my life. I am very involved in the Hispanic community and I am totally committed to providing educational access to Hispanics in this community. As I mentioned earlier, the holidays are a time that I celebrate my culture and all the components that make my culture special to me. I speak very little Spanish, and I am not comfortable attempting a conversation in Spanish but I certainly enjoy Spanish music.

Our time together had come to an end as Reyna needed to attend another meeting. “May I call you if I need additional information,” I asked? She responded with a smile, a firm handshake, and “Absolutely.”

Isabel

The three-hour drive to Isabel's home was very pleasant. She lived near the foothills of the Rockies in a farmhouse surrounded by open pastures. I could see horses grazing at a distance, farmers moving about their fields with large farm equipment, and numerous ponds among the vast openness. I had never met Isabel so when I rang her doorbell and she appeared, she did not reflect the picture I had conjured in my mind of what she would look like; which speaks of course to my preconceived stereotype if those in her profession. Isabel is an attorney who runs her own practice and has published several books to help individuals navigate the legal system.

Isabel is a small and hospitable woman. We maneuvered our way through an over crowded foyer and made several more twists and turns until we arrived at a large open room located at the back of her house. In the center of the room was a very large table that one might think belonged in a dining room for a rather grand family dinner. As I looked around I observed what appeared to be movable bookshelves, like those one might find in a library, and indeed they were. Shelves upon shelves filled with book, and on the floor were boxes filled with yet more books. The room also housed a couple of desks, some lounge chairs for reading, and numerous lamps. On the west side of the room was a glass patio door where I could see a large greenhouse outside to the left and several animals roamed about; among them some ducks, geese, a dog, and inside the house lay a lazy gray cat resting on one of the overstuffed lounge chairs.

Isabel and I had a seat at the table and after taking care of some formalities like the consent form and a bit of small talk we began the interview. As was the norm, I asked Isabel to tell me about her family and what life was like as she was growing up. I

immediately knew that I would be there for more than our scheduled hour. Isabel had much to say and was totally unconcerned about time. She talked in great detail about her life and her family and I have attempted to garner the highlights without getting stuck in the detail unless when doing so would make her story more vivid.

Isabel is the second child in a family of nine children. Her parents had six natural children and adopted three other children who had been abandoned by their own parents. They grew up in a lower socioeconomic area of a mid-size town where the ethnic population was almost equally divided between Anglo and Hispanic families. They lived in a part of the town where the environment was not very safe and thus her parents, especially her father, were very protective of the children.

Isabel said they didn't need any playmates because there were so many siblings and the extended family was also very large. Her father and her mother each had fourteen and eleven siblings respectively so there were many cousins around to play with. She does recall being very shy as a young girl and never fighting with her siblings. "I hated confrontation," she said as she joked about becoming a lawyer.

Isabel's worst childhoods memory involved the death of her baby sister. Isabel was only five years old when this tragedy occurred. The baby was born healthy on New Year's Day and died thirty days later. Isabel remembers the funeral and everyone's sadness. After the baby's death the family discovered that the baby had a congenital heart defect but at the time of her death it was only sorrow that filled the home. "A five year old doesn't understand why the adults are sad, or why her mother is sobbing for day," Isabel said. "It wasn't until I was a young adult riding a city bus home from work one evening, that the memory of my sister's death and my mother's sorrow really gripped

me,” she continued. “I remember that evening being overcome with grief and crying for the loss that had occurred so long ago. I still wonder why this memory came alive so many years later,” she concluded.

Isabel spoke with great respect about her parents. “They had so much empathy and showed such great generosity toward other people,” Isabel said. “They continually took in troubled kids from the community and sometimes those kids would stay for months at a time; yet my parents never complained,” she remarked. Isabel remembers coming home from school and seeing strangers in the house, knowing instantly that these were individuals her parents had offered safe haven to. Isabel explained that her extended family was very dysfunctional in many ways. There were elements of alcoholism, child abuse, sexual abuse, suicide, and extreme poverty. Her parents did all they could to alleviate the suffering of that extended family and often the cousins would stay at Isabel’s home for months to escape an abusive situation.

Isabel explained that her parents were very innovative and were able to stretch a dollar by amazing means. Isabel’s mother made beautiful clothes for the children and her father was gifted at making furniture. Because of their many talents members of the extended family thought that Isabel’s family was wealthy and that her and her sisters were spoiled. “This was not the case at all, we just made use of everything at our disposal,” Isabel said.

I could see that Isabel was very fond of her father. He was the person she always strived to please. She described him as a quiet and gentle man, a person way before his time with great inner strength and intensity to care for others. He believed firmly in the need for education perhaps because his own was so limited. Isabel’s parents never

graduated from high school. Her father completed the third grade and her mother completed the ninth grade. Her father was not a disciplinarian but according to Isabel, he didn't have to be as illustrated in the following scenario:

My dad had a way about him when I was growing up. His quiescent nature told me without castigation when my behavior was unacceptable. Let me give you an example; one night when I was a teenager I was out until 2:00 a.m. When I returned home all the lights in the house were off so I quietly made my way up the stairs to my room. There in the darkness of the living room sat my dad – he didn't say a word and I could see only the glow of his cigarette. I continued up the stairs and into my room. The next day my dad never said a word, neither did I, but I never came home that late again.

We both laughed as the vision of her father became clear in my mind.

“Are you close to the extended family unit,” I inquired? “When we were growing up many of the aunts, uncles, and cousins would gather at my grandmother's house on Sundays after church,” Isabel explained. “Even today we maintain a close connection but now my own brothers and sisters gather at my mom's house on Sunday,” she said.

Isabel offered numerous stories about various family members; all of them amusing but I needed to remind myself that I was here to gather information about her personal experiences. I had a good understanding of her family background and now I wanted to know about her experiences through the educational system. As we began to talk about her educational experiences it was once again clear that her father had provided a solid foundation, both intrinsic and extrinsic.

Education for his children had always been an important issue for Isabel's father. She described a time in his life when he worked as a gardener for a very wealthy family:

My father always worked these side jobs and he fit the stereotypical quiet, meek, and submissive Mexican worker. My father was very strong but when he dealt with any kind of authority he changed immediately from my strong father to the meek and humble worker. I think there were many times that my father felt like he was less than because he didn't have an education. I watched this

transformation of behavior over the years and have often wondered if this is where I get my own fearful nature. I do know that he wanted all of his children to believe that they mattered and he recognized education as a doorway to success.

He believed that somehow Isabel was going to make a difference in the lives of others and he was clear in letting her know his beliefs. He told her many times that she, “Was the smart one”. Perhaps he saw something different in her that he didn’t see in the rest of the children although Isabel said he treated them all equally. Isabel however loved to read and this was her favorite pastime. Isabel said, “My father would order my sisters to go do the dishes and they would say, ‘Why doesn’t Isabel have to do dishes?’ and his response would be, ‘because she is reading.’ So my sisters tease me that maybe if they didn’t have to do dishes that perhaps they would be lawyers too.” We both laughed at this analysis knowing that becoming a lawyer involved much more than just not doing the dishes.

Isabel attended a Catholic school, as did the rest of her siblings. The cost was covered by intense volunteer work and multiple sacrifices by the entire family. When Isabel was ready to enter high school, the family moved to a new town. Within the town was an exclusive all girls Catholic academy where students attended from locations around the world. The academy included dorms where the girls lived during the school year.

Isabel’s father had heard that this was a very good school and it would provide a good education for his daughters. Her father worked two jobs, he also made custom kitchen cabinets, her mother worked as a maid in a local hotel, and the children who were still at home and legally able to work also acquired jobs to assist the family economically. Through all of this effort he was able to send Isabel and her sisters to this academy. The

girls lived at home but they still had the cost of tuition, books, and uniforms, so the private school privilege was attained through total family sacrifice.

“What was the Catholic school experience like I asked?” Isabel thought for a moment, shook her head, and began to describe a young girl who always felt very alone and afraid:

In elementary school I remember being afraid all the time. The nuns were very mean and I exerted great effort in trying to please them. I would never get in trouble, I would do my work, but it was always just to please them. My self-esteem was very low and remained that way from elementary school through high school.

Once I got into high school, I don't remember being afraid so much as I remember being alone and feeling like I never belonged. I always felt like the odd-ball. I just didn't fit in at the academy. I did not come from a wealthy family like the other girls. I couldn't go on ski trips or vacations abroad. I didn't live in the dorms with them so that sense of community for me was never developed.

There was a group of girls at the academy that came from Mexico and they made my life miserable. They would tease me and lock me in the bathroom. They called me 'the little Spanish girl'. I didn't speak Spanish so even though I had a Mexican last name I was definitely not considered one of them. On the other hand there were a few Latinas who were more like me from the United States but I was also excluded from this group because of the socioeconomic status of my family.

Finally at the beginning of my sophomore year another girl began to attend the academy who also felt like an odd-ball. We became best friends and remain so to this day. She became my saving grace through that time of my life.

“How did you do academically,” I asked? Isabel did not consider herself a high achiever; she said that she performed above average most of the time. Her freshmen year was hard because she had to take courses like physics, which she was completely unprepared for. Her parents of course were unable to help her and providing tutors was not within their financial means. Studying was just something she and her sisters did on their own. Isabel reiterated that she was self-motivated to do well but only because she wanted to please those in authority.

That desire to please others placed her in the top percentile in her graduating class.

“What about college,” I asked? “When did you think about it or make the decision that you wanted to attend.” Isabel’s response turned into a long exposition with multiple actors assuming various roles. As I listened to her story I realized that synchronicity, as I understood it, had been manifest in her young life. Synchronicity is the principle of meaningful coincidence of two or more events, where something other than the probability of chance is involved. Isabel referred to this process as, a blessing. Her parents never talked about college, it was something they knew nothing about. Thus began the path of synchronicity that carried Isabel into college and down a road she never expected to walk. Listen carefully for the coincidence of two or more events where something other than the probability of chance is involved as Isabel relays her story:

My neighbor married my sister, thus becoming my brother-in-law. His father [I’ll call him John] was an Assistant Dean of Admission at a flagship university and one of his goals was to travel the state and recruit Hispanic students to attend his university. The academy where I was attending high school was one of his scheduled stops. He talked to me about application to the university and guided me through the process of SATs. He also informed me about an organization called United Mexican American Students (UMAS) that provided scholarships, grants, monthly stipends, and support groups for inner city Chicanos in an effort to encourage them to attend college.

UMAS provided a very intense summer program on the university campus to prepare Chicano students for fall matriculation. I was not an inner city girl. I was a small town girl that had never been exposed to the Chicano culture [I’ll explain that later] so basically I didn’t qualify for that program. Anyway, we went ahead and completed the regular admission and financial aid paperwork so I could begin college in the fall.

About two weeks before the summer college session was to begin, John called and told me that a student had dropped out of the UMAS program and there was an opening and although I was not from an inner city environment he thought the experience would be very beneficial to

me. He said, 'You'll have a real opportunity to experience the Chicano culture.' I knew exactly what he was talking about.

My life, although I am Latina, was very mainstream. I knew nothing about Chicano issues and my culture at that time was based on socioeconomic status more than ethnicity. Immediately I accepted his offer and prepared to move away from home and attend the college summer session.

My parents were very upset with John, that he would put these ideas into my head. They could not understand why I would want to go away to college. After all, I had a boyfriend and he wanted to get married and I said, 'I can't because I'm going to go to college.' My parents thought something was wrong with me because I wanted to go away to school and not get married. I was the first, and only one in my family to ever leave home.

Isabel left to college that summer, it was 1972 and the college environment was very political as students from the UMAS association presented and debated many causes that were unfamiliar to Isabel. She became completely absorbed by the Chicano culture as well as the intellectual culture.

At first the culture shock was unbearable. Coming from a small town to a large university created much anxiety and fear for Isabel. "I remember calling home and I was sad and depressed and my mother immediately said she would come and pick me up; that I didn't belong there," Isabel stated. "What made you stay," I asked? "I was so fascinated," she said. "To me it was everything I had read about and now I was experiencing it. I learned about my culture in the most fascinating ways and the environment was so intellectual," she continued. "It was the first time I ever felt like I belonged."

Isabel excelled in college, graduating with a double major in sociology and psychology. Her goal was to become a clinical psychologist and apply to a Ph.D. program where she could realize her dream. Unfortunately the process for getting into the program was quite complex.

The psychology department had several slots available for minority students but they had to fit within a certain GPA. Isabel's GPA was above the criteria so she had to compete with several hundred other students. I found it interesting that part of the criteria for acceptance was based on world experience. "I had never been anywhere," Isabel said. "How could I compete in all the categories, I was not at all like the other 'regular' students and my grades placed me outside of the realm for minority status; once again I didn't fit anywhere and this made me very angry," she concluded.

Isabel went to see John to talk about her frustrations and his response to her was, "Why don't you apply to law school. As a lawyer you can use all your skills in psychology and sociology," he advised. Isabel thought about his proposition but to her it seemed impossible. She had always been interested in the law and politics but never thought that law school would be an option for her. She took the application and pondered whether to throw it away or fill it out. "What is the worst that could happen," she thought? Then another thought crossed her mind, "My daddy would be so proud!" Isabel applied and was accepted into law school. When she started college it was never her intent to go to law school but in retrospect she said, "It was the best decision I ever made."

After receiving her undergraduate degree Isabel took some time off. These were turbulent times on the college campus; a lot of boycotts, bombings, and demonstrations so she decided to return home for a period of rejuvenation. It was during this time that she met someone and they married. Both her and her husband returned to college and she continued on with plans for law school. Her husband enrolled also into a master's program.

Law school was at times a degrading as well as a transcendent experience for Isabel. “Law school is a process of weeding out the weak where only the strongest survive,” she said. She described professors who were absolutely boorish and their method of teaching was referred to as the Socratic Method; trial by ordeal. She recalled an incident when the minority students demonstrated against a Supreme Court justice because of his public remarks concerning minority law students stating, ‘Why do we let minorities in when they are doomed to fail.’ Isabel concluded that law school had been a bittersweet experience. She hated the process but once more felt like this was a place where she belonged and developed some lasting relationships.

Isabel spoke again about the relationship with her father:

The day that I passed the bar exam I immediately went looking for my dad. He was painting someone’s house when I located him. He was covered with white paint. I said, ‘Dad, I’m a lawyer now,’ and his eyes filled with tears and he gave me a big hug. We both sat among the paint cans and cried, and laughed. The next time I saw my daddy cry was the day I graduated.

Isabel began her law career in a public defenders office and later did work for the Migrant Farm Workers program, and numerous legal aid departments. “My dad doesn’t understand why I’m not a rich lawyer,” she said. “I told him that it’s his fault; his and my mother’s fault because they always taught us that we have a duty to help other people,” Isabel laughed as she made this comment. The fact is that Isabel has remained in a public service role throughout her career. She learned the Spanish language in college and is now fluent to the point where she assists many people who do not speak English deal with various legal issues.

A few years ago she became very ill and eventually had to leave public service on disability. As her health improved she decided to do private practice and work at a pace

that would not affect her health. She continues to assist individuals who do not speak English well and charges very little for her service. Her philosophy is that she has been blessed in her lifetime and she must give back to society in any way she can.

I would like to regress for a moment and offer another account of Isabel's life that speaks also to her resiliency. This segment of her life has to do with her marriage and the man she married as she began law school. Perhaps this seems out of chronological sequence with her career but I wanted the flow of her career to be uninterrupted. Now I interject this segment that took place concurrently within the boundaries of her career.

Isabel's husband, you may recall was working towards a master's degree in public administration. After Isabel completed her law degree they moved to his hometown and that was the first place she went to work for the public defenders office. The move back to the familiarity of his family began to change his behavior. His parents were from the old school according to Isabel and they believed that a woman's place was in the home. He became resentful of Isabel because she was making more money than him and he was about to complete his degree when he dropped out of college. Instead he moved from job to job, never holding on to one for any length of time and eventually went the way of drinking alcohol and selling drugs. His behavior also became very violent.

The violence erupted in many situations. He would proceed to destroy Isabel's law books and throw them at her if she attempted to do any of her work from the office at home. He had always been very loving with their daughter but this loving nature also began to change. He would be gruff with the child and often call her names. Eventually Isabel filed for divorce and encounters between her and her husband became more

intense. He would take their daughter from the babysitter while he was drunk and Isabel became more fearful for her life and that of their daughter with each passing day.

The day came when Isabel quit her job, packed up her daughter and left town. Her husband, not knowing that Isabel and her daughter were gone, assumed that they were in the home they had all shared together and he drenched the house with gasoline and set it on fire. The house was completely destroyed and in the ashes were all the mementos of their life together including pictures of her daughter as she was growing up. The police were never able to prove that he set the fire.

Isabel and her daughter were left only with the few items she had packed in her car to begin a new life. Isabel divorced her husband, he moved to another state, and they have never seen him again.

Isabel moved to a city where she had many acquaintances and resumed her career through the stages I chronicled previously. During the later years of her career she wrote and published several handbooks for the legal aid office on *Do it Yourself Child Support Enforcement; Filing your own Divorce*; and helped to establish a Victims Advocate Unit for victims of domestic violence. Working with victims of domestic violence was therapeutic for Isabel and helped to advance her own healing from an abusive marital relationship.

Isabel offered a fascinating observation as we concluded the long discussion about her law career:

When I am in the courtroom defending a case, I experience this fascinating transformation. I am no longer the meek and fearful little girl who hated confrontation, and I am no longer the little Spanish girl that never fit in anywhere. In the courtroom I experience a source of inner strength and I know that this is exactly where I belong.

We must have spent at least a couple of hours talking about her career alone. Isabel gave me extensive detail about turbulent times as well as moments of victory and events where she had been publicly recognized on various occasions for her work in the community. When I asked about her leadership style, her response was one short phrase, "I lead by example." She offered no elaboration and continued to talk about her career and her family.

The afternoon sun had become an evening sunset and through the patio doors I could see the brilliant Rocky Mountains glowing in the setting sun. I was nearing a point of exhaustion although Isabel was doing most of the talking. She however, was energized as she shared the detail of her family and her life. I saw no fatigue in her demeanor.

At the onset of our interview when Isabel talked about her early school experiences she expressed great difficulty with cultural self-identity. For many years and in various situations she experienced exclusion from her own ethnic group for various reasons. As we progressed toward the conclusion of our interview I noted that she had self-identified as Latina and I asked if she would now describe what that meant to her. Isabel looked around the room and pointed out several artifacts and pieces of art work, then offered the following response:

Being Latina is about family. It is the spirituality that surrounds my life, a spirituality that leans towards Catholicism although I am not a practicing Catholic. Being Latina is the pride I have in the Spanish language I now speak with confidence. My culture is revealed in the art you see in this room, referring to some recent tapestries she has designed and some wood sculptures created by her father, that hold a spiritual significance. Being Latina is a lived experience that embraces special geographic areas that I visit annually. These places hold again a spiritual significance and when I am there I sense a connection to God and to my ancestors and to my roots. These are the things that define me as a Latina.

Our one-hour visit had turned into four. I had recorded two audiotapes of our interview and Isabel went on to tell me yet another story of a client she recently defended. I listened with great interest and thanked her for all the fascinating information she had shared. As I drove the long distance back to my home, I was cognizant of the fact that my life had been enriched as I shared the afternoon in the company of Isabel.

Inez

Inez recently retired as Associate Vice Chancellor of Research for a flagship university. She is the oldest of three daughters, born on a farm to parents who never graduated from high school, but firmly believed in the value of education for their children. Inez is the archetype of Latina; illustrated through the unfolding of her story.

I would meet Inez for the first time as her doorman escorted me to the elevator that would take me to her twenty-second floor condominium. I rang the doorbell and Inez quickly appeared. Her home was elegant with its dark cherry wood décor and Victorian style furniture. We exchanged pleasantries as we walked toward a cozy veranda that would become the setting for our interview. Inez offered to bring me a glass of iced tea as I positioned the tape recorder and my note pad to proceed with the interview.

When she returned from the kitchen, I commented on the beauty of her home and the overwhelming view from the veranda. We admired the distant view of purple mountains, large grassy areas, and multiple lakes and ponds. The sound of traffic on the busy city streets below was undetectable and what remained was an atmosphere of peace and tranquility; a perfect setting as Inez began to tell me the story of her life.

When Inez was five years old and ready to begin school, her parents moved from a farm to the nearby town. They believed that the children would develop better socialization skills if they lived in an integrated neighborhood and interacted with other children from the town. Her father believed that a rural setting, although safe for the children, isolated them from other people and would hinder their interactive skills. “My

dad was a real visionary Inez said I'm amazed at the steps he took to insure that my sisters and I would receive a well-rounded education."

Her parents opened a neighborhood market that would also serve as a training ground for Inez. She recalls working in the store as a young child; stocking shelves and sweeping floors. In addition her father kept a large garden and Inez was required to work in the garden hoeing and watering. Inez speaks fondly of her parents and the values they instilled:

My dad loved to read. This was a value he instilled in us at a very early age. Across the street from our little market was the public library. Every Saturday we would go to the library and check out a stack of books. We would read these books throughout the week and return for more the following Saturday. My father taught us the value of education along with a strong work ethic.

My mother, on the other hand, was really responsible for our high level of self-esteem. Our physical appearance was very important to my mother. She would spend hours grooming us and making sure that every hair was in its place. My mother was an excellent seamstress and she made all our dresses. It embarrasses me when I think about this, but my mother would constantly say 'You girls are so very pretty and smart. You are the prettiest and smartest of all the girls in the world.'

Inez laughed as she reminisced about those youthful years and how the nurturing of both her parents prepared her for life's challenges. "I never had any problem fitting in when I started school," she said. "I always excelled academically and I participated in multiple clubs and school activities," she concluded. Inez does recall that some of the students in the school would cast racial aspersions toward her but the positive reinforcement received from her home environment caused her to look at those situations as kids just acting dumb. Inez stated with great confidence:

I had been taught to really believe in myself. I was told that I was smart and I was beautiful. So my attitude in school was 'They [meaning her parents] said that I'm smart,' so I am, and I always excelled academically and socially.

Inez attended public school from kindergarten through the fifth grade. Then her father made a decision to enroll her in a different type of school. "My father recognized that there was a lot of prejudice toward Mexicans in the town where we were living so he decided to send us to a semi-private school," Inez said. Her father thought that the girls would have less exposure to prejudicial acts outside of the public school system.

Inez's parents spoke predominately Spanish, and although Inez and her sisters spoke English well, her parents were concerned that if the children spoke with a Spanish accent they wouldn't do as well in school. Therefore, they placed the children in an integrated school system with the hopes of eliminating any Spanish accent. Inez added, "This was in the 1940s so I believe they were very forward thinking."

Within their community was a teacher's college, and a component of that college was a laboratory school. The laboratory school included grades six through twelve and it was a place where student teachers and college professors could perfect their teaching skills. Students from junior high and high school could attend this school and avoid paying tuition if they maintain a certain grade point average. Inez's parents never paid tuition at the lab school because all three of the girls were high achievers.

I asked Inez to describe her experience in the lab school. "I was the only Latina in my class when I started and it remained pretty much that way until I graduated," she explained. Inez continued to describe the school and the teachers, concluding that the overall experience was very positive and she felt that she received an excellent education. Members of her extended family (cousins) also attended the lab school.

I asked Inez about her college experiences starting with the decision to attend college. "When did you decide that you were going to college?" I asked. "I never

remember not knowing,” she responded. “It was just expected,” she said. Inez referred back to the statement she made earlier about her father being a visionary in the sense that this was an era in which fathers did not encourage their daughters to attend college.

Among her father’s friends the consensus was that one did not educate daughters beyond high school because they would just get married and have children. Inez’s father however, was not of this belief system. He expected his daughters to attend college.

Inez received a full scholarship to attend the teacher’s college in her community although she was not interested in becoming a teacher; a statement she repeated several times during the interview. Inez believed that the options for women were limited during this era. “A woman could either be a nurse, a secretary, or a teacher,” she said. Inez had no desire to be either a nurse or a secretary so a teacher became her most desirable of undesirable options.

Overall Inez’s college experience was very positive. She was academically prepared to compete at the levels required. She was socially prepared, attributing that to her mother’s personal attention, and her involvement in high school. In addition to the financial support offered through the scholarship, Inez maintained employment throughout her college years, thus she never experienced economic struggles. Inez was the only participant in my study that was rushed by a sorority and remained a sorority member throughout her college experience. In all areas of the college experience Inez felt included and capable of success.

Immediately upon graduation, Inez began her academic career as a junior high school teacher for the public school system. Once again Inez stated that she wasn’t crazy about teaching and she didn’t want to teach elementary school so that left only one

choice, secondary school. She taught junior high school for six years and then took a sabbatical.

It was during her sabbatical that she met a group of community leaders who were putting together a program for Latino students that was funded by a Title I grant. Inez applied for and was offered the position of coordinator for this new program. She was pleased to get out of the classroom and thus began her career in educational administration. A few years into this new position, Inez got married and continued on with her education to earn a master's degree in counseling.

Upon receiving her master's degree she was hired by a community college as a financial aid officer and eventually transitioned into a position as director of an educational opportunity center. Inez stated that all of her career moves from this point forward were all grant related and she became very skilled at writing grants and receiving outside funding for the various institutions that employed her.

The next stage in her life involved returning to school for a doctoral degree. Earning a Ph.D. was never a goal that Inez deliberately set for herself. It was more an outcome from a troubled time in her personal life. Inez was unable to have children and eventually her marriage failed. The marriage failed not only because of the lack of children, but she stated that her and her husband came from different religious backgrounds which combined, made the marriage irreconcilable. Education and learning created an environment where Inez could experience validation. She became absorbed in the doctoral process and did not allow herself to focus on personal issues. The pursuit of a Ph.D. became a therapeutic endeavor; one that would also enhance her career. In retrospect she stated, "Pursuing a Ph.D. was the best decision I ever made."

After receiving her Ph.D. she went to work for a major university as faculty in their education department. Once again Inez stated, "I wasn't crazy about teaching, even at the college level." She continued, "I think they hired me because they thought I could get grant monies." Inez did write many grants and was instrumental in starting the first bilingual multicultural program for this university. She mentioned that she received early tenure and this struck my interest immediately.

I was interviewing these women to get a better understanding on how to navigate the system that leads one to a successful position. I considered a tenure position something to be coveted so I asked Inez to elaborate on the process:

The university wanted me to publish but I really got no excitement out of doing research and getting published. Some of the articles I did get published were all over the place in terms of areas of focus. I wasn't a teacher. I wasn't a scholar. I was an administrator and I was good at administrative tasks. I was also good at politics. I was politically astute and had many influential connections throughout the academic community due in part to my own work, and my sisters were both very successful in the political arena. One of my sisters had a very good friend at Harvard and he wrote a letter of recommendation on my behalf.

I had made other academic acquaintances on a recent trip to Cuba and several of those professors also wrote letters of recommendation on my behalf. That year there were four of us from the school of education that applied for early tenure and I was the only one successful. I think it was a combination of my ability to get outside funding and the letters of recommendation that did the trick. Anyway, it worked out great and I got early tenure.

Inez attributes much of her career advancement to being in the right place at the right time and knowing the right people. Shortly after receiving tenure an opportunity opened up for interim assistant dean of the graduate school. The person in this position would be in charge of grants and contracts and research administration. Inez approached the dean of this department expressing her interest in the position and was appointed interim assistant dean. "The dean was married to a Latina. If it had been anyone else but him, I probably wouldn't have received the appointment," she said. One year later she

went through the formal process of applying for the position and from a pool of ninety-five applicants she received a permanent appointment.

For a second I pondered my own fate in life. I did not know any influential people and try-as-I-may I never seemed to be in the right place at the right time, and I certainly didn't consider myself to be politically astute. As Inez continued her story, my mind shifted back to the interview and I forced myself to listen carefully as she continued. "We had doubled the amount of external funding," she said. "My folks always taught me to work hard and if I worked harder than the other person, I would come out ahead," Inez continued. So there was hope for me after all. I was a hard worker, diligent in every way, and I too was determined to succeed. Inez gave me renewed hope because I could identify with at least one of her personal attributes.

Inez was very successful in the position of assistant dean. She later moved into the position of associate dean, then dean of the graduate school, then assistant vice chancellor, and then associate chancellor which was her final position with the university before she retired. Her progression through these various positions came about through a series of institutional re-organizations and new administrations, but the ultimate contributing factor to her success was her strong work ethic. Inez does believe however, that her appointment to dean of the graduate school was due in part because she was a minority and a minority appointment was necessary for the school to look good.

I would concur that Inez had a very successful career track. I wanted to know of any mentors she may have had along the way. Inez indicated that she had three very significant mentors throughout her journey. The unusual element about these mentors was that they were all Latino; two males and one female. The reason this seemed

unusual, even to Inez, was because at this point in time there were few professional Latinos in the academic arena.

The next focus of dialogue came as I asked Inez to describe her personal leadership style:

My leadership style evolved over the years and I've become much less directive. I'm probably more secure than when I first started out. I am really buying into the notion of inclusion. It's a cooperative kind of leadership style. I would involve the staff more and ask for their input. I found that if there was consensus that things just worked better in the long run because the staff is invested in the process. I have learned that this style just works a lot better.

Since Inez was now retired she didn't seem to have much interest in talking about leadership or the work environment, I transitioned the conversation over to information on the demographic form.

Inez had identified herself as Mexican-American so I asked, "Describe what being 'Mexican-American' means to you from a cultural perspective?" Inez referred once more to her parents and the environment where she was raised. "I grew up in a very prejudice town that was dealing with many ethnic issues," she said. "My parents taught me to be very proud of my ethnicity so to me it became a badge of honor," she concluded.

Inez continued to discuss her ethnicity in terms of its connection to the Spanish language, closeness to family, community involvement, and family traditions. She stated that ethnic foods, Mexican music, and being Catholic are also components of her ethnic identity. She comes from a long line of community activists who always rallied for the advancement of Latinos. She acknowledged however, that her Mexican-American culture has become Anglocized over the years as opposed to someone who is first generation Mexican-American. Inez's family has been in the Rocky Mountain region for more than five generations. "It takes a conscious effort to maintain my cultural identity," she said.

We talked in detail about her favorite foods and events that bring the family together, than I asked if she would describe her spirituality.

Inez began by describing her religion. “I grew up Catholic and for years I took part in all the Catholic sacraments but when my divorce happened I became angry with God,” she said. Inez elaborated on her sense of abandonment by God and went on to tell me that since the divorce twenty-five years ago her Catholic faith was never restored. “Oh I go to church now and then for family functions and I participate but it is not the same,” she continued.

I rephrased my question; “Can you talk about your spirituality as opposed to your religion,” I asked? “I am in recovery from breast cancer. I had a breast removed and I am still taking chemotherapy drugs,” Inez said as her voice began to crack and she wiped the tears from her eyes. Apologizing for her emotions, I assured her that I understood her struggle and I appreciated her courage to share this story. Inez continued:

Death doesn't scare me. I believe death is nothing. I don't want to contemplate the after life or be concerned with what might be. It is living that sometimes scares me. I was still working when I was diagnosed with breast cancer and I had always thought this could never happen to me; I followed a healthy lifestyle. I worked all the time, but after the cancer treatment began, and then the surgery I decided to make the most of every day and that was when I decided to retire. I don't know - maybe there is a guiding force but spirituality – I don't know.

I wanted Inez to know that she was not alone and I really did understand her suffering. The conversation drifted from the interview but I could see in her countenance that she appreciated my openness. I asked her if there was anything else she wanted to share about her life and her response brought a smile to my face and hers. “I recently met a gentleman who in all appearances seems to be my soul mate she said. We are so compatible and I have begun to dance again. Life is a dance, don't you think?” she

asked. "I certainly believe so," I responded. "Maybe it's that guiding force," I concluded. "Maybe it is," Inez responded with quiet laughter in her voice. This had been a really great afternoon.

Caridad

Caridad means charity, generosity, and kindness. I chose this pseudonym for my participant because it clearly speaks to her character. Like many of the other participants, I had not met Caridad until the day of the interview, but upon listening to her story I walked away knowing that I would hold her core values close to my heart. Her story is unlike any of the other participant's, it is transcendent in many ways beginning with the account of her parent's nuptials.

Her mother was born and raised in Mexico and her father is first generation Mexican-American. Both families had prearranged her parent's marriage to each other. Her father went to Mexico, was introduced to her mother, they married, and moved to Kansas. They soon jaunted to Nebraska to visit relatives; a visit that lasted one year and produced their first progeny, Caridad. Her father worked for the railroad, then as a carpenter, and eventually joined the Air Force where he remained until retirement.

I usually wouldn't go into such detail about the family background or disclose their location but in this case the family history is important to understand the totality of Caridad's life story. She had allowed me to identify the exact geographic areas that collectively shaped her character. Caridad is the oldest of five daughters and the family moved around continually because of the father's military career. Caridad was three years old when the family moved to Panama:

I remember my mother decided that she would just stay in Panama because she did not like the United States. She felt much discrimination and she had a lot of problems with the language. Many people, including members of my dad's family would make fun of her because of her traditional ways, her manners and her language. She decided that she didn't want to move from Panama, and consequently we stayed there until I was a young teenager.

Panama became the home base for the family. Caridad's father would go off on tours of duty, sometimes the family would join him and at other times they would remain in Panama. It was common for them to go back and forth to the United States visiting relatives. Sometimes Caridad would attend school in the United States but most of her primary years were spent in Panamanian schools.

Caridad attended a bilingual primary school in the Canal Zone and was fluent in both English and Spanish. English was really her second language because as a young girl she spoke only Spanish to her mother. Caridad commented that her father insisted that they speak English in the home, but because of her mother's difficulty with the language they only spoke English in his presence.

Caridad, being the oldest of the children, was the closest to her mother and adopted many of her mother's Mexican traditions, culture, language, and love for music. With a smile on her face and laughter in her voice she stated that she adopted her father's stubbornness and his intense desire to achieve. Caridad said:

My father is a real motivator. As far as I can remember, he always said that I was going to be in education, that I would be a teacher. I grew up with that as my goal. In my family it was simply expected that I would go to college.

Caridad believes that her experience in Panama was a benefit to her personal development in a way that she sees differently from the development of her siblings. "My younger sisters are not quite as lucky as I was. They grew up in a much assimilated nature, I think I was more acculturated," she said. When Caridad was in Panama she would attend military schools and when she was in the United States she would attend Catholic schools.

At one point Caridad attended public school in the United States, but when she would return to the military schools in Panama her academic performance reflected a decline in standards. It was at that time that her father decided that any extended visits to the United States would require Catholic school enrollment so she would not fall behind.

“Was this transition between two environments an impediment to your education and did you experience any marginalization?” I asked. Caridad responded, “I never felt a race division, at least not in the early years, but being from a military family I always felt a class division.” The class division of course was based on military rank and the children of military personal were certainly subject to the class division, as Caridad explained:

My dad always impressed on me that I was just as good as any of the officers kids and as a matter-of-fact he was one of the top tanking sergeants so I had an obligation to be good and not embarrass him. In addition I was the oldest, so that was another responsibility.

The responsibility Caridad spoke of involved staying out of trouble and achieving academically; responsibilities she fulfilled throughout her life. I found it amusing when Caridad said, “I didn’t want to go into education and be a teacher. I was going to be a movie star.” We both laughed at the idea and then she indicated that her father encouraged both of these (teaching and acting) in the oddest way. Caridad loved to sing and dance and she joined many theatrical groups and even took lessons in song and dance; both of which would surface much later in her adult life.

Her mother was one who never valued education, perhaps because she never fully understood the benefits. She wanted Caridad to do well and was always proud of her accomplishments, but her core values centered on building character as Caridad explained:

It was important to my mother that we become good, strong, faithful women; faithful to the family and the family concept. It was important to her that we remain faithful to our religion and that we nurtured a spiritual connection to God and the people around us. I will never forget my mother's words when she said, 'It doesn't matter what you do in life or how many things you accomplish, but you must always be nice to people. You will not get anywhere being cutthroat.' I remember these words in her broken English and they are stuck in my mind forever.

Caridad's parents were very supportive and encouraging throughout her life, but those early years were especially important because they helped to formulate her positive self-esteem. In Panama she was with people from diverse ethnicities, but certainly many Latinos as well as the Spanish language was common. Then when she entered middle school her life took a dramatic turn. The family moved from Panama to Montana and, "Suddenly it was apparent that I was brown. I was Latina," Caridad said with a less than enthusiastic tone.

The move created not only a cultural shock but also an environmental shock. The family moved in the winter. Coming from a tropical climate to the snow and blowing wind of the Montana landscape marginalized Caridad to a place of isolation she had never known. Her self-esteem quickly began to diminish as she could not make friends and soon became quiet and withdrawn. I asked Caridad if she could remember anything specific about that time:

I was at that school for two years and I remained the only Latina. I recall a history class when they were talking about the American Indians and the discussion was not positive. I recall even the teacher looking me and I remember thinking, 'stop looking at me, I am not an American Indian'. Years later I did discover that I do have some Apache roots. I also recall a class discussion about the Alamo and the Mexicans and again all eyes were upon me. I recall putting my head down and just being very, very sad, and wishing I could return to Panama.

When Caridad was ready to start high school the family moved to Texas. She thought that Texas would be a place where she could fit in, but that also proved to be a

delusion. "I just couldn't fit in," Caridad stated. "This was where I noticed that the *Mexicanos*, the Chicanos were a different breed. I had the language but I didn't have the same experiences. I didn't grow up in the barrios," she continued. Caridad believed that she shared the same experiences in terms of social class, but she always felt very separate and that separation began to affect her grades. She was never socially accepted. She had a few girlfriends but was never asked out on a date. "For a high school girl that can be very traumatic," she stated.

When Caridad was ready to begin her senior year of high school, the family moved to Delaware. This would be the point in her life where Caridad identified her lowest level of self-esteem. "I was completely out of the loop. I just did not fit in at all," she said. She could not identify with anyone in her immediately environment but made it through the school year and graduated from high school.

Caridad applied for and received a full scholarship to a private college in the Delaware area. She stated, "The students who attended this college were richer than God." Once more Caridad felt marginalized. She was one of the few Latinos on the campus and her parents were only able to provide minimal financial support. She often felt impecunious because the class division was so great between her and the other students.

A strange thing happened her second year of college. Caridad met an Italian football player and they became best friends. This friendship suddenly changed a shy and withdrawn girl into a beautiful butterfly. She became metaphorically a litter sister who was adopted by the football team and this was her ticket into popular culture. She was encouraged to try out for the cheerleading squad and suddenly she had many friends.

Caridad describes one member of the football team, a Scott-Irish who actually became her first love.

Caridad and (I'll call him Scott) were engaged to be married. Scott came from western Pennsylvania to what Caridad referred to as a very strict traditional background. The day that Scott took Caridad home to meet his mother is a day that will be branded in her memory forever. "His mother was appalled because she couldn't believe that he would date an Italian," she said. "Why didn't you tell her that I am not Italian, that I am a Mexican," she continued. Scott's reaction was, "Oh, my God, no!" Needless to say, the relationship was soon over.

Her junior year of college Caridad enrolled in a study abroad program and spent the year in Madrid, Spain. She didn't have much money but managed to connect with foreign students from around the world and the overall experience was phenomenal. She had excellent Spanish communication skills but lacked the formal grammar for proper written communication. Among her areas of study were Spanish and German. She returned to the United States one year later with excellent Spanish writing skills and fluency in German. The year abroad did wonders for her self-esteem and she had overcome any sense of marginalization that had dominated her past experiences.

Her family was now in Arkansas. Caridad was able to transfer all her previous credits to a university in Arkansas and a few months before graduation, her parents moved to Okinawa, Japan. She remained in Arkansas and immediately following graduation she flew to Okinawa to spend the summer with her parents. Caridad's educational journey was certainly an adventure.

“What did you do after graduating from college,” I asked? “After spending the summer with my parents, I moved to Washington, D.C.,” she continued. “I got a job teaching English to students from Central and South America. I was there for three years and I just hated it. I hated D.C.,” she said. Caridad related that Washington, D.C. was a very lonely place for her. She was unable to make friends and the environment was just not favorable to her personality. “Then I got a call from an old roommate of mine who had moved to Colorado and she said, ‘why don’t you come down here, you’ll love it.’ So I quit my job, sold all my possessions and moved to Colorado,” she said. “That was thirty years ago,” Caridad stated with a big smile on her face.

Her move to Colorado was not what she expected. As she arrived to meet her friend in the big city, her friend immediately moved to another town leaving Caridad with an apartment she could not afford, no acquaintances and no job. Through a strange turn of events Caridad’s father had a friend who lived in the city and the friend’s son worked at a four-year college. Caridad got word that there was a position for an administrative assistant in a Chicano Studies Department at this college and she applied. Within days she was working as an assistant.

Her thoughts at first were rather mixed. She didn’t like teaching but also never expected to work as a assistant. As it turned out she fell in love with the job. This was her first opportunity for administrative work and it absolutely fit her personality and her skills. It was not simply the administrative work that pleased her, but this would be the beginning of a journey to ethnic self-discovery.

Caridad began to learn about the Chicano Movement, and people like Cesar Chavez and his plight to help the Mexican farm workers. She became active in the

community and got involved in *sutiatro*, a theatrical performance that honors the Mexican culture through song, drama, and dance. “I knew this was where I belonged,” she said. Caridad discovered her academic career would not be in teaching but in administration, and she was able to engage in the performing arts as well.

Caridad has been at this same institution for over thirty years as I mentioned earlier. Her career track has been impressive as she explained:

I worked as an administrative assistant for two years and then I was recommended to the position of director of the tutoring center. It was during that time that I returned to school and got my masters in public administration. From the tutoring center I moved over to director of student activities. I loved student activities; putting on concerts, bringing in speakers, and other performers was right down my alley. I did that for eight years and then was promoted to assistant dean of student affairs. I wasn't real crazy about the position but I knew it was necessary if I wanted to move up the administrative ladder, so I focused on what it took to be a good leader and gave it my all. Then I was promoted to dean of student services, then associate vice president of student services. My current position is vice president for student services. I have been in this position for five years. I have had a wonderful career.

Unlike her childhood, Caridad has become rooted in the community, especially the Latino community. She performs and sings in *sutiatro* and has been able to integrate, to some degree, both her career and her passion for the performing arts.

“Tell me about any mentors you've had along your journey,” I asked? Caridad shared that early in her career all of her mentors were men, both Latino and Anglo. She said she never really adopted the style of any one person but rather through observing their behavior and understanding their philosophy she selectively chose elements from each person that seemed to work best with her own personality. She actively sought Latino role models who were able to cut to the chase and get things done. Caridad viewed leadership as “Cut and dry; make a decision and stick with it,” she said.

“Then I worked under a woman. She was the person who promoted me to assistant dean,” Caridad continued. “She taught me about bringing in the humanistic and spiritual element into my managing experience and that was critical to my development. It was critical to my development because I had resisted it for so long.” In evaluating her leadership style, Caridad believes that she adopted the directive style from her military father, but certainly the humanistic and spiritual components were derived from her mother. “My mother taught me many things; she is my main mentor,” Caridad stated. Caridad’s voice carried a strong conviction.

“How would you describe your leadership style,” I asked? “Its eclectic,” Caridad continued to explain:

I have a strong sense of order and great respect for the hierarchy of the system and the position of my superiors. Honoring and respecting their position is very important to me. However, I tend to want to operate on a very flat system. I try very hard to work as a team. I completely enjoy allowing people to develop an idea and watch them develop their own process of that idea. When my employees come to me with a problem, I want them to leave my office having developed their own solution. I learned that from one of my mentors and I have seen the process work successfully many times.

Next Caridad said something that to me was very profound:

I think about organizational structure and leadership theory but to me the central element is spiritual. It’s okay to care, and to love what you do, and love the people you work with. It’s okay to feel the emotion and see the faces, to join in the laughter and also in the tears. These things to me are not symbols of weakness, but they are symbols of courage and strength.

There was suddenly something stirring within my mind and in my spirit. What was it? It was something I knew and understood but where was it coming from?

Suddenly I remembered *Leading with Soul*, by Lee Bolman and Terrance Deal (1995).

This was a book I read my first semester as a doctoral student and I clearly remembered the emotion I felt as I devoured every word of this masterpiece. I asked Caridad if she

was familiar with this work and she said, “Yes, I give a copy to everyone who comes to work in my department.” We must have spent twenty minutes at least talking about the leadership philosophy illustrated in that book.

I was certain that through all the events that had transpired in Caridad’s life she had surely developed a strong sense of self. I was eager to know how she would describe her ethnicity. “You identified yourself as Latina-Chicana on the demographic form,” I said. “Please tell me what this means to you...paint me a visual picture,” I asked? Her words flowed with conviction. The young girl, who once was shy and didn’t fit in, was now an empowered woman whose words brought clarity to my own convictions:

I call myself Latina because I think it represents a lot of my experiences. Latina engulfs all of those who are the Spanish speakers, the Caribbean, the Central Americans. Latina is more of a global term; it embraces my family background, my years in Panama, and my experiences in Spain. All of that is inclusive in Latina.

La Chicana represents my growth in understanding the *Indio* in me through my mother. It defines my level of social activism and recognizes the mix of Indian and Mexican roots. It represents a political component and activism in the community; the part of me that fights for social justice, equality, equity and access to education. La Chicana is militant in a very soft-around-the-edges sort of way, but I am still a warrior, especially for access to education. There should be no reason why our students cannot do well and have access to whatever they want to be, and wherever they want to go.

We continued to discuss family traditions and events that clearly define her Latina-Chicana ethnicity. “One thing that I feel very strongly about in terms of tradition is *El Día de Los Muertos* [the day of the dead],” Caridad continued. “It is a way for me to honor my dead relatives and friends. I collect these *cadáveres*, [literally translated means corpses],” Caridad said. I must take a moment and offer an explanation.

I never did describe the setting for our interview. By the above statement one might think the interview was taking place in a graveyard or a morgue, but in fact the

interview was in Caridad's office. I did notice that she had several shelves with odd-looking doll-like characters and they also lined her window seals. She rose from the table where we were seated and drew my attention to the dolls. "This one looks like my aunt who just died," Caridad stated. The doll was a bit comical with big lips, large boobs and a protruding butt. Caridad said her aunt was a real busybody. "She was always in somebody's business; a real gossip," Caridad said this with affection and laughter. Then she picked up another doll; actually it was a small red devil. "I haven't decided who this is yet", she said with a chuckle. "This is my way of keeping their memory alive," she remarked. *Día de los Muertos* is a Catholic holiday that dates back centuries in honor of the dead.

Caridad expressed that although she has had some issues with the Catholic Church over the years; she is still very faithful to her beliefs and has great faith in Our Lady of Guadalupe. She said, "I believe in divine intervention in a sense that it gives me peace, it centers me and it reminds me of my mother's words to be nice to people."

Our time together had come to an end. I was captivated by Caridad's life and her inner strength. She is a marvelous woman and I hoped that we would develop a lasting friendship.

Elissa

Elissa is an elementary school principal with a Ph.D. in Public School Educational Leadership. She is the only participant in my study with a career in the public school system. Like many of the other participants, I met Elissa for the first time on the evening of our interview. I drove to her home and met her as she finished a day's work.

I traveled through a wooded area of Colorado; an area I had never visited before. After following her directions through many twists and turns, and traveling upon dirt roads I located Elissa's house among the ponderosa pine trees that are common in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. No one was at home when I arrived so I waited in the driveway. After about fifteen minutes, Elissa arrived. We situated ourselves at the kitchen table and Elissa began to tell me the story of her life.

Elissa was born and raised on a farm in a very small community in the Southwest. Her extended family had been on that land for many generations and portions of their land originated from old Spanish land grants common to the Southwest. Her father was a migrant farm worker that moved around with the harvest of crops across the country. Her mother maintained the farm and cared for the animals in his absence. Neither of her parents graduated from high school.

Elissa is the oldest of five children, but a span of seven years between her and the next child created much responsibility for a young girl. She said, "I was my mother's right hand. I always remember having many chores both in the house and outside. I would take care of the animals, bring in the wood for the stove, and hoe the garden." Elissa continued, "I grew up with no electricity or running water, but I was never deprived. This is just the way life was." It was a very rich life for Elissa. Rich in respect

to a sense of strong family values, rich in roots, and rich in a sense of knowing who she was and what the family stood for.

The only language Elissa spoke as a child was Spanish. Her parents and extended family never spoke English. The culture of the community was predominately Latino, so knowing the English language was never a necessity until she started school.

Elissa started elementary school in an era when speaking Spanish in the schools was not acceptable. “I taught myself to read in English even though I didn’t speak it,” she said. “I know I didn’t learn to read before I started school but learning came real easy for me,” she continued. She had the same teacher for the first and second grade and by the time she reached the third grade she was so advanced that the teacher skipped her ahead one grade level. Elissa remembers the teacher telling younger students that if they needed help to go ask Elissa.

There were several Latino teachers in the elementary school. Elissa feels fortunate to have had their positive influence. “They contributed to the richness of my development as a young girl,” she said. “They grounded me in who I am, what I believe in, and what I could become,” she explained. The early years of her education were very positive, due in part to the encouragement from her teachers, but the biggest influence came from her mother.

“My mother was always there for me. She helped me with math homework that seemed to be my most difficult subject and she instilled in me the belief that I would always do well,” Elissa stated. She spoke of her mother with high regard and continued to describe her mother as a woman of strong character and determination who reinforced in the children that they could do anything if they set their minds to it.

Elissa described her stature as the smallest child at her school. Her self-esteem however, was never diminutive due in part to the constant validation from her mother. Elissa stated, “My mom always used to tell me, walk tall, hold your head high, and no one will ever bother you.”

There was no high school in the little community where Elissa lived. When it was time to begin high school she had to be bussed about twenty-five miles to the nearest town that had a high school. The community where the high school was located was also primarily a Latino community. Elissa indicated that the transition created some dynamics between the students already at the high school and those coming in for the first time. The dynamics was not a result of ethnic tensions, but simply country kids verses city kids; although by definition this was not a city but merely a bigger town. In talking about the ethnic makeup of the school Elissa mentioned that there were approximately eight Anglo students. I was interested to know if these Anglo students felt included in the school environment. Elissa said, “They fit right in with the rest of us. In fact most of them spoke Spanish.” She continued, “At this point in time it was okay to speak Spanish in the school and most of us did.” I found this to be an interesting phenomenon; perhaps something for future research. The Anglo students were children of the area’s ranchers or foremen. They came from a more affluent family environment but Elissa said the class difference was never an issue.

High school was also a positive experience for Elissa. She was involved in many extracurricular activities and was encouraged by her parents to participate. The only barrier was the great distance to school and many of the activities took place outside of

normal school hours so on occasion she was not able to participate because of transportation issues.

During her senior year of high school, Elissa's principal counseled her that if she intended to go to college she would need to study chemistry, but the school did not offer chemistry. So the principal arranged for Elissa to have private chemistry lessons from the biology teacher. These sessions however, would take place after school and Elissa was unable to arrange for transportation. As a result she was not able to take the chemistry sessions; a decision that would prove to have negative effects on her college progress.

As we talked about her decision to attend college I asked, "Did you make the decision to attend college on your own or did your parents encourage this?" I found Elissa's response both amusing and enlightening:

There was never a doubt in my mind that I would attend college. My father is one of the older members of his family and no one in the extended family had ever gone to college so this concept was a bit foreign to him. I remember him telling my mother, 'Why should Elissa go to college, she is just going to get married?' My mother, very assertively tells him, 'Yea, and if her husband is a sad sack, than she will be able to support herself.' My dad responded, 'Well I guess she goes to college than.'

Elissa's family was unable to fund her education. Once again the principal of the high school provided the appropriate guidance and Elissa received a full financial aid package that included grants and scholarships. She started college immediately after graduation.

"Did you select a major," I asked? "I started out as a biology major," Elissa replied. "I loved biology but in my freshmen class I think there were 120 biology majors and only four women," she said. "This was the first time in all of my schooling that I felt

out of my element. It was very unfriendly,” she continued. She stuck it out for the first year and then Elissa needed to take a biochemistry class and didn’t have the background necessary to succeed. She recalled that her high school principal tried to get her private chemistry classes but circumstances were such that the plan didn’t work out. Feeling unable to compete academically, Elissa changed her major to Education.

Elissa started out in secondary education but when the time came to do her student teaching, she began to question how much of an impact she could have on this group of students. One day she ran into an old friend who was completing her master’s in special education and began to tell Elissa about the tremendous sense of satisfaction she felt working with special education children. She invited Elissa to spend an afternoon with her in the special education classroom and immediately Elissa knew this is what she needed to do, this was where she belonged. Through a series of events and connections with various individuals, Elissa became a special education teacher.

Our conversation was fast-forward from the time she started college to the beginning of her career and I wanted to be sure that I had not missed anything in between. So I asked Elissa to regress for a moment and talk briefly about her college experience. “Overall it was a very positive experience. The college was a small liberal arts university with a large Latino population. I was very involved in co-curricular activities and became very involved in the social issues surrounding the 1960s,” she stated.

Elissa became involved in the civil rights movement and strongly protested the Vietnam War. She had a lot of friends and classmates who went to Vietnam. Some never returned, others returned either physically or mentally damaged. She was very

conflicted because her boyfriend, who later became her husband, was drafted out of college during the war.

Elissa was politically active on the campus. She was engaged in efforts to have a Latino appointed to the college presidency and lobbied to have a Chicano Studies major added to the curriculum. She believed that since the community and the campus had a strong Latino presence that it was within the best interest of stakeholders that the administration respond to these requests. By the time she graduated, both efforts were successful: A Latino president was eventually appointed to the university and a Chicano Studies major was added to the curriculum.

I asked Elissa if the college experience presented her with her first exposure to the Chicano Movement? “Yes,” she stated. “I had never felt any prejudice and some of the pain that other’s felt was foreign to me,” she continued:

At first I really questioned their motives and I had a difficult time understanding their cause. I could empathize with those in the South and the Civil Rights Movement, but I wasn’t really sure that we Latinos had a legitimate cause of our own. But it was the 1960s and a lot of things were happening and I began to draw some parallels with the civil rights movement. We had a group on campus that was called *Las Gorras Blancas* (white caps). They were a very militant group almost like the Ku Klux Klan in reverse. I was never a part of this group but I could see the parallels.

It was probably my junior year in college when I began to realize that things were okay in my little farming community where I grew up and even at the small university I attended, but things were not okay in the rest of the country. Some great injustices were occurring and I realized that I could make a difference. I wasn’t out there pounding my fists but at an intellectual level I began to understand. Human rights in general became more visceral to me.

Elissa was twenty-one when she graduated from college. She married her college sweetheart who was now in the military and they moved to the east coast where her husband was stationed. While on the east coast Elissa did some student teaching and picked up some part time teaching contracts. Adjusting to life on the east coast was

challenging but exciting for Elissa. The pace of life was accelerated compared to life in the southwest. Overall her experiences were positive and after her husband's tour of duty was over they returned to the southwest.

Elissa's husband completed his undergraduate degree and she began graduate school working toward her master's in special education. Elissa taught elementary school while completing her masters and upon graduation was offered a full time special education position. She stayed in the southwest while her husband completed his master's degree and then they decided to move to Colorado where employment opportunities would be greater for her husband; His area of study was not in education.

The decision to move to Colorado was prompted in part by the great number of Colorado school districts that were recruiting in her area. Special education teachers were in great demand and Elissa was offered several contracts with multiple school districts. She finally made her decision and remained with that district for fifteen years.

Elissa commented about the geographic area that has been her home for many years:

It has been an interesting experience working in Colorado. I would have to say that I felt out of my element more so here than I ever did in the southwest or on the east coast. This city [referring to her current location] is clearly divided between the White, more affluent population, and all the others. Latinos in Colorado are very different from the Latinos where I come from.

An example is the pronunciation of Latino surnames. When I first came here I would use the correct pronunciation of a persons name only to be corrected by that person. They had completely Anglicized the last name and I was stunned. I began to realize the vast breadth of our lived experiences and I could not relate to them and they could not relate to me. Most of the Latinos here did not speak Spanish but they were also unfamiliar with the foods of my culture. The holidays were also different.

For example, I never celebrated *Cinco de Mayo*, to me it was simply the 5th of May. This holiday meant nothing to me and still doesn't. I tried to explain to a fellow teacher that my ancestors had been in the southwest since the 1600s and he simply could not believe that we did not come over from Mexico. Why did

I need to explain that my roots are planted deep in American history before it was the United States? I became very resentful and was becoming uncomfortable in who I was.

That discomfort is gone now. I realize that I don't need to explain my experiences to anyone and I realize that my culture is just that, it is mine. I realize that we have to function in the mainstream but we can do so without losing our cultural roots. I try very hard to instill this concept in my sons.

I expressed my gratitude to Elissa for sharing this story with me. I informed her that I too was born and raised at the very edge of southern Colorado and I too had many of her same experiences. Immediately there was a sense of celebration for the connection we felt to our culture and to each other. We talked in detail about the foods our mothers prepared and how that food is only found in a very small part of the country. We laughed about some common traditions and recollections of customs long forgotten. Another area for future research I thought.

It took years for Elissa to adjust to her new environment but eventually she grew to love the area and had several mentors along her career path. She had been teaching at one elementary school when the existing principal needed to take leave and asked Elissa to fill in during her absence. Elissa protested stating, "I don't know anything about your job. I can't do this." The principal however, saw leadership potential in Elissa and encouraged her along the way.

This principal encouraged Elissa to enroll in a Weekend Executive Program that after two years would allow Elissa to get her principal license. Once licensed, she applied for assistant principal positions. She was overlooked at one point because the district had too many women principals and needed to hire a male. Elissa indicated that if she knew then what she knows now about hiring practices, she would have created a

real stink. Eventually she was hired as assistant principal for two separate schools, dividing her time between the two locations.

Elissa said, “This was the hardest assignment I ever had in education.” She worked under two principals, one male and one female. She said the female principal was very difficult to work for and often monopolized Elissa’s time even when she was at home placing unrealistic demands on her schedule. Elissa was eventually hired full time at one of the schools as assistant principal; the school with the male principal. He became a great mentor for Elissa, instructing her in many other areas of necessary knowledge to become an effective principal. Within one year Elissa had been assigned principal of her own school.

Elissa loved the school and the students but within a few years she began to feel burned out. At this point in her career she had been at the same district for fifteen years. One day her husband approached her with some news about a new school that was being built a short distance from their home. His suggestion was, “You should look into this.” It was odd that her husband would offer such a suggestion because he never interfered in her career path. “He could see that I was burning out,” Elissa said, “although I didn’t see it.” Elissa applied for the principal position in the new district and was hired.

The change was a significant cultural adjustment. Elissa had been working with predominately Latino students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The new school district was predominately a White affluent culture. Elissa went down many paths of soul searching thinking that she was abandoning the little *Chicanitos* who needed her. But could it be that these other students also needed her in a different way? The answer

would not come easy. Elissa said, “This was probably the second toughest job I’ve had; not the job itself, but the community’s acceptance of me.” She continued to explain:

The parents and the staff at the school didn’t know what I was in terms of cultural ethnicity. [Elissa’s last name is not a common Hispanic name]. I have brown skin and dark hair so one woman said, ‘Oh you must be Jewish’, to which I responded, ‘No I am Hispanic’. Again this parent responded, ‘Really, I never would have guessed that.’ I have thought about these remarks a lot, trying to analyze their meaning. I thought that perhaps this woman couldn’t fathom that someone like me could be a principal and certainly not a principal in this kind of community. Or maybe she really didn’t know that people like me existed. Maybe I was too sensitive to her remarks. It took several months for the staff and community to accept me, not only because I was Latina but also because I was a woman. After about six months, things began to click and I have been there for twelve years.

About four years ago Elissa was considering giving up her principal position when the superintendent of the district approached her with a new proposition. He wanted her to open a new school for the same district but in a recently developed area. “This is an extremely affluent area,” Elissa said. “The medium price of a home in this area is about \$500,000. The people who live in this area are lawyers, doctors, top ranking military officers, and top level executives,” she explained. Elissa accepted the challenge and the new school was built. She was extremely involved in the design stage of the school; everything from floor plan, to color scheme and décor, to ordering furniture. Hiring staff and planning programs and curriculum was also part of her duties.

The design of the school was build around a concept called a *house* borrowed from established schools in New Zealand. The plan was very successful and the school has gained recognition around the state and country as being on the cutting edge of elementary education. Her final thought about this school and the process it follows is that she was hired for its establishment because she is a divergent thinker and does not follow the status quo.

I asked Elissa about her Ph.D. work and if her goal was to become a superintendent. “My answer to that question has always been unequivocally and emphatically no,” she stated. Elissa said that she pursued her Ph.D. for her own satisfaction and as a dedication to her mother because her mother always believed in her.

I transitioned the interview as I asked Elissa to discuss her leadership style. “I build relationships,” she said. “My style is first and foremost building relationship. Building personal relationships is part of my culture and it is part of who I am as a person. It is people first. Paperwork can always wait,” Elissa stated.

I looked at my watch, we had been sitting at her table for two hours and I felt like I had known Elissa my entire life. We connected on so many levels and certainly I expressed my appreciation for the generosity of her time. “I only have a couple of areas yet to touch on,” I said. Much of this Elissa had already expanded on as we spoke but for clarification sake I asked, “Explain what being ‘Hispanic’ mean to you?” Elissa stood from the table and pointed out some beautiful artifacts that decorated her home. “My father made this,” she said as she pointed to a beautiful Spanish-Colonial style framed mirror. Her father is an artisan and he made many other pieces displayed in Elissa’s house. She explained:

These artifacts are replicas of my culture. Being Hispanic is having a high regard for people, and close family ties. It means being the best daughter, wife, and mother possible. It means teaching my boys about cultural traditions that included the foods of my ancestors. Being a person of Hispanic culture also means having close religious connections; not necessarily to the Catholic Church but to God.

It is very important that my home be a reflection of who I am as a person. All of the artwork that you see is a reflection of both my husband’s culture as well as my own. You will notice a lot of Native American pieces. My grandfather was a Tewa Indian so you will see the Mexican, Spanish, and Native American influence in our home. All of these cultures meld together to define who I am as a Latina/Hispanic woman.

I felt that Elissa had given me plenty of rich data but it would not be complete without asking her to describe her spirituality, so I asked for her description. “Spirituality is a good way to phrase it,” Elissa said “because I am not very religious.” She pointed out once more the religious artifacts throughout her house and indicated that they are more representative of her culture than they are of her religion. “I am a spiritual being in the sense of being part of the earth, maybe this is my Native American roots,” she said. Elissa continued to explain that she sees organized religion as more of a bureaucracy that attempts to mold people into what others think they should be and what they should think. “Attending church is a time of meditation for me,” she said. “It is a personal time for me to connect with my creator but the rituals are meaningless,” she concluded. “This is the first time I have ever articulated my religious/spiritual feelings to anyone,” Elissa stated.

I asked Elissa if there was anything else she wanted me to know about her life, her beliefs, or her ambitions. “Yes,” she responded. “I plan to retire in the next few years and my ambition is to open a shop that will bring my culture to the people of this city. “ Her dream is to have a shop that will provide artwork, blankets, weavings, music, literature, and foodstuff of the southwest. “This is my effort at keeping my culture alive,” Elissa said. I was so grateful for the time we shared together and I anticipated our next encounter with great expectations.

Celia

It was a hot summer afternoon when I walked across the scorching blacktop and concrete sidewalks that led to Celia's office on this university campus. The buildings were all the same gray color and not many students were visible. I thought their absence was perhaps due to the intense heat or because it was summer session and not many students attended this campus during the summer; perhaps a combination of both factors. As I walked I looked at the green trees, the flowerbeds, and the green lawns. I wondered why the quiescent beauty created by the groundskeepers could not suppress the realism that this was an institution. I thought it must be all the gray, dull buildings that created this ambiance.

As I entered the administration building the sense that I was in an institution became even more explicit. The interior of the building lacked any character. There was no décor other than gray walls and bulletin boards overloaded with flyers announcing dated events that were long gone. I made my way to the second floor and announced myself to the receptionist in the office of the Vice President of Human Resources and Affirmative Action. He (the receptionist) walked back to the vice president's office and quickly Celia appeared to greet me. I expressed my gratitude for her availability and agreement to participate in my study.

She moved behind the oversized desk in the small office and I sat in one of the two chairs positioned in front of her desk. Her office décor was no different from what I had witnessed in the rest of the building except for the one wall that displayed a window of like size through which I could see a beautiful shade tree, and at a distance rolling hills.

As I proceeded with the interview Celia's phone began to ring. She looked at the caller ID display and ignored the caller. I continued to explain the purpose of my study and offered a briefing about the types of questions I would be asking. Celia started to tell me about her childhood and again the phone began to ring. Once more she ignored the caller.

"I was born in a small town out on the plains of Colorado," she said. "The environment was very safe and secure and this is where I started my public school education," she continued. The phone rang again and again and she ignored the rings several more times until she finally said, "I'm very sorry but I must answer this damn phone or it will just keep on ringing." Abruptly she picked up the receiver and said to the caller, "Can't you understand that I'm busy and when I don't answer the phone the first time please give it a rest. Now what do you want?" I assumed that the caller must be a family member or someone she knew very well which could explain her callous tone. After a brief conversation she hung up and explained that the caller was indeed her daughter. Celia's only response was, "Kids – they're a pain in the ass sometimes." We continued with the interview.

"You were born on the plains of Colorado," I reminded her with the intent of drawing focus to the interview. "Yes," she said as she inserted a code into her phone so we would no longer be disturbed. Celia continued her story and informed me that while living on the plains, a younger sibling had died and her mother became very distraught. She didn't tell me what caused the death of this sibling but said that her father decided at that time to move the family away from the area and into a larger city to assuage her mother's pain surrounding the death of this child.

Celia offered the following description of her family environment:

I am the oldest of seven children. We lived in a two bedroom, one bathroom house. I know what it means to share everything, even a bed. All of us kids grew up working in the fields during the summer and we used the money we earned to buy school clothes. We all worked a lot. At a very young age we developed a strong work ethic. I remember being in elementary school and pushing a step stool up to the sink so I could wash dishes. My sister and I had to wash dishes every night.

Celia's father worked as a federal employee in a government warehouse and her mother cleaned houses. They have a daughter who is asthmatic and was always very ill, requiring the family to spend a lot of money for medications. The need for medications and the large number of children to support required that all the family members work and contribute to the financial support of the family unit.

Celia continued to explain the nightly family ritual in her home. Her father would arrive promptly from work every evening at 5 o'clock. Dinner would be ready and the table set waiting for his entrance. He would wash up and all activity that others were engaged in would stop. The children would also clean up and everyone sat at the table and had dinner together. After dinner her father would watch the evening news as the daughters washed dishes and then he would sit back at the table to help the children with homework.

Celia's parents came from large families and grew up very poor. Both of them completed a tenth grade education. They believed firmly that their children should receive an education. Celia attributes her father to encouraging education and her mother to demonstrating commitment. She stated that her parents will soon be celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. She spoke affectionately about her father, "My dad taught us a lot she said, I recall him telling me, 'I will teach you everything you will need to know

about school and when I can no longer teach you, then you will teach me,' and that was the way it was." She went on to talk about her mother and the values she had instilled in the children. Her mother made sure they attended church every Sunday and understood the sanctity of marriage and importance of commitments. "I have been married for twenty eight years," she said, "It's all about commitment and values." Celia worries that she may not be passing on these same values to her own children.

Celia shared the following account about her and her sister that illuminates the home learning environment:

My mother cleaned houses for women who had many possessions, some of which they would give her to take home. Some of the things they would give my mother were old magazines. My sister and I would sit around the floor furnace and pretend that we were sitting around a campfire and we would read the magazines and imagine that we were going to some far away land. We were the two oldest of the children and we had the responsibility to clean house, take care of our younger siblings, and take care of ourselves while our parents were at work. Reading became our playtime and it allowed our imaginations to work. We were expected to be real *mujeres* (women)...I mean grow up, do things. That's how I remember it, but it was fun.

I asked, "Did your parents encourage you to attend college?" I found Celia's response about her parent's view on college education to be very amusing and certainly illustrated the role of women as perceived by her parents. Celia began by explaining that in the warehouse where her father worked, many women were also employed. Her father observed that the families of these women had certain advantages because of their type of employment. These working women were able to purchase new cars and their families lived in newer and bigger homes and they were able to go on vacations. They were also able to provide other privileges for their children that Celia's parents were unable to provide for their own. With this observation in mind, Celia's father thought that all the children should certainly graduate from high school and if nothing else at least take some

college courses. “I am not afraid to say that one thing about men; all men regardless of color or age, is that they understand the economic of things,” she said. “My dad understood that if a woman had a college education she would earn more money.” Celia recalled being out in the fields during the summer picking onions or green beans. She stated, “It was hotter than hell and I hated it.” Her father would say, “Okay girls, this is hard work huh? It stinks, and you smell, and you always have to worry if a damn bull snake is out there.” He would continue, “Think about this, because if this is the kind of life you want, it’s here. Otherwise get out of these fields, get on with your lives and do something; go to school.”

Her mother had a different perspective on education as Celia explained:

My mother was very traditional in her ways. She said that the boys should go to college because they were going to be the breadwinners and maybe the girls could go if there was any money left over. She said the girls would need to learn to keep house, cook, and take care of the children. That is why she made my sisters and I do all the household chores, and the boys didn’t do crap. Thank God that my dad was a visionary and had the foresight to push all of us toward education. My sister became a widow at age 24 and because she had attended college she was able to support herself and her two girls after her husband died. My two brothers started college but never graduated and all of the four girls are college graduates.

As Celia continued to talk about her family life I noted that she never diverted to any activity involving her brothers. She did not mention them working in the fields and her explicit description of them as, “Not doing crap around the house,” led me to ascertain that they were perhaps a slothful pair.

Celia acknowledged that although her father was very encouraging of her education he did not fully understand what a college education was. “He thought that you could go off to college for six months and that was good enough,” she said. Celia explained to her father that just starting college wasn’t good enough. “If you start

something, you have to finish or else you're just out there like everyone else.”

Eventually her father understood and he became relentless in pushing her until she received her Ph.D. Interestingly enough, when Celia was in high school she listed one of her goals as acquiring a Ph.D. without knowing what a Ph.D. was.

Learning always came easy to Celia. She recalls that on two separate occasions an attempt was made by her elementary school teacher to move her ahead one grade. Her parents however, refused to be persuaded and instead asked the teacher to give Celia more challenging schoolwork to keep her busy. Her ability to learn quickly led to certain privileges in the school such as working on special assignments and projects. Celia stated that she has always enjoyed working on projects, even in her current position as Vice President of Human Resources and Affirmative Action. She enjoys the challenge of difficult problem solving projects.

We had talked extensively about her younger years but I was interested in knowing about her experiences in the school systems as a pre-teen and also as a teenager. Celia attended a junior high school in a lower socioeconomic area and said she always excelled both academically and socially and felt at ease in the school environment. “Everyone around me was poor, White or Brown, we were all the same,” she said. “The real shock came when I went to high school,” she added.

The high school was only a couple of miles from her home but a major highway, a border of sorts, divided the city based on socioeconomic status. “The majority of those neighborhoods around the school were White,” she said. “These kids had cars, and the girls had shoes that matched their cloths.” Celia became very forceful in her words as she said, “This may not be a big deal to some people, but when you are thirteen or

fourteen it is a big deal and it can really work on you psychologically.” Her voice calmed and a smile appeared as she went on to describe the morning ritual of getting to school from her neighborhood:

I would get to school with this older kid in my neighborhood. He drove a 1954 Ford and I remember that it was baby blue and white. All the kids from the neighborhood would pile into his car and get a ride for the ten or twelve blocks to the high school. I remember that my folks would set aside \$1 per week to give this kid for gas. We all sat on top of each other and we never got to school late. It was so strange though because all the White kids arrive at school one or maybe two to a car, and the cars were usually new. For me it was such an eye opener. The way they talked was also so different from what I knew.

When Celia mentioned the way the other students talked as being different, she wasn't referencing their speech but rather the content of their experiences. She mentioned that her family had once made a trip to California and the whole family, including grandma and grandpa, piled into the car and drove the long distance in the middle of summer with no air conditioning in the car. “When we got there everyone was mean and cranky,” she said with laughter in her voice, “but could you blame us.” Celia also mentioned that the family had driven to New Mexico a couple of times but that was the extent of their vacations. Many of the other students at her school talked about their summer vacations to Europe and the Caribbean; places Celia could only dream of going.

Celia's parents were relentless in their pursuit of her academic advancement as illustrated in the response to my questioning of her performance in high school. “My dad took it upon himself to pick my classes in high school,” she said with almost a sense of despair in her voice. “He didn't know what the hell chemistry was. He just thought it was something I needed to take,” she concluded. Her parents had no idea how difficult this course was for her or the isolation she had felt getting through it. It wasn't until years later, when she entered college, that she recognized the value of taking challenging

courses. As a young teenager she only saw it as a labor of love trying to satisfy her parents.

Celia was the only Latina enrolled in chemistry and other difficult classes. She endured ridicule and isolation from other Latino students who picked on her accusing her of trying to be different. For Celia, high school was a very painful time as expressed in the following narrative:

Some kids had the impression that I wanted to be in those classes but I didn't. My folks made me go to those classes and that was the difference, I didn't choose to be there. I was just trying to survive the peer pressure and at the same time keep my parents happy. I had been told so many times, 'She thinks she is better than us', by other Latino students. Yes, I was different, but not because I wanted to be, it was because my parents forced me to be different. I had no one to access for help. I didn't know anyone who had ever taken chemistry or algebra for that matter. My parents just did not understand how difficult this was for me and often times I felt like they didn't care how I felt.

Celia's parents were often unreasonable in their expectations. "I had a mother that was brazen in her behavior," she said as she struggled to find the word to describe such behavior:

She was just...I mean...I...years later I realized that her behavior was a form of abuse. Let me give you an example. I came home and...my sister was always a good student, but because of her asthma my mother always gave her latitude. Also, this sister was close in age to the one who died so I felt that my mom always favored her and protected her. This is really painful...my mom...I had gotten all A's on my report card except for one B. My mother went completely off the deep end over that one B. 'So this is what your dad and I do,' she said, 'we work our butts off to get you to go to school, to support you, to stand by you, and this is how you pay us back!' She meant every word of it too. I realized that her expectations were insane but there was nothing I could do. I functioned under that kind of pressure all the time and graduated at the top of my class but I always felt very, very alone. The bright side was that college was a breeze.

Celia didn't start college immediately out of high school. Recall that her parents were reserving that privilege for their sons. As the oldest of the children however, Celia was expected to work after high school. To please her parents that is what she did.

Eventually she married, had three children, and became a stay-at-home mom until her husband lost his job. Their lives had become very comfortable with his high paying factory job and then, “The worst thing in our lives turned out to be the best thing,” Celia explained:

Not only had my husband lost his job, but my health was deteriorating. By the age of 26 I had a hysterectomy, by the time I was 30-31, I had a bilateral mastectomy. I told myself that I didn’t have time to mess around anymore. From a spiritual level I wanted to do different things with my life – I was no longer happy being a homemaker.

Her husband eventually got another less-paying job but it required that they move away from her extended family. They moved near the small rural community where Celia was born and she got a job as a assistant to the superintendent with a rural school district.

This was a farming and ranching community that lacked proximity to any colleges or universities. Instead several colleges and universities within and out of state set up distance education courses and Celia enrolled at the urging of the superintendent and her own sense of urgency to move forward with her life. She attended classes several nights a week and in four years, when they moved again, she had earned her bachelor degree.

Celia and her family were able to move back to the town they had previously left through a job transfer offered to her husband. She got a job as a tutor at a community college and eventually was hired as a member of the faculty. It was during this time that she met a person whom she praises for becoming the most important mentor in her career.

The person Celia met had been a former college president and he saw potential in Celia that perhaps she did not see in herself. He encouraged, in fact, insisted that she

continue with her education and pursue a master's degree. Celia accepted his challenge and set a two year goal for herself to complete her masters. She pursued her masters through a distance education program that required her to spend summers away from home. The remainder of the time it was evening and weekend classes through interactive video and voice conferencing. Celia talked about her summer experience on a Midwest campus:

Living in the Midwest was an eye opening experience for me. Everyone thought I was Puerto Rican because I have the brown skin. I can't tell you how many times I had to explain that I was from the Southwest, I was an American whose ancestors had been here for multiple generations. They just didn't understand that all Hispanics are not the same. My culture and the Puerto Rican culture are very, very different. I don't think the people in the area ever understood that. They really considered me some kind of an alien.

This was an opportune time to ask Celia to describe her culture since she had self-identified her ethnicity as Latina on the study demographic form. "First of all," she said, "I don't speak any Spanish. I understand it okay but I can't carry on a conversation in Spanish." Celia's parents spoke minimal Spanish, and when they did it was not the proper usage of the language. "I am from the Southwest," she emphasized again. "Like I said, when I was in the Midwest everyone thought I was from Puerto Rico but of course I didn't speak any Spanish so I was really the odd ball," Celia said with a touch of humor in her voice. She went on to explain that she is very comfortable with her brownness and people will just have to understand that not all Latinos or Hispanics speak Spanish but that doesn't make them any less Latino or Hispanic.

Celia expressed the love of her culture in the Latino music that she listens and dances to. "We make empanadas (turnovers) for Christmas," she said "along with many other ethnic foods." She indicated that Catholicism is a part of her Latinismo as is the

commitment to family and marriage. Remaining in proximity to the extended family unit is also a vital component of Celia's Latino culture.

"You were telling me about your mentor," I said, drawing Celia back to our previous point in the interview. As Celia approached the graduation date her mentor encouraged her to keep going with her education and pursue a Ph.D. Celia gave herself a one day break and immediately started a doctoral program.

Celia's mentor who had influenced her into pursuing the doctoral degree also became a member of her dissertation committee. His commitment to her progress was astounding and he vowed to stand by her until she completed her goal. During the process of her dissertation work he became very ill. Celia graduated with her PhD in May and although he was very ill he still attended the graduation. Her mentor and friend died in July of that same year. "I couldn't have done it without him," she said as her voice cracked and her eyes filled with tears.

Celia's father continued to be a major support while she was getting her doctorate. He would often drive her to cohort meetings that were at least a couple of hundred miles away from her home. He would take care of her children while she attended classes and also worked. Her father was a positive influence always assuring her that she could do it. Celia said she always did things because other people expected her to, and she never really did the things she wanted to do.

I was wondering why Celia had not provided much information about her husband so I inquired about his character. "He is Hispanic," she said, "and he is no different from any other man as long as what I do doesn't interfere with the house getting clean and someone taking care of the children and cooking his meals." Her words were

brusque as she went on to describe that he understood her pursuit of advanced education as a personal investment. As she increased in education, so would her ability to earn more money, and that earning power was what he saw as a personal benefit.

There were times however, when he was influenced by his Latino friends who would say to him, “You’re a fool to educate your wife. She’ll get educated and then she will leave you.” Celia admitted that the outside influence often caused turmoil in the marriage. Once again her curt words rang with a symbolism I was not at liberty to scrutinize, “It has been almost ten years since I received my degree and I’m still with the guy – I still haven’t packed the bag.” I wondered if using the word ‘still’ implied that this was perhaps a possibility.

Celia continued to offer more information about her husband:

When I was going to college I realized that I needed to do something to get him off my back so I convinced him to also enroll in some classes. He did enroll in a community college and completed a two-year degree while I was working towards my doctorate. The problem was that my husband had no computer skills and refused to take a computer class. He would write his papers in long hand and then I would have to put them into the computer and edit them for grammar and spelling so essentially his educational pursuits doubled my work. Instead of getting him off my back, I created more work for myself. But again that sense of commitment was so great that I would not quit. What an idiot I was. But I mean...he got a two-year degree and I was real proud of him.

Celia completed her dissertation on women in higher education administration and the glass ceiling faced by many. In retrospect she stated, “Women in general, not just Latinas have progressed minimally toward equality in higher education. Isn’t it sad,” she said. “The academy in general brags about how well women have done and how far they have come but this is just not the truth.”

Her statements were a great precursor to transition the interview and gather information about her current position as vice president. I asked about her personal

leadership style that she described as being participatory. “I like to get everyone’s input,” she said, “but sometimes a decision needs to be made quickly; at those moments I assume full responsibility and make the call.” Celia went on to explain that she likes to give people choices and that by doing so it speeds up the decision making process. Celia has been in her current position for ten years but stated that a change would be nice.

I knew that Celia was the only female at this level of leadership within her institution. I ascertained the campus accoutrements to be inhospitable and I wondered how this climate might impact a female executive so I asked Celia to describe the campus environment as far as its receptivity towards women. Without hesitation Celia responded:

I think this institution is a classic example of an old boy’s network – absolutely. What is interesting about this institution is that this old boy’s network is not only at the top levels but it is embedded in the entire structure and that is very scary. It is bad enough when you have to deal with people at the top but when you have to deal with people throughout the structure it just makes for a hostile and very cautious environment. It is definitely embedded. It is alive and well to the point that I think that sexism prevails and if you could lift that veil you would see that racism is institutionalized here. This type of environment is very unhealthy for women and minorities.

These are the words from a woman in charge of human resources and affirmative action. Needless to say, I was rather taken aback by these remarks. “So, how do you as a woman and a minority overcome this?” I asked. “I don’t know that I do overcome it,” she responded. “Most of the time I just live with it and choose my battles very wisely.”

Celia had given me a wonderful interview. I thanked her for being open and willing to share the details of her life. As I walked out of the building and back to my car the campus seems more desolate, the blacktop felt hotter, the flowers and the trees were

not as colorful as I remembered an hour earlier, and I knew this was one place I did not want to revisit.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND THEMES

Overview

The women in this study are eleven successful, professional and resilient Latinas. I define their success as having achieved academic and professional advancement. They are first generation college graduates that have overcome external environmental factors that for some would have remained barriers to success. These women, however, because of their personal characteristics and their intrinsic moral fiber have embraced these barriers and from them garnered the resiliency to achieve. They are the daughters of secretaries, maids, housewives, fieldworkers, shopkeepers, factory workers, farmers, laborers, ranchers, and meat cutters,.

Collectively they have experienced poverty, violence, illness, grief, discrimination, and marginalization. Individually they have embraced the challenges of being Latina and through their resolute nature have achieved advanced degrees and leadership positions within their organizations and communities. Today they hold the following positions: public school principle, department chair of a community college, college and university administrators', lawyers' in private practice, vice president of a social service agency, chief executive officer of a health care organization, vice president of a college, judge, college president, and a university vice chancellor. I believe they have arrived at a place of honor, and it is through the illustration of the findings and

themes that I attempt to connect the research puzzle that will shed light on the factors that have influenced their success.

To present the findings in this study I have engaged in a cross-case analysis of the eleven life histories of the participants. Through this process I will demonstrate the similarities and the differences between them. I begin at the point in time where these women have arrived in their quest for success; their careers. I will present the information on their personal leadership style followed by barriers to their careers, mentors, and the theme of entrepreneurship. I will present information on various social systems that intersect throughout their lives beginning with the family system then followed by the economic system, the educational system, and conclude with the findings surrounding ethnic identity and resiliency.

In an effort to guide the reader through this chapter I offer a visual diagram in Figure 1 that illustrates the major themes and the various support themes that emerged from the study. Within each major theme are support themes that also surfaced. After presenting the findings on their careers I return to their roots, as illustrated in the family system; the foundation of their being. The family system was a major theme that emerged. Within the family system theme are the support themes of family unit, family traditions, the family work ethic, and family resiliency. It is important to note that when I reference the family, I am referring to the participants' family unit when they were growing up (e.g. father, mother, and siblings) and not their personal families as adult women (e.g. husbands and children).

Although the economic system could be very broad, I took a narrow perspective and focused on data that exhibited evidence of poverty and class division. Represented

within the educational system theme are the support themes of parental influence, the educational environment with respect to the participants' experiences in the early years, secondary years, and college years, barriers in education, and mentors in education.

Ethnic identity refers to a theme that presents issues in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. In the global context of ethnic identity, particularly in adulthood are such issues as marginalization, acculturation, assimilation, separation, and integration. These issues are discussed in the following chapter. Ethnic identity also revealed a support theme of defining community. Within the context of defining community I explore four distinct areas of space; physical, social-historical, emotional-psychological, and spiritual.

Also within the theme of defining community there emerged a phenomenon that was unique to these study participants. I refer to this experience as *El Valle* (the valley) culture. More than half of the participants came from the same part of the country; a large geographic region in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico that contributes to their unique culture. It was not my intent to seek out women from this region, it just happened, and the emergence of these findings necessitates a section of its own.

The fifth theme that emerged was that of personal resiliency presenting powerful information on significant life events both in childhood and adulthood. In addition, I identified within the personal resiliency theme, information on the personality traits of these women and their personal work ethic. Each of the themes and sub themes are explained and illustrated with quotations using the participant's voices along with my own in an effort once again to tie the research puzzle together.

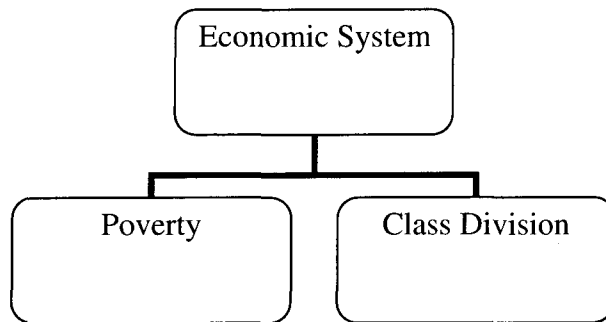
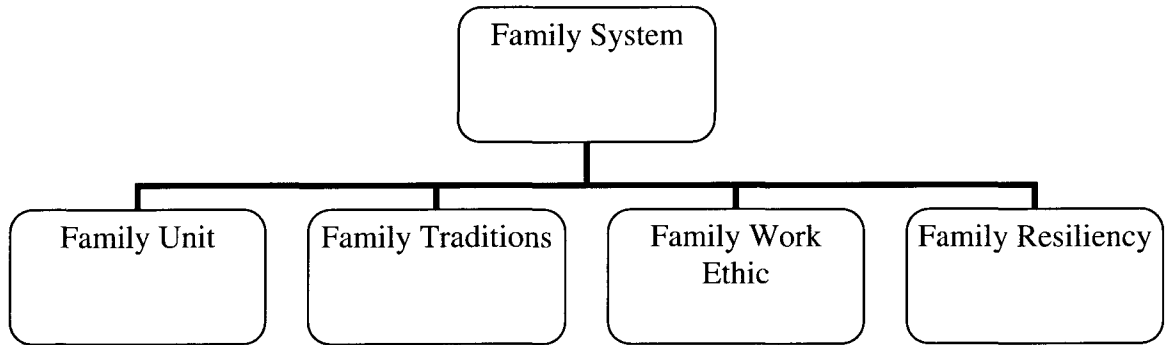
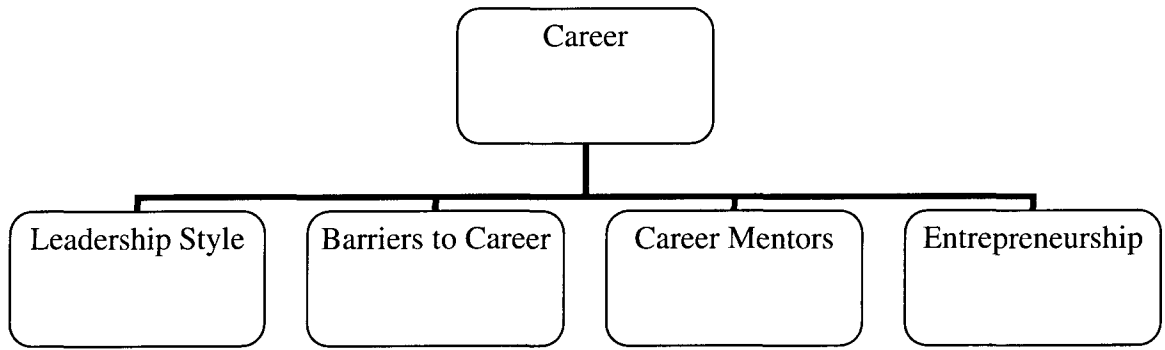


Figure 1-A: Themes and Support Themes

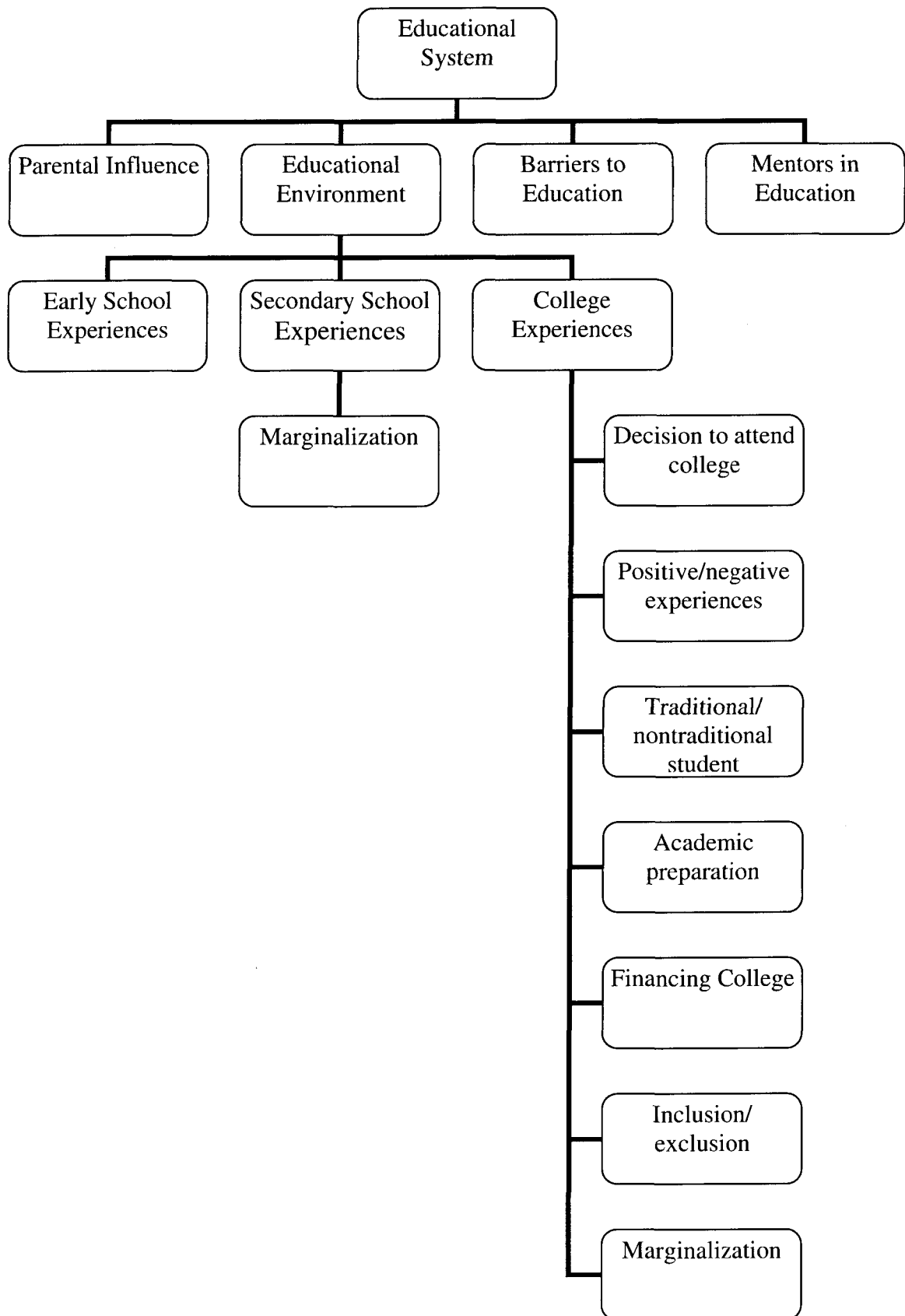


Figure 1-B: Themes and Support Themes

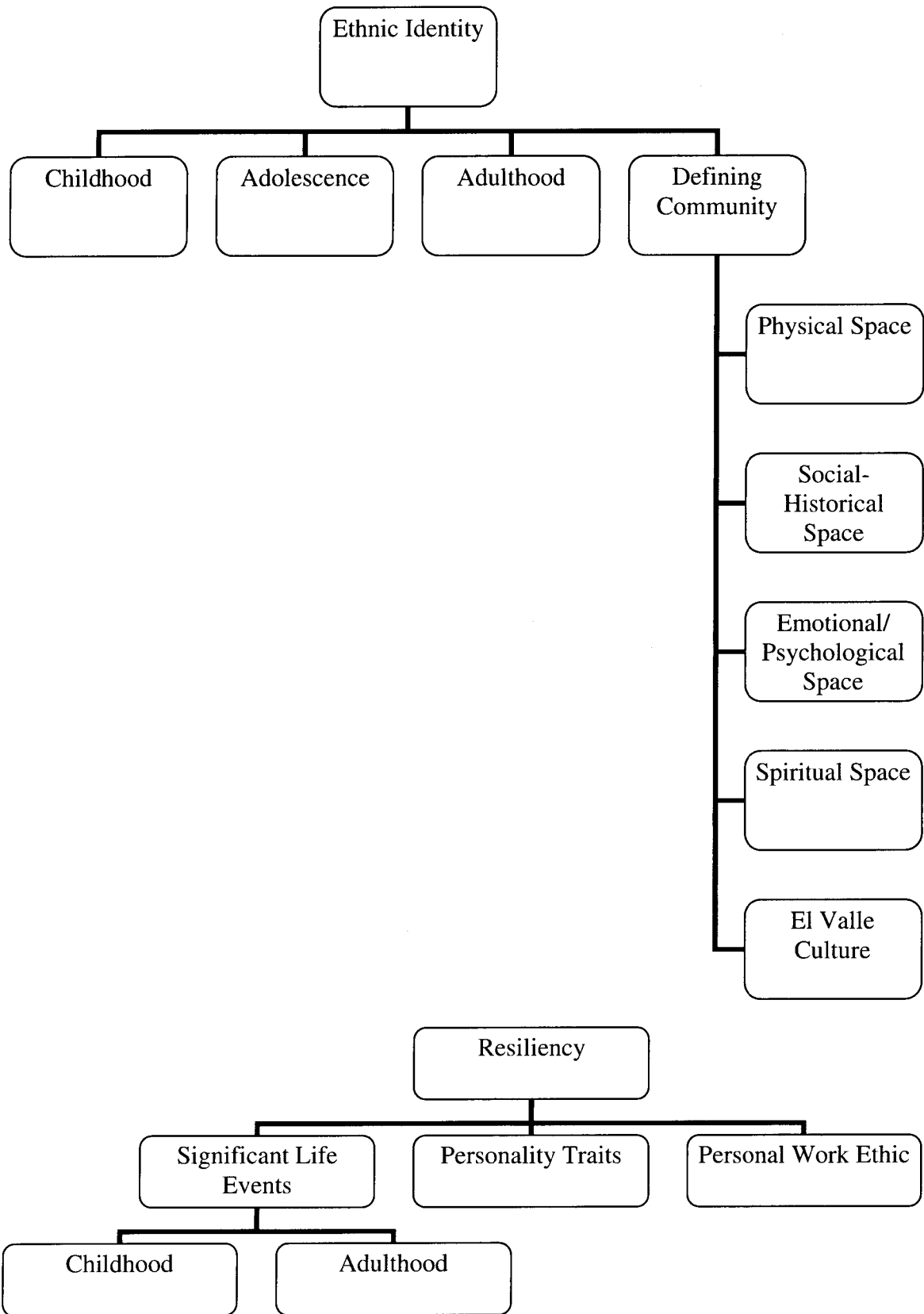


Figure 1-C: Themes and Support Themes

Career

The women in my study are in middle- to upper-level management positions in their organizations. I wanted to gather information about the occupations or professions followed in their individual lifework; in their careers. I asked each participant to provide an oral work history through which I sought to identify any factors that may have contributed to their success.

Several codes emerged as the women discussed their careers. I was able to identify personal characteristics such as ambition, assertiveness, high achiever, resolute, and autonomous. I have reserved the discussion of these personal characteristics, among others, for the section on resiliency.

I wanted to know how the women identified their personal leadership styles. I also wanted to know if they had experienced any barriers to their careers and if they had mentors along the way. These three areas, along with the emergent theme of entrepreneurship became the primary themes in this section. I will present the findings on each of these themes in this section. In addition, I would like to add that all of the women entered the work force as teenagers and all maintained employment throughout college.

All of the women began their career path upon completion of their undergraduate work. Six of the women (Alicia, Liana, Mari, Lydia, Juanita, and Celia) changed careers multiple times, and their experiences may be summed up in the statement made by Mari, "I had already worked a lot of careers by the time I was 35." At the time of the interview these women had been in their current positions for several years. Five of the women (Reyna, Isabel, Inez, Caridad, and Elissa) have remained within their chosen career path

all of their adult lives. Also at the time of the interviews, Inez was the only participant who was retired after working thirty years in higher education.

I define their success as having achieved academic and professional advancement within their chosen field. At the time of this study they held the following positions: public school principle, department chair of a community college, college and university administrators', lawyers' in private practice, vice president of a social service agency, chief executive officer of a health care organization, vice president of a college, judge, college president, and a university vice chancellor.

Leadership Style

As the women discussed their roles within their organizations, I asked them to describe their individual leadership style. They each supervised numerous employees, and I wanted to know if there were any similarities in the way they managed their departments/organizations and directed the people under their supervision.

The participants used a variety of terms to describe leadership style. However, seven of the eleven women used the term participative. In addition, three of these seven women also used the term inclusive to describe their personal leadership style and one person used the term principle centered.

The women, who used the term participative described this style within an array of formats. Mari stated, "I have learned my style over time and I participate by helping others to understand their job duties and then leaving them alone to perform them." Celia said, "My style is participative. I want input from those who work with me." Isabel explained that she performed duties just like everyone else. She wouldn't ask her employees to do anything she wasn't willing to do herself.

The three women who used the term inclusive with participative offered the following explanations. Caridad and Elissa both indicated that they like to get others involved in the decision making process and believe strongly in building relationships. In addition, Caridad also stated that her leadership style is eclectic in that she uses numerous styles depending on the situation. "Making decisions by consensus," is how Inez defined her participative/inclusive approach.

Juanita used the terms participative and principle centered and provided a precise description of this combination of terms. She explained:

I define principle centered by beliefs and values that I have and then the beliefs and values of the organization. I believe that leaders make a huge difference in terms of the culture of an organization and that is driven around the values both of expression of what we believe in and then do we manifest those values in how we behave, work and interact. On the one hand we have value driven and on the other hand we have participatory.

Alicia described her leadership style as inclusive and web-like. She stated that she functions best in the center of her department where she includes her staff in planning and decision-making.

"I believe that I use the servant leadership style," Liana stated. She went on to say that it is very important to her not to feel that she is above anyone and that the most important people she serves are the patients that access her clinic. She went on to say, "I think to have that kind of style, you have to want to serve others. I am very inclusive in what I do."

Reyna used the terms situational, inclusive and principle centered as she described her leadership style. "I am very honest and straightforward. I try to include employees in the decision making process but that does not always work out. We have to make decisions based on the law," she stated. Reyna's department is governed by many federal

and state regulations therefore allowing others into the decision making process is not always appropriate, but she does include her staff whenever possible.

Lydia described her leadership style as dictatorial. She attributes this style to the fact that a very domineering mother raised her. She stated, “This style lends itself well to a courtroom; to being a judge.”

To conclude this section on leadership styles, data show that the participants exhibit various styles of directing their employees, department, and/or organizations. An individual may exhibit various styles depending on the situation, but I believe it would be appropriate to say that these women value relationships with their staff and most tend to embrace an inclusive style of leadership. In addition they all exhibit a high degree of integrity and dedication to their work.

Barriers to Career

I wanted to know if any of the women had experienced barriers in the advancement of their careers. I wanted to know if they encountered anything that obstructed their progress. I did not ask the question directly but rather allowed them to share any information about their experiences as they progressed through their careers. I did not want to influence their answers so I simply listened to their stories. I interviewed eleven women, seven of them never revealed any barriers to their career advancement. The four remaining women shared experiences that revealed a sense of not fitting in with the mainstream or Latino culture, needing to prove competency, subtle discrimination, and institutional racism.

Lydia, a judge and attorney, stated that she feels “stuck in the middle.” As a Latina professional she often feels alone and unable to fit into the mainstream culture as

well as the Latino culture. Reyna, a college administrator, stated that in her current position she had to prove to others that she knew what she was doing, and it took a couple of years for the campus to believe in her competency. Elissa, a public school principal, was not considered for a principal position because she was a woman, and they needed more men in that position. At another time she was given a principal position in a lower socioeconomic district with a predominately Latino population because she was Latina. And finally there is Celia, a university administrator, who offered the following statement:

I think that this institution is an old boys' network and this network is embedded in the entire structure from top to bottom. It makes for a very hostile and very cautious environment. It is alive and well to the point that I think that sexism prevails and when you lift that layer you would see that racism is institutionalized. It is a very scary environment.

Seven out of the eleven women interviewed did not indicate any barriers to their career advancement while the experiences of the remaining four ranged from feelings of not fitting in to institutional racism.

Career Mentors

A mentor is someone who is a trusted counsel, teacher, advisor, and instructor to another person. Since I considered the Latinas I interviewed to be successful, I was very interested in knowing if they had mentors along their career paths. I was interested in identifying any mentors outside of their immediate families since many of them considered their parents to be their primary advisors. Of the eleven women interviewed, only two, Alicia and Mari, stated that they never had anyone to advise them along their career path.

Alicia attributes her success to guidance of a spiritual nature. She affirms her faith and trust in God as the primary factor to her success. She also indicated that she had to succeed as a matter of survival for her and her children. Mari attributes much of her success to an internal locus of control. She believes that her future is within her control and that external forces will have little influence on her success or lack thereof.

Data from the remaining nine women revealed that eight of them identified males as their mentors, five Latino, two Anglo, and one African-American. Of these eight women, two identified both Latino and Anglo males as their mentors. One participant identified Anglo women as the key mentors in her career.

The women who identified males as their mentors indicated that the lack of women in top level positions, whether in higher education or in the corporate structure, was the reason they had male mentors. The exception was the one participant who stated that most of the key support she has had in her life has come from women.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship was another theme that emerged from the study as I analyzed participant data. I reference entrepreneurship to be the process of planning, operating, and assuming the risk of a business venture. An entrepreneur is someone who engages in entrepreneurship. Five of the eleven women have either engaged in entrepreneurship, are current business owners, or plan to own and operate their own business in the future.

Alicia at the young age of 17 owned and operated a hair styling salon. At the time of our interview, in addition to her current position as vice president for a non-profit organization, she had just started her own non-profit counseling service. Liana also

owned and operated her own business prior to assuming her current position as CEO of a public health organization.

Lydia and Isabel, both attorneys, each has her own practice. Elissa, upon retirement from her position as elementary school principal, hopes to own and operate a shop that will specialize in artwork, home accessories and foodstuff each specific to her ethnic culture.

Family System

Family emerged as a dominant theme throughout the study and was intertwined consistently within the other major themes. When studying the family system, several sub-themes emerged such as the family unit, family traditions, family work ethic, and family resiliency. The findings under each of these sub-themes are described in this section. I was interested in gathering data about the participants' families when the women were children and young adults. However the importance of family has carried over into their personal families as adult women but that was one area I did not gather data.

Family Unit

There were several codes that emerged throughout the analysis that assisted in defining the family unit. The codes that appeared most often were traditional family, close immediate family, close extended family, and for three participants the code of dysfunctional family emerged.

Every participant grew up in a traditional family unit meaning that the father and mother (same father and mother, not step-parents) were in the same household for most

of the participants early childhood and adolescent years and most into their adult years. Mari stated that her parents were married for fifty-five years, Juanita's parents were married for sixty-six years at the time of her father's death, Alicia's parents were married for forty-five years before her mother's death, and Celia's parents were celebrating their fiftieth wedding anniversary at the time of our interview. Lydia was the only participant who experienced the divorce of her parents when she was an adolescent and her case was one where the dysfunctional family code emerged several times. Lydia's experience is discussed further under the resiliency section of this chapter under the support theme of significant life events.

Within the family unit of all participants the mother was a homemaker. She took care of all household chores, guided the children through education and life choices and was influential in keeping the family unit including the extended family close.

As I describe participants being close to their family or extended family unit, I refer to the immediate family as parents and siblings and extended family as grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and cousins. In using the word close or closeness I am referring to the concept of individuals becoming an integral part of one another's everyday life.

The closeness of the family unit, both immediate and extended, was often illustrated through family gatherings that occur through a multitude of events like holidays, birthdays, or simply because the timing was right for the family to be together. Six of the participants also stated that their immediate family unit and members of the extended family unit often take vacations together. Inez stated that members of her extended family attended a specialized school together that contributed to their unity.

Some families are separated geographically but not emotionally. Juanita states that she had a very wonderful childhood with a strong family that remains very close although they are separated by geographic distance. Likewise, Caridad and Elissa come from a strong family unit with many siblings that remain close emotionally but are separated by geographic distance. Liana attributes the closeness of her family to the loss of her mother when she was a young adult although strong family values had previously been established. Inez, Lydia, and Liana also spoke of the family closeness developing when they were children involved in political and community events with their parents.

Some family units have resisted separation even in geographic terms. Reyna for example tells a story of the extended family inhabiting several city blocks that formed a community of their own within the larger community. "All my mother's brothers and sisters, and older nieces and nephews, were our next-door neighbors," she explains. They cared for one another's children and shared in the care and nurturing of the larger family unit. At the time of the interviews with the participants, approximately half of the family members still lived in proximity to the extended family unit.

Alicia's extended family unit was large and most lived in a central geographic location. Her aunts, uncles, and cousins would gather at her grandmother's house on Sunday afternoons to share food and the latest gossip. Isabel described her large extended family in much the same way, "Gatherings on Sunday afternoons at my grandmother's house."

Alicia, Lydia, and Celia shared information about their families in which the code dysfunctional family emerged. I define the dysfunctional family as a social unit characterized by consequences of social activities or structure that undermines a stable

family unit. Each of these women experienced dysfunctional family behavior as children. Alicia experienced a mother who battled alcoholism and depression. Lydia witnessed domestic violence initiated by her father towards her mother, and Celia experienced what she referred to as verbal child abuse by her mother imposed on her in the form of extreme academic expectations. Looking at the dysfunctional family code in relationship to the close family unit code only Alicia indicated that the family was also close. Neither Lydia nor Celia offered any indication that the family unit was close.

Family Traditions

I asked the women to describe the family traditions that helped to define their family unit as they grew to adulthood. Among the most common responses were the gathering of family around major life events and the sharing of food. These major life events included birthdays, graduations, and holidays. As young girls they all celebrated events in conjunction with the Catholic Church such as baptism, first communion, confirmation, and the marriage of family members. Although all of the women were raised in the Catholic faith only three currently maintain the traditions associated with the Church but all maintain the tradition of family gatherings and the preparation of specific foods to correlate with the celebrated event. Alicia and Isabel described the gathering of family at their grandmothers' house on Sunday afternoons as family traditions when they were growing up.

Reyna describes a Thanksgiving tradition that involves renting a local venue to house the extended family gathering in which they share food, music, and dance. Caridad described the family tradition of making tamales with her sisters and her mother during the Christmas holiday. Elissa also described the same event but being the only

daughter in her family the environment she described included the men in the kitchen, something not often described as part of the Latino family traditions among the other women.

Family Work Ethic

All of the participants came from a working class background where the father was the primary wage earner. Their fathers' worked as shopkeepers, field workers, farmers, laborers, ranchers, meat cutters, and factory workers. On occasion their mothers' also works in professions such as maids or secretaries but none of them worked when their children were young.

All of the women felt secure in their environments when they were children and believed the family lived from paycheck to paycheck but none of them understood the concept of poverty. Juanita expressed clearly the belief held by all the women in the study concerning their families' socioeconomic status, "If we were poor I didn't know it." Elissa in her story tells us that her family did not have running water, but never considered that a symbol of being poor. Celia likewise expressed the fact that the family worked all the time. She stated, "We grew up knowing what it meant to have a strong work ethic. We just did it. We worked all the time."

Mari was the only participant who indicated that her family took vacations. Those vacations came in the form of road trips where her mother packed all the food the family would need and they traveled in a camping trailer. Celia and Alicia shared that their families took vacations to visit relatives in another town that also involved a road trip of sorts.

Four of the participants attended Catholic schools that required the payment of tuition. The families' of these women made multiple sacrifices to send these girls to private school. Isabel's father worked two jobs and made cabinets on the side. Reyna's parents performed numerous hours of volunteer work for the Church to compensate for the tuition. Lydia and Caridad's family also took on multiple jobs and assumed volunteer work for the Church so their daughters could attend the local Catholic school.

All of the women adopted the attributes of a strong work ethic at an early age. Many of them cared for younger siblings, and all engaged in household chores. Some sought employment outside the home as soon as they were old enough to be legally employed.

Family Resiliency

Resiliency is a term that is subject to many interpretations and can be described in reference to an individual, family, or community. Within the context of this study I present the term resiliency to mean the ability to jump or bounce back after disappointment or setback. It also refers to the ability to recover readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like. As I reviewed data, I could certainly identify the resiliency in the individual participants and I will cover that in a subsequent section, but I also noted a family resiliency that is worth mentioning. Once again I am referring to the participants' family when they were growing up.

Many of the families experienced traumatic, life-changing events but were able to bounce back. The death of a sibling was devastating to the families of both Celia and Isabel. Liana's family experienced the death of her mother as she lost her battle to cancer when the children were very young. Mari and Isabel experienced the strain of a disabled

sibling. Lydia witnessed her mother suffer from domestic violence, and Alicia experienced the affect of alcoholism and depression as they collectively changed the behavior of her mother from a concern for her children to a sense of detachment.

A strong work ethic, perseverance, and pride are also attributes of a resilient family unit. Juanita mentioned several times the family pride and perseverance that attributed to a strong work ethic that became the norm for the entire family. Reyna and Inez, along with Caridad likewise mentioned several times the tremendous sacrifices that their families endured in order to provide for basic family needs.

In summary the family theme presented evidence that all the participants came from a traditional family unit where both parents were present in the home when the women were in their formative years. They all shared family traditions that contributed to the connectedness of the family unit. All participants came from working class families with a strong family work ethic and a history of resiliency.

Economic System

As the women presented information about their family backgrounds I was able to identify that they all had common experiences. They came from poor working class backgrounds, lived in poverty and experienced class division. I have already discussed the family work ethic and presented information on the working class status of the families therefore I will not reiterate that point again in this section. Instead I will present the findings on poverty and class division.

Poverty

I describe poverty as having little or no money, goods, or means of support. When the women were children, none of them recognized their state of poverty. Naturally they judged their world as normal because that is what they were accustomed to and understood. They felt secure in their environments. Each of them indicated that the family always had what they needed. It was not until they became adolescents or young adults that they recognized the economic state of the family as a level of poverty.

Liana stated that her father supported the family through his work as the town barber, charging one dollar for a haircut. Reyna stated that the family was very poor, but their reliance on the extended family unit offered support in a multitude of areas. Celia told the story of her family of seven living in a two-bedroom home. Perhaps the most vivid story comes from Elissa when she told her story of growing up without electricity or running water. "If I told people today that I grew up without electricity or running water they would be appalled and think that I grew up in a third world country," she stated. Yet she indicated that her life was very rich with tradition, love and support from those around her.

Class Division

The Latinas in this study shared the same social stratum of basic economic and cultural characteristics. It was not until they reached adolescents or young adulthood that they recognized the difference between their social status and that of others.

Several of the participants were first exposed to the different class structure when they entered high school. Reyna describes an incident in high school when she was

invited to an Anglo student's home and saw for the first time in her life that others lived in an environment different from her own. "This was the first time I saw carpeting," she said. Celia describes her experience at 13 when she saw that the White girls at her high school all wore shoes to match their outfits. "This is a big deal when you're a teenager," Celia stated.

Isabel related many experiences of isolation in her high school because of the socioeconomic status of her family. "The girls at this school came from very wealthy families," she said. She never fit in and remained isolated well into her college years because of these same experiences.

Reyna, Celia, Isabel, and Lydia all indicated that their socioeconomic status was also evident in physical boundaries that separated the middle class from the working class in their communities. Lydia identified the areas in her town where the Latinos lived by a specific name. I will not reveal the names of these locations because doing so would remove the confidentiality of this participant. I will say, however, that these names describe animals in a state of disarray or a location synonymous with rubbish. Their neighborhoods were divided from the more affluent sections of town by major highways or railroad tracks.

The women who grew up in small towns or rural communities never noted a difference in class division. Alicia and Liana grew up in small towns. Alicia stated, "I never knew minority thinking – everyone was just like me." Her community was predominately Latino. Liana likewise stated that there was no division of class in her small town and noted it was equally divided between Latino and Anglo. Juanita and Elissa grew up in rural communities and also revealed no division of class.

As the women entered college the awareness of class division was heightened. Caridad stated that students who attended her college were “richer than God.” Liana describes a situation in her dorm where the other girls are talking about joining sororities and it was at this juncture that she felt the greatest sense of marginalization. “There was just no way I could afford to do that; nor did I want to,” she stated. Liana felt she could never fit in with those types of girls.

Juanita and Inez were the participants who stated that they never felt excluded from the college environment either because of ethnicity or class. Inez was the only participant who became a member of a sorority.

Educational System

I was interested in looking at the role of education as a factor that may have contributed to the success of the Latinas in my study. I define education as the overall process of acquiring knowledge and of developing the powers of reasoning and judgment. Many of my questions focused on the educational background of these women from their early years, even before primary school, through their college years. There were many codes that I identified in the area of education that I subsequently grouped into sub-themes. Among the codes were parents encouraged education, parents not involved, family positive influence, Catholic school, secondary education positive, active in high school, academically prepared, academically unprepared, high achiever, college traditional student, college nontraditional student, college own decision, college financial aid, college positive experience, college included, college excluded, experienced discrimination, marginalized, barriers to education self-made, barriers to education non-existent, barriers to education social, and educational mentors.

The sub-themes that emerged through the grouping of codes in the discussion on education included parental influence, and the educational environment; early school, secondary, and college. Within these three time periods I saw evidence of academic achievement and co-curricular or community involvement. Additional themes that emerged were barriers to education and mentors in education. The findings within each of these sub-themes are described in the following sections.

The participants' educational experiences during their college years were varied and extensive. Therefore, to add structure to this sub-theme I added headings to assist the reader maneuver through the various experiences of college life. These headings include; decision to attend college, positive/negative experiences, traditional/nontraditional student, academic preparation, financing college, inclusion/exclusion, and marginalization.

Parental Influence

All of the participants indicated that their parents encouraged education. For some that encouragement was very strong and for others, like Alicia, it was minimal. Alicia started kindergarten through her own initiative when she was four years old. She was the only participant that indicated no parental involvement and no parental influence in her education.

Parental encouragement for the rest of the women was evident in several ways and often began in the home before the participant started formal education. For some women it was the father who was the primary influence and for others it was the mother. For a couple of the women their parents worked as a team, but in both instances it was the mother who took the lead and the father assumed a supporting role.

Reyna was the only participant that gave both of her parents' equal acknowledgment for her academic success. She stated that her father completed the eighth grade and had worked hard his entire life. He knew that education was the key to his children's economic advancement. Her parents' came from a very humble and poor background but continually pushed Reyna and her brothers in the direction of education.

Liana recalls that when she was a young child her mother, while cooking in the kitchen, would seat her on the counter and teach her songs and rhymes. Mari learned to read before she started school because her mother would tape words on the cupboard doors. Mari would have to pronounce the word correctly, learn how to spell it, and then use the word in a sentence. Lydia remembers having a large collection of *Golden Books* supplied by her mother and by age three she had memorized many of them because her mother repeatedly read these books to her. By the time Lydia started the first grade she was able to read.

Isabel's father was the primary influence in her life when it came to education. "He picked me out of all my siblings and referred to me as the smart one," she said. Education was important to him and he made many sacrifices so Isabel could attend a Catholic girls high school. He also encouraged reading, and whenever Isabel was reading she would be excused from doing the evening dishes.

Inez's father likewise insisted that his daughters read because he enjoyed reading. Each Saturday he would take his daughters to the local library to check out books that would be read during the week and then returned the following Saturday. Inez's father enrolled her in a special school when she was in sixth grade because he believed that she

would receive a better education in that school than what was offered in the local public schools.

I asked the women if their parents had helped them with homework when they were children. Inez indicated that her parents did not help her but that was mainly because she didn't need help. They continuously reinforced how smart she was and that reinforcement added to her high degree of self-confidence, her high level of self-esteem, and her high academic achievement. Juanita also stated that she never received help from her parents in doing homework but her father was the one who told her that education was a necessity and reinforced in her the belief that she could accomplish anything. Juanita was a member of the National Honors Society and also indicated that she never needed help with homework.

Celia and Caridad each stated that their fathers' often helped them with homework and were influential in pushing them toward education although each of them had a different method of influence. Celia's father took a more aggressive approach toward influencing his children, especially Celia. He made her work many summers in the fields picking crops for the local farmers. His approach was to emphasize the misery of this type of work and stressed that the only way out of the fields was through education. He told Celia that he would teach her everything he knew but when he could no longer teach her because of his limited education than Celia would have to teach him. As Celia entered high school her father would select the courses she would take and from her story we know that this created a real quandary in her struggle to achieve.

Caridad's father, on the other hand, was a real motivator and from a very early age he consistently told her that she was going to be a teacher. She grew up with the

notion that she would be in education although we learned that later in life her passion was in educational administration and not teaching. Caridad repeatedly stated that her father was the major influence in her education.

Elissa's father was gone from home much of the time because he was a migrant farm worker. Her mother therefore was the major influence always providing support and encouragement.

Ten of the women were influenced and supported by their parents in their educational pursuits. Only one participant, Alicia, indicated that her parents were indifferent, detached, and removed from her educational environment.

Educational Environment

I wanted to know about the experiences these women had in their education environments. I have grouped their experiences into three time frames. The early school experience is from kindergarten to eighth grade. Secondary school experience is from ninth grade to graduation from high school and finally their experiences in college.

Early School Experiences

All of the women indicated that their early school experiences were very positive. They each expressed that their environment was safe and they felt very secure. Five of the women, Alicia, Lydia, Reyna, Isabel, and Caridad, attended Catholic elementary school. Lydia summed up the Catholic school experience when she stated, "Name-calling and bad behavior is not Catholic and was not acceptable or tolerated in that environment. Respect for individual differences was an expected mode of behavior." The

Catholic schools required the girls to wear uniforms so everyone dressed the same creating equality in style and appearance.

Juanita and Elissa attended elementary school in rural communities and both describe a similar environment. Juanita attended a two-room schoolhouse until the eighth grade when the school was permanently closed. Elissa also attended a small school where two or three grades were in the same classroom taught by the same teacher.

Both Juanita and Elissa had mothers who spoke only Spanish. Both women started elementary school with very little knowledge of the English language but quickly learned English and both were excellent students. They each were in an environment with a predominately Latino population and received encouragement from their teachers as well as from their parents. They both described the environment as very rich, safe, and positive.

Celia and Mari attended elementary school in a larger public school district where the ethnic breakdown was about fifty percent Latino and fifty percent White. Their schools were located in working class neighborhoods so the socioeconomic status of all the students was about equal. They also described an environment that was positive and received encouragement from parents as well as teachers.

Liana's elementary school was located in a small town community but certainly not rural. She also excelled and did not recall any negative experiences.

Inez's elementary school experience, although still positive, was somewhat different from the other participants. Prior to starting elementary school her parents moved from a rural community to an urban setting for the purpose of exposing their children to a more diverse environment. Her parents believed that this environment

would give them greater life skills. Inez described the town that they moved to as very prejudiced toward Mexicans. She can recall racial aspersions cast at her during those early years, but also recalls her response to those aspersions as kids just acting dumb. She received continuous positive reinforcement from her home environment and was always a high achiever.

Secondary School Experiences

As the women entered high school they collectively had a wide range of experiences. Nine of the women stated that their high school experiences were positive. However, three of these women also identified periods of marginalization. In this context I define marginalization as any activity that places someone on the border; on the outside, making them feel less important, and different. I will discuss briefly their experiences in the domain of marginalization later in this section and in greater detail in the next chapter.

These nine participants had many friends and were involved in several co-curricular activities. They took advantage of many opportunities to get involved in both their schools and in their communities. Even the women who experienced some form of marginalization rated their overall experience as being positive

Marginalization.

Isabel and Caridad stated that their high school experiences were negative and expressed many occasions when they felt discrimination and marginalization. Neither of these women was involved in any high school activities and always felt like they did not belong.

Isabel attended a Catholic residential girls' high school where most of the students lived on campus. She stated that most of the girls came from very wealthy families and because she came from a working class family, and she did not live on campus, she never felt like she belonged. She was excluded because of her socioeconomic status but also because of her ethnicity. She did not fit in with the Mexican girls that came from wealthy Mexican families and she did not fit in with the Anglo girls because she was not considered White or rich. Isabel summed up her high school experience with the statement, "I always felt odd everywhere I went. I never, ever fit in."

Caridad had many negative experiences but she attributed them in part to the mobility of the family due to her father's military career. She spent much of her early years in Panama and when she started middle school the family moved to Montana. This was the first time in her life she felt the marginalization of being brown and became very shy and withdrawn. When she was ready to begin high school, the family moved to Texas.

Caridad thought that Texas would be a more welcoming environment, but she quickly realized that she was once again different from the Latinos in Texas. Her life experiences were different from the students in the high school she attended and again she felt like she did not belong. She described herself as being a real loner, not fitting in with either culture.

Lydia, Celia, and Reyna are the three individuals who rated their overall high school experiences as positive but also experienced episodes of marginalization. Lydia experienced marginalization when she was 12 years old and her parents divorced. She was attending a Catholic school at the time and divorce in the Catholic Church was not

acceptable. As a result of her parents divorce Lydia became an outcast and was marginalized by both her peers and those in authority. She, however, managed to change this negative episode into a positive flow of energy for her life. It was through this family trauma that Lydia became, and remained a high achiever throughout her academic career.

Lydia, although intensely involved in co-curricular activities continued to experience marginalization because of her academic ability. She took honors level courses and was one of only two Latinos in those classes at her high school. She was labeled as different from the other Latinos on her campus because she earned high grades. The other Latino students made reference to her thinking that she was better than the other Latino students. Her excellent English teacher also told her, after she was accepted to a prestigious private college, that she should consider a state school instead because she would be unable to compete with upper-class prep-school students that would make up the majority of the student body at the private college.

Celia and Reyna's situations were a bit different. Coincidentally they attended the same high school but were in different grade levels and were at their institutions at different time periods so they did not know each other. They both recognized the difference in the socioeconomic status of the students at the high school compared to their own.

Celia recognized that the students drove newer cars, wore new and coordinated outfits. Reyna also noted these same differences. The distinguishing factor between Celia and Reyna came in the influence of their parents toward their education. Celia's father picked her classes in high school. He selected courses like physics, chemistry, and

other challenging courses. Because Celia was enrolled in these classes, the other Latino students referred to her as acting White. Many of the Latino students did not accept her, and she did not fit within the social construct to mix with the Anglo students because she came from a lower socioeconomic background, therefore she always felt alone.

Reyna, coming from a very strong Catholic family, wanted to enroll in advanced courses but was told by the school personnel that she could not; no explanation, simply *no*. Instead she was tracked into basic math that was too easy for her. Her parents were of the belief that one never questions authority so they were very passive in their approach to her education. As a result, Reyna was never given information about college nor were any of her friends although they all had above average grades. Reyna and her Latino friends were all tracked into basic level courses and never given options to enroll in college preparatory classes.

All of the participants in my study, regardless if their experience was positive or negative, were all high achievers. They all graduated in the top ten percent of their classes. They all graduated from high school with honors and with the expectation of attending college.

College Experiences

The college experiences of these women were as varied as the threads in a tapestry, but collectively they tell a story of resiliency, bravery, and a resolute nature that I found to be present in each of them. Data on their college experiences were copious so in an effort to present the information in a more cohesive manner I have provided additional sections within this sub-section. I have labeled the college experience with

the subtitles that include the decision to attend college, traditional/nontraditional students, academic preparation, financing college, inclusion/exclusion, and marginalization.

Decision to attend college.

I wanted to know about their desire to attend college and if the decision to attend college was their own or influenced by their parents. Although many of the women had parents who encouraged education in general, all of the participants stated that the decision to attend college was their own.

I asked the question, "When did you make the decision that you would attend college?" Alicia stated, "I think I always wanted to go to college." Liana, Juanita and Lydia each likewise responded, "I always knew that I would go to college." Caridad stated, "I always knew that somehow I would go to college and there was no doubt in anyone's mind that I would complete." Elissa's decision to attend college was questioned by her father when he asked, "Why do you want to go to college? You're just going to get married." Her mother responded with, "Yes, and if her husband is a sad sack then she will be able to support herself." "I guess you should go to college," was her father's response.

Isabel also made the decision to attend college on her own. Her parents actually encouraged her to marry her high school sweetheart rather than go to college. However, through the help of a college recruiter she was able to complete the necessary paper work and eventually went away to college against the wishes of her parents.

Positive/negative experiences.

Seven of the women classified their overall college experience as positive but none without a struggle to maintain their place in the academy. Three of the women, Isabel, Reyna, and Lydia, described their college experience as a mixture of positive and negative events and memories. Alicia was the only participant who identified her college experience as one of the most difficult times of her life. She referred to herself as the walking wounded. When Alicia attended college she had just gone through a divorce and she was in poor physical health.

Isabel had both positive and negative experiences. Among the positive events for Isabel were periods of extreme growth when the whole world just began to make sense. The negative events in her life were once again characterized by feelings of isolation and marginalization. Reyna, although she believed her overall college experience to be positive, describes an event when a professor was deliberately discriminatory in his actions toward her as she took the final for an independent study course. Lydia enjoyed her college experience and involvement in Latino organizations. However, she mentions many episodes in the private college where she felt isolated, and also later in law school when she felt that she had been purposely marginalized.

Traditional/nontraditional student.

Alicia attended a vocational school directly out of high school. She was seventeen, pregnant, married, and alone. Without repeating her story, I will just say that when she began working toward a bachelor degree in a four-year college, she was a non-traditional student with three children. She had been abused and abandoned by her

husband, and it was the culmination of traumatic life events that drew her in the direction of education. Her enrollment, attendance, and completion of a degree were solely a need for survival and an act of love toward her children.

Alicia and Celia were the two participants who were non-traditional students when they entered college. They were both married and had children of their own. Isabel started college as a traditional student then stopped out and returned a few years later as a nontraditional student. Nine of the participants were traditional students, meaning they started college directly out of high school and graduated within four years.

Academic preparation.

I asked the women if they felt academically prepared to enter college. I was interested in assessing their basic skills upon college entry. The majority of the women affirmed that they felt academically prepared. One woman felt completely unprepared and a couple felt partially prepared.

Alicia is the one participant that stated she was unprepared both academically and emotionally to enter the college environment. Alicia isolated herself from human interaction and was focused only on completing the degree and getting a better job.

The second participant who also stated she was partially unprepared for college level work was Liana. "I did not feel like I was academically prepared in either science or math, I always felt lost," she stated. Elissa stated that she was academically unprepared in biology and chemistry but she excelled in the remainder of her course selections.

The remainder of the participants indicated that they were academically prepared to enter college and they excelled in their course work. Juanita states, "I was good in

math and science and everything else came easy to me.” Lydia commented, “I excelled academically maybe because I came into college with a very strong sense of self.” Celia stated that writing her dissertation “was a piece of cake.” Reyna said that when she went to college she knew she was there to study and that is what she did. “Maybe it came easy because I was focused on my studies,” she stated. Inez’s response when I asked if she was academically prepared was “absolutely.” Mari stated she was by all means a high achiever and received the first ‘B’ in her entire life during her second year of college.

Financing college.

I wanted to know how the women had paid for their college education. All except one received some form of financial aid. Liana, Mari, Juanita, Inez, and Caridad all received full scholarships. Alicia, Juanita, Lydia, Celia, and Isabel received a combination of scholarship, grants, and loans. Reyna’s parents paid for her college education - not because she didn’t qualify for financial aid, but because the family was unaware that they could get assistance. No one at Reyna’s high school offered them any information about scholarships. Reyna had excellent grades and could have received a full scholarship but since the family was uninformed about financial aid they borrowed money so she could attend college.

Inclusion/exclusion.

I wanted to gauge a deeper sense of their college experience so I asked the women to discuss their impressions of inclusion or exclusion within the college environment. Four of the participants, Alicia, Celia, Mari, and Isabel, indicated that they felt excluded. One woman stated that she was excluded in undergraduate school but included once she

attended graduate school, and six women identified a sense of inclusion throughout their college experience.

Alicia stated, "I always felt like an outsider, like a sore thumb, like I didn't belong." Alicia was a nontraditional student who returned to college during a time when she was going through extreme personal trauma. She indicated that the isolation she felt was in part brought on by her own withdrawal from other people. Likewise, Celia returned to college as a nontraditional student and she too indicated that she had no desire to get involved in the college outside of the classroom. Alicia and Celia both had children and they felt the need to be with their children far outweighed any need for inclusion. Mari also stated that she was excluded from the college environment but this was by her own choosing. She stated "I didn't want to be there so I didn't pursue the avenue of wanting to feel included." Mari was attending college because she understood its significance to her future although she already had a good paying job.

Lydia was the only participant who attributed her sense of exclusion due to the actions of others. "As Latino students we were not invited to join clubs or to be a part of sororities; we were just not invited to the table. We lived within their midst but we did things on our own," she stated. Recall that Lydia was attending a private prestigious college with a predominately Anglo population.

Isabel felt that her undergraduate experience was very isolating and affirmed that she never felt like she was part of the college experience until she entered law school. "Going to class was a solitary experience in undergraduate school. In law school I had my friends so it was different," she said.

The experiences of the six participants who felt a sense of inclusion within their college campuses were varied. Those who lived on campus attributed dorm life to enhancing the sense of community. Liana summed it up when she said; “We all shared the same hall so our socioeconomic or ethnic background didn’t matter. We were all in the same situation and the experience was wonderful.” Juanita stated, “I enjoyed meeting people from around the world.” Elissa indicated she was very involved and active in co-curricular activities. Caridad made friends with a group of football players and that association made for a strong sense of inclusion. Inez was the only participant that was rushed by, and became part of a sorority. Reyna was the only participant who lived at home and also indicated a strong sense of inclusion.

Marginalization.

During the interview process with each participant we spent several minutes, and in some cases hours, discussing various experiences of personal growth. Even though more than half of the women felt their college experiences were positive they all conferred events or episodes when they felt conflicted and marginalized. To provide clarity and consistency I will state again that I refer to marginalization as any activity that place someone on the border; on the outside, making them feel less important and different. Random House Dictionary (1995) further states that to be marginalized is to have contact with two or more cultural groups but not fully accepted in any of them (p. 829). Mari, Juanita and Inez were the only participants that never revealed any instances of marginalization in their college experience.

Three of the participants expressed that they felt the greatest difference in the area of economic status. Liana, who attended a large state university, said, “I started seeing

the difference between people who really had money.” Caridad and Lydia both attended private colleges and offered similar observation. “What I remember most of my undergraduate experience was the economic difference. The students that went to that college were richer than God,” Caridad explained. Lydia stated, “The economic divide between us and them [Latino and Anglo students] was very extreme.”

Caridad and Lydia also recalled a separation along ethnic and racial lines. Caridad acknowledged, “I was an outsider because I was the only Latina.” Lydia likewise stated, “We were divided by race. I think they felt as uncomfortable around us as we did around them.”

Elissa was the only participant who experienced marginalization in a male dominated discipline. She began her college career in Biology, an area of study she was passionate about. Her freshman Biology class consisted of 120 students, only four of whom were women. “It was very intimidating,” she said, “for the first time in all my schooling I felt out of my element. It was very unfriendly.”

To summarize the college experiences of the participants I would affirm that all of the women made the decision to attend college on their own. The majority felt that their college experience was positive although not without some negative components, and only one participant identified the total college experience as negative. Nine of the women attended college as traditional students and two as non-traditional students. Nine of the women felt that they were academically prepared to perform college level work, one person felt partially prepared, and two felt that they were completely unprepared. Ten participants received financial assistance to pay for college. Although all of the participants were eligible to receive financial aid the family of one participant was

unaware of this opportunity and consequently borrowed the required funds. The majority of the women felt included in the college environment, four stated that they felt excluded. Three participants stated that they never felt marginalized while the remainder expressed episodes of such.

Barriers to Education

I was interested in identifying any of the barriers to education experienced by the participants. I define a barrier as anything that obstructs progress toward, or access to, the overall process of acquiring knowledge and of developing the powers of reasoning and judgment.

One participant identified the educational barriers as self-made. Alicia acknowledged, “The barriers were the ones I created for myself because I was so shattered and wounded that I didn’t want anyone to even talk to me.” Six participants identified several educational barriers that I grouped together as social-cultural barriers. These barriers were imposed by their peers, their teachers, and in some cases by their own families.

Celia illustrates the social-cultural barriers as she describes a high school environment where a small group of Latino students shunned her because she was taking chemistry and algebra classes. “They made me feel like an outside,” she stated. Her parents forced her to take these courses and in retrospect she recognizes that it was a good decision but the rejection from her peers at the time was difficult to deal with.

Lydia faced a similar situation when she was accused of acting like she was better than the other Latino students because she took honors courses in high school. Caridad

indicated that her grades dropped in high school because she felt like an outsider since she was the only Mexican in the Montana high school she was attending.

Lydia also illustrates the social-cultural barriers when she described a situation in high school where a teacher discouraged her from attending a private college although she had already been accepted for admission.

These social-cultural barriers are further illustrated through Reyna's high school experiences. Several times while in high school Reyna wanted to take honors courses and was told by her teachers that she could not. In spite of earning a gold cord at graduation she was never encouraged to attend, or offered information about, college.

Liana also described occasions in her high school when she and other Latino students were tracked into sociology based courses instead of being pushed or even encouraged to move into the science or math courses.

An example of a social-cultural barrier imposed by the immediate family is illustrated when Isabel's parents discouraged her from going away to college. Upon calling home one day after a bout of loneliness, her mother stated, "You don't belong there. We'll come and get you." Isabel however, decided to remain in college against her parents' wishes.

Four participants stated that they did not experience educational barriers either in high school or in college. Mari indicated that she never experienced marginalization or barriers of any kind. Juanita explained that she was involved with many organizations, some were specific to Latinos, and others were within the mainstream culture of the educational system. "I was active in many groups, I always had high grades, and never experienced any roadblocks," she stated. Inez expressed her experience in the

statements, “I was very popular and was rushed by several sororities. I was a good student and can truthfully say that I never encountered obstacles.” Elissa confirmed that school was always very easy and enjoyable for her. Her mother instilled within her the belief that she could accomplish anything. Her mother’s belief in her made any and all barriers disappear.

To summarize the concept of educational barriers, one participant indicated that her barriers were self-imposed, six women offered examples of social-cultural barriers imposed by peers, teachers and their immediate family. Four of the participants stated that they did not experience educational barriers during their educational careers.

Mentors in Education

In my continued search for any factors that might influence the success of Latinas, I wanted to know if any of them had mentors at any time during their passage through the educational systems. I define a mentor as a wise and trusted advisor, counselor, or teacher.

Five of the participants indicated that they did not have mentors. Alicia, Liana, and Mari each stated that they could not think of anyone who ever offered advice or direction. Reyna, like the other four women, stated that she never had an advisor either in high school or college. She declared, “I think I never really had a mentor until I started working.” Caridad likewise indicated that she made her own way through the system and never had a mentor until she became employed in higher education.

Six of the participants confirmed that they did have mentors, some as early as elementary school. Juanita tells of a wonderful teacher she had from fifth through eighth grade. She explained, “This teacher really mentored me. I didn’t know what the word

[mentor] meant but she would give me books and really encouraged me.” Juanita also received mentoring in high school and throughout college.

Elissa talked about an incredible woman, her high school principle, who offered continuous encouragement. “She told me that I needed to take chemistry so I would do well in college. My high school didn’t offer chemistry so she arranged for another teacher to teach me chemistry outside of the normal school day,” she stated.

The other four women, Lydia, Celia, Isabel, and Inez, along with Juanita and Elissa, were able to identify mentors during their college years. Most of the mentors were professors who also served as personal advisors. Lydia spoke of two Latino professors with high regard: “They participated in our functions, they mentored us, and they guided us through the system.” These professors guided a group of Latino students at the private college where Lydia was a student.

Celia spoke with great admiration when she described the encouragement from one professor who became her mentor and friend as she pursued her master’s degree and eventually her doctorate. “He stood by me and encouraged me every step of the way,” she concluded. Isabel and Inez also identified Latino professors who advised and encouraged them.

The mentors identified by the women during their college years were all minority males. With further inquiry I was told that the college environment provided no females who they could identify with therefore they connected with the males.

To summarize within the realm of educational mentors five of the participants stated that they had no mentors and six indicated that they did. Those participants who

acknowledged mentors identified women mentors when they were children but male minority mentors when they entered college.

Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity in the construct of this study is the personal identification of the women with their own ethnic group as a subgroup of the larger society. Ethnic identity is a theme that presented issues in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Ethnic identity also revealed a support theme that I have labeled “defining community.” As stated previously, unique to these study participants was a support theme I refer to as *El Valle* (the Valley) culture. Recall that there are several participants who grew up in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico that identified a culture unique to this geographic region.

Several codes emerged that I used to study the concept of ethnic identity. I looked at the participants’ levels of self-esteem, ethnic self-discovery, ethnic pride, cultural conflict, culture shock, language issues, community, and the complex issues of acculturation, marginalization, assimilation, separation, and integration: much of the latter will be reserved for discussion within the subsequent chapter.

Childhood

Not every participant expressed an awareness of her ethnicity during childhood but those who did relayed it through an event, family influence, or an overall sense of belongingness. Lydia tells a story that when she was a child her next-door neighbors were White and one day her younger brother was involved in an altercation with the boy next door. Lydia was outdoors and the neighbor children called her a dirty Mexican.

Lydia entered her house in tears and related the event to her mother. Her mother said to Lydia, “You go back outside and tell those kids that you are proud to be a Mexican but you are not dirty.” Lydia stated that this event marked her first awareness with being Chicana and the awareness was further marked with a sense of pride. As Lydia matured, her mother reinforced on many occasions that she should be proud of her ethnicity.

Alicia, Juanita, and Elissa grew up in very small communities with a predominately Latino population. Alicia made a statement that collectively embraces the sentiment of these three women: “I was never minority, I was always majority. The sense of identity of being Hispanic was always very solid and brought with it a strong sense of pride.” Juanita and Elissa attributed a high level of self-esteem to the continuous positive reinforcement from their mothers’. In addition both spoke only Spanish in the home prior to starting elementary school and the pride of their language coupled with strong family values gave them an acute awareness of their ethnicity and the pride of being Latinas. Likewise Caridad, as a child spoke Spanish to her mother and was instructed in the ways of the Mexican culture at a young age.

Inez’s parents took an almost contradictory approach to ethnic identity in reference to language. Recall, if you will that her family moved from a rural setting to an urban setting and made a conscious effort to integrate their children into the Anglo culture. Her parents did not speak Spanish to their children nor did they allow the children to speak Spanish. The parents did not want the children entering school with a Spanish accent. Inez stated that her parents believed the children would do better in school if they did not speak with a Spanish accent. There were times when Inez was the recipient of prejudicial aspersions but her parents were very quick to point out how

beautiful and smart she was and that she was actually better than anyone else. Inez stated, “We all grew up being really proud of our ethnicity. It was like a badge of honor.”

Reyna also confirmed a high level of self-esteem as a child which she attributes to the close and large family unit that she defined as being a village unto itself. Reyna’s extended family inhabited several city blocks where they lived in proximity to one another. Reyna stated that the many family traditions and the rituals surrounding the Catholic Church contributed to a strong ethnic identity.

Adolescence

Adolescence is that transitional period between puberty and adulthood and for most teenagers it is a time of positive and negative experiences. When it comes to ethnic identity it is perhaps a time when many young people try to answer the question, “Who am I?”

For Caridad this was a period of great turmoil. Her family had moved from Panama to Montana and the following statement captivates her sense of despair. “All of a sudden it was really apparent that I was brown, I was Latina. I felt separated and I was very self-conscious of the fact that I was Mexican,” she said.

Alicia, Juanita, and Elissa grew up in communities that were predominately Latino so they each passed through their adolescent years with a strong sense of self and pride in their culture. Each of these women stated that when they were teenagers, the Latino traditions were a normal part of everyday life. They each came from families that spoke Spanish and likewise they are fluent in the Spanish language as well.

Inez, Lydia, Celia, Liana, Reyna, and Isabel each lived in a mixed community, Anglo and Latino. They confirmed that through their teenage years they grew up being

very proud of their ethnicity. Mari, also growing up in a mixed community, was the only participant who made no reference to her ethnicity during this period of her life.

Adulthood

The starting point for discussion of ethnic identity in adulthood came from information the participant provided on the demographic form under the category of ethnic identity. I asked them to describe their culture based on their response. The women self-identified their ethnicity as Hispanic, Chicana, Mexican-American, Latina-Hispanic, Latina, and Chicana-Latina. In the global context of ethnic identity, particularly in adulthood, are such issues as acculturation, marginalization, assimilation, separation, and integration. These issues are discussed in the subsequent chapter. I also identified issues surrounding cultural conflict and culture shock during the women's adult years.

Lydia identified herself ethnically as *Chicana* but she had a very difficult time defining this term and its significance to her personal culture. She took the conversation in multiple directions and finally stated, "I don't know why I'm struggling with this." She never did respond to my question of "What does being Chicana mean to you and how do you define it in terms of your culture?"

Liana also identified her ethnicity as *Chicana*. She, like Lydia, had a difficult time trying to describe her culture. She ultimately defined it as close family ties and in relation to certain foods common to her cultural roots. Neither Lydia nor Liana speak Spanish.

Inez and Mari both identified their ethnicity as Mexican-American. Inez responded to my questions by stating, "It's an ancestry that has a connection in some

ways to the language, the culture, and the ethnicity, but I am probably more Anglicized.” Inez’s parents did not want her to speak Spanish as a child because they felt she would be at a disadvantage if she started school with a Spanish accent. To date she speaks very little Spanish. Inez did go on to say that family traditions in the way they celebrate events like birthdays, weddings, and anniversaries, and the inclusion of ethnic foods and music all define the Mexican in Mexican-American. Mari simply stated that being Mexican-American just meant being an American. She did not elaborate. Mari’s parents do not speak Spanish and she, like Inez, speaks minimal Spanish.

Chicana-Latina was the nomenclature that Caridad used to self-identify her ethnicity. I had no doubt that she knew exactly its significance as she stated:

I call myself Latina because I think it represents a lot of my experiences. Latina engulfs all of those who are the Spanish speakers, and because I grew up in Panama I have a sense of that culture. Latina is more of a global term. It represents my time in Spain and especially my family background. *La Chicana* represents my growth in terms of understanding the *Indio* in me through my mother. It also represents a very political meaning and the fight for social justice.

Caridad continued describing her culture as previously presented in her individual story, and I provide only the above excerpt to illustrate the point of ethnic identity in adulthood. She also referenced many family traditions that are tied directly to the Latino culture, the Catholic faith, and her mother’s Mexican background.

Celia identified her ethnicity as Latina-Hispanic. She stated that *Latina* is a connection with her brownness and an association with the Southwest. “I love the music, the dance, the family, and my role as wife and mother,” she concluded.

Isabel explained that she did not identify with her culture and her ethnicity until she was in college. She took many courses in sociology and particularly in Chicano Studies. Through the exposure to Chicano Studies she began to define who she was. It

was also during her college years that she learned the Spanish language. Isabel self-identifies her ethnicity as *Latina* and defined the nomenclature as a strong connection to family, a conviction for social justice, and a heightened sense of spirituality.

Elissa, Juanita, Alicia, and Reyna each self-identified their ethnicity as Hispanic. For Elissa the word Hispanic is simply just a word. She stated that her ethnicity was more complex than could Hispanic be defined in a single word but it embraces a sense of richness with respect to family, traditions, roots, and integrity. She embraces Latino art and music and speaks fluent Spanish. Juanita, Alicia and Reyna each echoed the sentiments expressed by Elissa that included an association with the Spanish language, loyalty to family, traditions, and a pride in the values learned as children.

Lydia was the only participant who experienced cultural conflict. To clarify, I define cultural conflict when there is conflict within one's own culture because of different generations or understanding of cultural norms. Lydia was married to a man whose parents had emigrated from Mexico and everyone in his family spoke predominately Spanish. Lydia's family had been in the United States for many generations and you may recall that she was one of the participants who had a difficult time describing her culture. In addition, Lydia does not speak Spanish. Her husband's family held to very strong Mexican traditions where the women do everything around the house and function in the role as servants to the men in the household. Her cultural norms and those of her husband were constantly in conflict. He referred to her as coming from an abnormal Hispanic family. This marriage lasted a couple of years.

Culture shock is the state of bewilderment or distress experienced by an individual who is exposed to a new or strange culture. I would say that several of the participants experienced culture shock at different crossroads in their lives.

Liana talks about the first day she entered the cafeteria at her college and there were more students in the cafeteria than there were people in her hometown. Lydia describes an experience in her college dorm where all the girls shared a common shower and being raised Catholic made it impossible for her to undress in front of other girls. She would rise at 3:00 a.m. before anyone else was up, and shower to avoid the discomfort and embarrassment of being naked in front of others.

Reyna described her first exposure to the Chicano Movement as a complete “culture shock”. She had been raised in a very sheltered and protected environment and knew nothing of the plight of Chicanos at large.

Isabel recalls the day her parents took her to orientation at her college. Her father carried her luggage into her dorm room and in the hallway stood a young girl ironing her clothes wearing only her underwear. Isabel said she would never forget the look of shock on her father's face as he observed the culture in which his daughter would soon become a part of.

Defining Community

In reviewing research data from the participants I discovered a common theme of *community*. According to Webster's Random House Dictionary (1995), community is described as a group of people who reside in a specific locality. It is further described as a group of people who have common cultural and historical heritage. And finally,

community is described as a social, religious, occupational or other group sharing common characteristics or interests (p.275).

Irene Blea (1995) has been studying Chicano communities for over twenty years. She discusses Chicano communities in terms of physical, social-historical, emotional/psychological, and spiritual space. I saw the parallel between my study and the elements of community spaces as described by Blea. Therefore, I will use her categories for community as I present the findings on community and will use her information more extensively in the following chapter. I believe it is important to note that, according to Blea, individuals using the labels they select for self-identity serve to define community.

Physical Space

The women in my study experienced the physical space of community in a variety of settings. Elissa and Juanita both grew up in rural settings in communities that were predominately Latino. As they moved through the educational system they encountered teachers and other community leaders who were Latino. They never identified experiences of discrimination or prejudice.

Alicia's community was a small town with an almost exclusive Latino population. "Everyone, including authority figures was just like me," she stated. Because of everyone's sameness she never experienced any form of discrimination or prejudice.

Liana also grew up in a small town where the population was equally split between Latino and Anglo families. She describes it as "a very healthy place to grow up." Likewise Celia's community was a small town with a Latino population of over 50% and she expressed an environment of everyone getting along.

Five of the participants, Inez, Mari, Lydia, Reyna, and Isabel, grew up in urban communities. Although they integrated with the Anglo population both as children in school and as young adults, their physical space was separated from the rest of the population by some type of boundary. Lydia and Reyna said they lived on the east side of town where most of the Latinos lived. Further inquiry indicated that an interstate highway separated the east side from the rest of the city. Isabel also lived on the side of town where the Latinos lived, also separated by a major highway. The data revealed that they were not only divided by physical boundaries but also socioeconomic boundaries; all of the participant's families were working class and those on the other side of town were middle class. Caridad was the only participant whose physical space was not separated by ethnic or structural boundaries. Her community space was defined and divided by her father's military rank.

Social-Historical Space

The most recent social change for Latinos occurred in the 1960s with the Chicano civil rights movement (Blea, 1995). Most of the women in my study were young adults during the 1960s and I was interested in knowing how, or if, their ethnic identity was influenced by the historical events of this era. I also wanted to know the extent of their community involvement as Latinos organized to bring about social change.

Several of the women were introduced to the Chicano movement when they entered college. Inez, who is the oldest of my study participants, was the only participant knowledgeable about the issues surrounding the Chicano community gatherings of this era. Her parents were actively involved in promoting social change and she entered

college with full knowledge of the movement's issues. She became a social activist and is to this day a voice for Latinos in her community.

Mari and Lydia are the youngest of the study participants and I found their experiences to be significantly different from each other as well as different from the other women. Mari and Lydia both grew up in families with a high degree of community involvement. Mari's involvement was in mainstream community participation like Girls Scouts of America and her parents were involved in the local PTA. Recall that Mari identified herself as Mexican-American and indicated that she never viewed her ethnicity as anything except American.

Lydia on the other hand grew up in an environment where her mother and stepfather were actively involved in the Chicano movement and participated in numerous political rallies. At age 14 Lydia was walking precincts and distributing political paraphernalia promoting awareness for various social causes. Although Lydia was involved in the Chicano movement and social causes at an early age, and she self-identified as *Chicana* she had a very difficult time trying to describe what being Chicana meant to her.

Alicia and Celia were both married and raising children during the time of the Chicano civil rights movement. Neither was actively involved, nor did they mention any awareness of the movement during that era. Currently they are both actively involved in the Latino community as well as the community at large.

Of the remaining six women, their experiences in the Chicano civil rights movement were very similar. They all express an era characterized by self-doubt, confusion, and ethnic self-discovery.

Liana recalls arriving at the university and observing groups of Chicano students conducting rallies and demonstrating. "I had a lot of self-doubt in the regard that I wasn't a bona fide Chicana. I had a broad base of friends and never really identified with any one group," she stated. It was not until she left the university after a couple of years to return to her home town college that she got involved in the movement and felt like she understood the need for social change and embraced a sense of identity with other Chicanos.

Isabel arrived on her university campus and felt like an outsider with regard to the Chicano movement. Her enrollment in psychology, sociology, and Chicano studies courses helped her to understand the depth and breath of the Chicano civil rights movement. It was not until her graduate school years when she became involved and developed a sense of who she was ethnically. Since this time she has learned to speak Spanish fluently and actively supports the Spanish speaking community through a multitude of legal assistance programs.

Elissa likewise stated that she felt like an outsider to the movement. She did not understand what was going on and felt like Chicanos were drawing attention to themselves in a negative light. It was not until she entered her junior year of college that she began to see the parallels between the Civil Rights Movement and the Chicano Movement at which point she became actively involved in social justice issues. Elissa also mentioned her protest to the Vietnam War at this same juncture.

Reyna attended a college in her hometown: A town with a large Chicano population. Her first exposure to the Chicano movement was on her college campus.

She stated that this was a time when she witnesses a lot of unrest in the community but did not become involved.

Caridad recalls going through college and never becoming involved in the Chicano movement. You may recall that Caridad attended a private college where she was often the only Latina. Living on the east coast she would read about the Chicano movement in the southwest and often thought that the Chicanos were a bunch of thugs and troublemakers. It was not until she moved to Colorado in search of employment that she understood the issues surrounding the movement. Caridad became involved through her employment in a Chicano studies department of a college, and it was during this time that she fully understood and embraced her identity as a Chicana/Latina.

Emotional/Psychological Space

Blea (1995) states that the community is not only a physical and a social-historical space but it is also a psychological space where people have been conditioned, where they learn to love and discover the meaning of family and neighbors (p. 6). As I reviewed the data of my participants it is clear that these women each identified the emotional/psychological space of community. They each have a strong connection to the family but perhaps Reyna's depiction summarized for all this bond of community when she stated:

The cousins were raised as brothers and sisters. I remember just walking into houses and getting fed, and getting disciplined if I needed it. It was wonderful. We shared food and as one child grew out of clothing it was passed on to the next. We played together, we prayed together, we went to church together, and we did everything as a family. We really were one family although we had many homes in a two or three block radius. You're familiar with the phrase, 'it takes a village,' well in our case this was absolutely true. We were a village that took on the responsibility of raising all the children in the unit.

Spiritual Space

Blea (1995) concludes that the spiritual elements of the Chicano community are not limited to that found in traditional European Western thinking. It is present in an indigenous form and can be witnessed in storytelling, theater, dance, cooking techniques, nonelectoral politics, religion, and health (p. 11). I was able to identify each of these elements in the life histories of my study participants.

They each told stories of their families and painted visual pictures of their community. Mari captured my attention with the many tales of her parent's life lessons to the children. There was the story of when her father illustrating the meaning of discrimination, and the division of his weekly paycheck to teach the children about money management. Isabel told many stories of her parents taking in foster children and of the family gatherings on Sunday afternoon. Alicia likewise, described the family gathering at her grandmother's home for warm tortillas and homemade jelly on lazy Sunday afternoons. The storytelling is rich and vividly clear.

The element of theater and dance that Blea (1995) describes is revealed in Caridad's involvement in *teatro*: A theatrical performance that honors the Mexican culture through song, drama, and dance. Reyna also expresses this element of spirituality through her strong connection to her religion and her role as vocalist in her local church.

Nine of the women spoke of the many gatherings, especially around the holidays, to cook the food specific to their culture. Elissa and Inez talked about making *empanadas*: a sweet meat turnover for the New Year celebrations. Caridad, Elissa, Juanita, Alicia, and Reyna talked about the family gatherings to make *tamales*. Celia and Liana talked about making *biscochitos*: a Mexican cookie.

Knowing that the Latino culture in general expresses a strong sense of spirituality, I wanted to discern how the women viewed their own spirituality so I asked each of them the basic question, “How would you describe your spirituality?” The answers I received varied, but in every instance it was clear that each of these women had a very strong and obvious sense of connection to the earth, the heavens, and one another as members of the Latina community that pervades the soul.

Alicia, Reyna, and Isabel were the three women in my study who suffered extreme domestic violence at the hands of their husbands. Each of them in a distinct way drew from their spirituality to find healing as illustrated by their statements:

My spirituality has brought me healing of the emotional scares that have been so traumatic in my life. It has brought me stability and a solid foundation. I stand firm, I know who I am, I know what I believe, and I know where I belong.

Alicia

I believe in my religion and in my faith in God. It has always been an important part of my life. My mother’s family, my dad’s family, all of their brothers and sisters and their families are also committed to their faith.

Reyna

My spirituality is rooted in tradition and it’s rooted in a place. That’s hard to explain. I believe in God but I’m not religious. I don’t go to church. There are places that are very special to me like the *Santuario* and parts of *El Valle* where I feel a real connection to the earth. When I’m there I have peace.

Isabel

Several of the women, like Isabel, do not attend church regularly but indicated that their spirituality is not connected to church attendance. Liana stated, “In everything I do, God is a part of that plan. I don’t go to church or practice religion, but I don’t need that to know that God is leading my life.” Juanita also stated that the spiritual dimension of her life was an essential part of her identity but was not affiliated with an organized

church. She stated, “Spirituality is an important part of leadership in terms of integrity and the meaning of work being a reflection of the person.” Elissa referred to the religious artifacts in her home as a reflection of her connection to the earth but not to religion. “I do not attend church,” she stated, “but I am spiritual in that I am part of the earth and God is a part of me.”

Lydia and Caridad were the two participants who referenced their spirituality in connection to the Catholic Church. “The Latino culture and Catholicism are so intertwined that they cannot be separated from one another,” Lydia said. Caridad spoke extensively about holy days and traditions associated with the Catholic Church and she made reference to these traditions as being a strong sense of her ethnic identity. In summary, the spirituality described by the women in my study was reflected in the respect and value of earth, community, family, self, and God.

El Valle Culture

Five of the eleven participants came from the same part of the country: a region in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico that they claim contributed to their unique culture. These women affirm to be descendants of the first Spanish settlers of the United States southwest. Included in this group of women are those whose ancestors settled northern New Mexico before it became part of Colorado’s San Luis Valley and those whose ancestors remained in the northern New Mexico region. It was not my intent to seek out women from this region, it just happened, therefore I believe that the emergence of these findings necessitate a section of its own.

Liana made a statement about her family history, “We are very proud that we have lived here in the Valley for seven generation.” Alicia, another participant with roots

in *El Valle*, indicated that she was of Spanish decent, not Mexican. Both participants indicated that their traditions and the food common to this geographic area were unique in that it was neither Mexican nor Spanish food it was simply *El Valle* food. Liana stated that she has traveled to many Spanish-speaking countries and concludes that the people from *El Valle* are different and unique and she is proud of that distinction. “Our history is so deeply rooted in this land: it’s like a piece of the Mexican culture, but not really,” she tried to explain further:

I have often said that we are an endangered species. When you think about all the different mixes of Latin Americans or Hispanics there are many more of them than there are of us. We are the unique natives who have been here for six, seven, or even eight generations who now through marriage or death are being thinned out. We are unique to any other population.

Alicia referred to the culture of this region as *El Manito* culture - roughly translated to mean a brotherhood (or sisterhood) that is rooted not only in the unique food and traditions of the region but also in the language. She explained:

Our language is different. We speak Spanish but it is a different dialect. We use words that are unique to that area and most people speak with a distinct accent that can be detected by those outside this region who are familiar with *El Valle* culture.

Isabel was another participant who identified roots in *El Valle*. She referred to this region as a secret place as she offered this description:

It has its own history, its own saints, and that is real important for me to let my children know that this is a special place with a special culture. There is something historically special about the valley, and it really was separate and it really was special. There was this intermingling of cultures and for whatever reason that happened, everybody else went the other way and here remained the *Santos* (saints), the carvings that are very particular to the valley. It remains a very special place for me: a place where I go to rejuvenate my faith and make a connection to the earth.

Elissa expressed that she has been frustrated over the years whenever she has tried to explain her cultural roots. “People just don’t get it when I tell them that my family has been in New Mexico since the early 1600s: long before it was the state of New Mexico,” she stated. Elissa went on to explain that she does not like having to educate people about all the different Hispanics in this country and has felt resentment because so many people don’t know the history of how this country evolved. “I have felt very isolated and alone at times and the only way I connect to my culture is when I go back to New Mexico,” she said.

Inez and Juanita are the two other participants with historical roots in *El Valle* region. Inez indicated that her family is fourth generation Coloradoans but her ancestors came over from Mexico and settled in northern New Mexico. Juanita also indicated that her family settled in northern New Mexico. Other than coming from the same region neither Inez nor Juanita elaborated on the culture of the region but instead spoke of their culture in more general terms as previously mentioned.

To recap this section on ethnic identity, the women had minimal exposure to racial/ethnic issues as children. This awareness increased as they matured but was not fully realized until they were in college and well into adulthood. Some of the women struggled to define their ethnicity while others were fully aware of their convictions and identity.

Community as a component of ethnic identity revealed four aspects in which defining community was illustrated: physical, social-historical, emotional psychological, and spiritual. In addition a unique culture connected to both ethnic identity and community emerged that I refer to as *El Valle* culture.

Resiliency

The term *resiliency* is derived from Latin roots meaning to, jump (or bounce) back after disappointment or setbacks; to be adaptable and flexible and to renew your sense of vitality (Webster's College Dictionary, 1995). Rhodes and Brown (1991) use the term resiliency to describe an individual as one who has experienced some type of dysfunctionality and have bounced back after recovery. They also use the term invulnerability to describe those who have never allowed dysfunctional environments to affect their functioning. Resiliency can be described at an individual, family, and community level, each interdependent and complementary of the other levels. For the purpose of this section, resiliency will be described as it relates to an individual.

I could write about many aspects of resiliency but I will focus this section on three emergent themes that I have classified as significant life events: both in childhood and adulthood, personality traits, and personal work ethic. I will discuss each of these themes in more detail in the subsequent chapter where I will offer supporting literature to justify my placement of these categories within the realm of resiliency.

Significant Life Events

Many of the study participants experienced traumatic events in their lifetimes. For some of these women the events occurred when they were children. For others it happened in their adult years, and there were some who experienced these events both as children and again as adults. I describe a significant life event as any life-changing event. It may be a significant emotional or physical event that remains implanted in the mind and alters behavior, goals, dreams, ambitions, attitudes, or priorities. A significant life event could be something like the death of a loved one, a divorce, violence, an accident:

or it could be something as simple as watching a movie, reading a book, or listening to a song: any event that is life changing.

Childhood

I would first like to discuss the significant life events that happened to the participants during childhood. Isabel and Celia experienced the death of a sibling. Isabel recalls that she was about five years old but she remembers the sadness that gripped the family and many days of crying. She told me that one day as she was returning home after working, already an adult; she was overcome with sadness at the loss of her sibling so many years past. Celia doesn't recall any sadness associated with the loss of her sibling but she does recall that her mother became very depressed and Celia was often at the receiving end of her mother's grief. That grief was often exhibited in the form of verbal abuse toward Celia.

When Lydia was 12 years old her parents divorced. Prior to the divorce she witnessed the domestic violence experienced by her mother at the hands of her father. Lydia became the protector for her younger brother and would cover his ears at night with a pillow so he would not hear his parents fighting. When the arguing would turn violent Lydia would walk into the room and become her mother's protector. Her parents eventually divorced at which time Lydia experienced alienation from her peers and her teachers because divorce in a Catholic school environment was unacceptable. The divorce of her parents, the preceding violence, and the alienation of her peers changed Lydia's ambitions and attitudes.

Lydia expressed that at age 12 she changed from an average student to a high achiever. It was at this juncture in her life that she became determined to succeed. It was

at age 12 that she decided she was going to become a lawyer and from this point forward she accepted every challenge with a determination to succeed.

As a young teenager Alicia assumed the role of caretaker for her mother. Her mother had gone into a serious state of depression and was drinking alcohol every day. She would become intoxicated and Alicia feared that her mother would burn the house down because she would leave the stove on or leave burning cigarettes throughout the house. Alicia clearly stated that this episode in her life solidified her role as a caretaker in multiple relationships.

Caridad also as a young teenager experienced alienation from her peers because she was continuously uprooted and required to live in cities around the country where she did not fit in. It was a culmination of these events that caused her to withdraw and subsequently become an underachiever for a period of time.

Adulthood

Many of the women revealed significant life events as adults that demonstrated their resiliency. Liana was a young woman in college when she lost her mother to breast cancer. Liana had younger siblings still at home when her mother died and she then became the caretaker and protector. This event brought the family closer together and they remain a tight knit family to this day.

Alicia became pregnant when she was sixteen, married at seventeen and by the time she was twenty-one she had three children. She suffered physical abuse at the hands of her alcoholic husband for seventeen years before she divorced him. When she finally left her husband she was physically ill, her self-esteem was at its lowest, she had no money and had to go on welfare. The culmination of these experiences gave Alicia the

drive to succeed. She was determined to provide a better life for her three young children: a life outside of the welfare system.

Reyna and Isabel also suffered physical violence from alcoholic husbands. Reyna's husband threatened to kill her with a butcher knife and cut her body into pieces so she would never be found. She too, divorced him after several years of marriage but not before suffering many years of physical and emotional abuse. Her experience has driven her not only to succeed in her career, but also to be an exemplary mother and a compassionate person. Isabel's husband likewise, burned her house down anticipating that she and their daughter would be inside. Her experiences with domestic violence have driven her to become an advocate for battered women and a compassionate attorney when defending the less fortunate.

Inez, Celia, Isabel, and Alicia have all gone through physical illnesses that have given them new direction in life. Inez was diagnosed with breast cancer and after losing a breast to the disease she retired from her job in order to enjoy life and dance. Celia was 26 when she had a hysterectomy and in her early thirties when she had a bilateral mastectomy. It was at this junction in her life that she was determined to complete her college degree and get on with life. Isabel became very ill while on vacation. She eventually became disabled and had to leave her job. The illness pushed her into starting her own law practice where she works at her own pace. This decision has provided her with the opportunity to assist those less fortunate: a value she holds in high regard. Alicia was diagnosed a few years ago with rheumatoid arthritis. The disease was stifling her ability to function on a daily basis. She continued to work and her faith in God has

restored her ability to function. She is now moving in a new direction of developing her own ministry.

Many of the women have experienced significant life events but each one of them has bounced back. They have used these events to discover inner strength and find new direction for their life journeys. They have turned disadvantage to their advantage.

Personality Traits

As the women described the details of their lives I was able to identify certain psychological characteristics in which I could categorize in terms of personality traits. I identified numerous personality traits but I was only interested in identifying those traits that were common among all of the participants in adulthood. The personality traits that were identified in each participant were accepting challenges, ambitious, assertive, courageous, divergent thinker, empathetic, autonomous, resolute, and resourceful. Rather than describing each trait and then illustrating how that trait was evident in each of the eleven women, I will simply offer my description of the trait identified and offer one or two examples from the data to support my interpretation.

Every participant accepted the challenges that were presented to her, either by personal choice or as a result of a series of events or circumstances. Four of the women, Alicia, Mari, Juanita, and Liana, had very similar experiences that illustrated this psychological characteristic of accepting challenges. Each of these women accepted positions in careers they knew nothing about.

Alicia was hired as a librarian when she knew nothing about managing a library nor did she have a degree in library science. Mari accepted a position with the state fair where she had to learn about the gestation period of horses. Juanita was hired as an

athletic director: not only was she unfamiliar with the role of this position, but she was not an athlete. Liana accepted a position to do psychological testing of children without any knowledge in this field.

Without a doubt it is evident that all of these women are ambitious. They are all self-motivated, showing much effort and desire in all their undertakings. Their ambition is evident in their pursuit for challenging projects, simultaneously working multiple jobs like Mari, or following their chosen career path like Elissa. I have selected a quote from Lydia that epitomizes the drive in each of these participants. She stated, "I want to be the first Latina elected to the United States Congress and that is what I intend to do."

Assertiveness was the next personality trait that I identified in all the participants. They all expressed an aura of confidence, a positive attitude and a sense of being aggressively self-assured. The participant who immediately comes to mind to illustrate this point is Isabel. You may recall from her life history that Isabel was a shy and withdrawn girl. She never felt like she fit in with her peers and attending law school was not something she had planned, but rather the result of what seemed like unfortunate circumstances. Isabel recounted a story of being in the courtroom and becoming another person. In this environment she was aggressive, self-assured, and confident in her knowledge and abilities. Each of the women expressed this same sense of confidence as illustrated by Isabel.

Courage is that quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, and pain without fear but rather with bravery. Each of the women is courageous as they face the difficulties of life. To demonstrate this point I will use the examples of

Reyna as she endured the beatings of an abusive husband, and Inez as she battled breast cancer.

As I examined the ability of these women to be creative and innovative I found that all of them are divergent thinkers. They all think outside the box and although some may hold to the status quo they each take pride in expressing their creative side whether at work or in their personal lives. Caridad, for example, expresses herself through song and theater. Elissa designed an elementary school incorporating a new model that had never been tried in the state of Colorado.

Empathy was a personality trait that was identifiable in each of the women. I denote empathy to be the identification with or vicarious experiencing of the feeling and/or thoughts of another. Isabel devotes her law practice to helping the indigent and those who become victims of the legal system because they do not understand the English language. Alicia has established a Christian based counseling ministry to serve the broken hearted.

All of the women prefer an autonomous work environment. Autonomy is independence or freedom, as of the will or one's actions. It is the state of self-government or the right of self-government. Alicia's sentiments echo the attitude of all the participants when she stated, "I really thrive in an environment where I have the freedom to do whatever I want." Juanita stated, "I love the privilege and the responsibility of making my own decisions and moving the institution in the direction I think it should go." Celia stated that she enjoys working on projects that allow her to be creative. "I want to be accountable for the details," she indicated. Caridad stated, "I love having control over information and processes."

As I looked at the hundreds of pages of data I could see that these women were steadfast, unwavering, firm, and strong-willed. I searched for a word that could identify this personality trait and I settled on resolute. They have a determination of their own fate or course of action without compulsion. I selected a section of the interview with Liana and another section of the interview with Juanita because I felt they illustrated what the other women also felt at some point in their careers. Liana said:

I've learned to be really tough. People have called me intimidating more often than not but I don't care about that. I know that people are watching to see what I do. I feel like I have to take a stand on things and I'm not going to be wishy-washy. They know where I stand on about anything.

Juanita explained:

I have very high standards for my own professional performance that is also what I expect from people who work with me. I have high performance standards and professional integrity. I encourage everyone to do a really wonderful job and let the work speak for itself.

I must also point out Lydia who attended a prestigious private college and went on to get her law degree. She was determined to show them that she could do it because they said she couldn't. She is referring to her high school teacher who discouraged her from attending the college of her choice. All of these women illustrated a strong innate determination to accomplish what they set out to do.

I saw in these women the ability to deal skillfully and promptly with new situations and difficulties. I identified this personality trait as resourceful. I use the example of Elissa when she took a principal position following the untimely death of a man who was highly respected and loved. "The toughest thing was not the job itself but the community's acceptance of me," she stated. I can also use the example of Celia who

returned to college at age 32 after traumatic health problems. “I was just trying to survive,” she said. “All I wanted to do was just get a degree.”

Personal Work Ethic

To conclude this section on resiliency I present the findings that speak to the personal work ethic of these women. Their work ethic assists to describe their values, attitudes and behavior. The women all came from working class families and were taught the value and importance of work at an early age. They all had jobs in high school and throughout college. In addition, several of the women held multiple jobs simultaneously: sometimes in an effort to supply the needs of their families and at other times simply to accept the challenge.

To sum up, resiliency as it applies to an individual means that one will renew a sense of vitality after experiencing a setback whether physically, emotionally, or psychologically. Many of the participants experienced some type of setback but recovered and gained a new sense of energy. Some experienced traumatic events at different stages of their life cycle but all expressed common personal characteristics. A strong work ethic was also a commonality among all the women in this study.

I have heard and listened to the data and I now define it and translate it based on my reality of what it all means. I concur with Thomas (1993) when he states that results are never final but simply theories and concepts that are only partial and always subject to rethinking (p.45, p. 69).

Summary

To conclude this chapter on *Findings and Themes* I begin at the point where these women have arrived: at their careers. As I reviewed their leadership style I acknowledge that they collectively engage in a leadership style that is participatory, valuing inclusion and the building and maintaining of relationships. Only one participant identified her leadership style as dictatorial but she acknowledges the need to be inclusive in the decision making process. I can state with confidence that these women value relationships over processes, but the building of relationships creates, in the end, efficient and effective processes.

Barriers in the advancement of their careers were experienced by four of the 11 participants. These barriers included the sense of not fitting in either with the mainstream culture or the Latino culture. In addition they believed that they needed to exceed expectations in order to prove competencies. These women identified occurrences of subtle discrimination, and institutional racism.

Having mentors was an important aspect of career advancement. Nine of the participants indicated they had male mentors of various ethnicities, one stated that most of her mentors were White females, and two women stated they never had mentors.

Entrepreneurship was a theme that surfaced within the lives of five of the 11 participants. Three women currently run their own business, one operated a business in the past, and one expects to operate a business upon retirement.

All of the participants came from a traditional family unit, with both parents in the household during their formative years and well into their adult years: separated only by

the death of one parent. Only one participant experienced the divorce of her parents during her adolescent years. All of the women value strong family connections and traditions.

All participants came from working class families. The low socioeconomic status of the women was not realized when they were children. It was not until they entered high school and then college that they recognized the significant class division between themselves and others in the White majority. The class division was often a social force that marginalized these women, creating feeling of isolation and exclusion. A strong work ethic was infused in the women as young girls and all of them maintained employment while attending college.

All but one of the participants had the support and encouragement of their parents throughout the educational process. All of the women had a positive school experience in their early years. As they moved into secondary and then post-secondary schooling they experienced both positive and negative episodes. Among the most significant barriers for some in high school was marginalization. Among the barriers as they moved into college were lack of mentoring, inadequate advising, financial obstacles, discrimination, and marginalization.

Ethnic identity began to emerge as the women moved into adolescence. This was a period of discovery, as some clearly understood their cultural roots and others found the path to self-discovery as they became involved in the college environment. As the women moved into adulthood, migrated through the educational system, and became established in their careers, the sense of ethnic identity for most has become clearly

defined. Ethnic identity for all of the women brings with it a strong sense of family, community, spirituality, and pride.

Five of the 11 Latinas come from a region in the United States I refer to as *El Valle*. These five Latinas share cultural roots that are unique to the other participants as well as to the Hispanic population in general.

Many of these Latinas have experiences significant life events that collectively have defined their resiliency, personality traits, and a strong personal work ethic.

CHAPTER V: REFLECTIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

Eleven successful Latinas have relayed their life histories, telling the stories and events that have carried them on their journey to success. More than being successful and accomplished women they have arrived at a place of self-actualization. I have written their stories, I have heard and listened to the data, and now I reflect upon it and translate it based on my study participants' and my own shared experiences.

My goal in this chapter is to examine the language of the data and the language in which I speak about the data, and therefore to identify those traditions, norms, institutions, artifacts, and other characteristics of Latina culture that provides access into the netherworld of her everyday life. It is my privilege and honor to reflect upon the information they have shared and answer the question, "So what?" What do all those data tell us about the multi-layered lives of Latinas and how do we take this information and help others to realize their potential and achieve their dreams?

In the previous chapter on *Findings and Themes* I have discussed in detail the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the findings. In this chapter I offer my reflections on what I see as overarching themes that tie the research puzzle together. I have identified factors that are both extrinsic and intrinsic to the success of Latinas. Throughout this reflective and recursive process I offer supporting literature and present multiple recommendations for future research.

I reflect briefly on General Systems Theory. Kenneth Boulding wrote about this theory in 1956. He stated that general system theory attempts to discuss the general relationship of the empirical world which depends upon the experiences and observations of the human organisms without using science or theory but rather depending on experience or observation alone (p.206). I reiterate that I am both a participant and an observer of the multi-layered lives of Latinas. I see how our lives are circles (systems) within circles (systems) that interconnect and interrelate to the larger system of life.

In observing the multilayered lives of Latinas in this study and becoming a research subject myself. I have experienced, observed, and become one with my subjects. I empathically believe that knowledge of Latinas does not grow and exist in the abstract. It is a function of multiple systems interacting and intersecting within extrinsic and intrinsic factors all creating the synergism that whole entities, as fundamental components of reality, have an existence other than as the mere sum of their parts (Wheatley, 1999) that contributes to her holism, her *Latinismo*.

Overarching Themes

Extrinsic to the Latina I observe the interrelated and intersecting systems of family, economics, educational, and sociocultural. Intrinsic are the factors of personal characteristics, resiliency, ethnic identity, and spirituality. I have provided a flow chart (Figure 1) and subsequently created individual sections to assist in the course of my reflections and hopefully help you, the reader, follow my reflective rational.

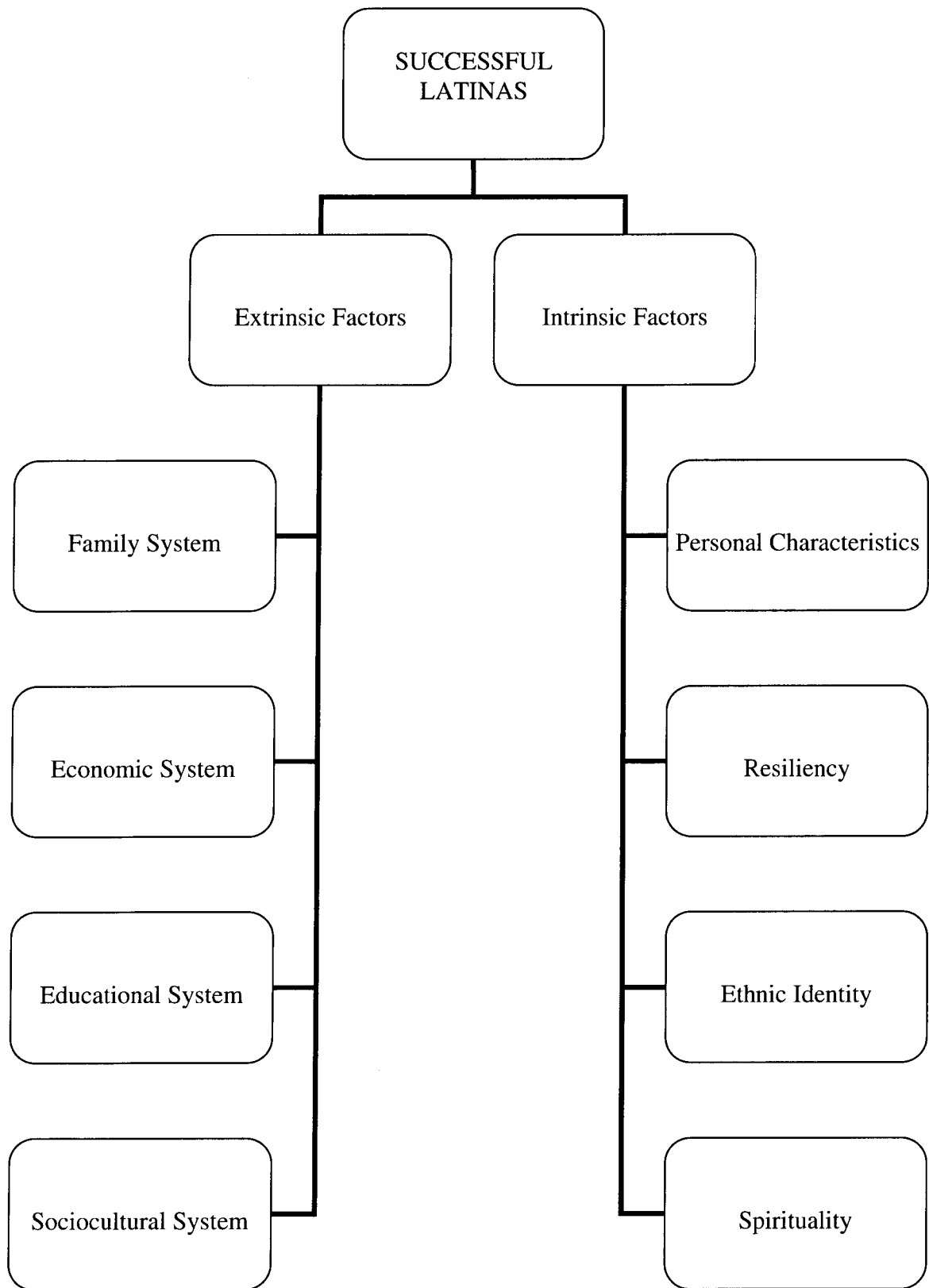


Figure 2: Flow of Reflection

Extrinsic Interrelated and Intersecting Systems

Family System

The family system is the most fundamental to Latina identity and success. Past research (Aragon, 1998; Blea 1995; Contreras, 1993; Gandara, 1982; Martinez-Martinez, 2001) has revealed that the family unit, both immediate and extended, is an extremely important factor that contributes to the success of the Latina. Gandara (1994) studied 20 Mexican-American women who came from low socioeconomic backgrounds who had successfully completed an advanced degree and found that their mothers' encouragement to persist, a strong work ethic, and equal treatment of boys and girls in the family were among the important factors that contributed to success. In her same study Gandara also studied 30 males; however, I have not presented information on this gender because that is not the population of my study. Gandara found that it was a combination of a strong work ethic and family stories of ancestors who acquired wealth that became in part the influence for those in her study to achieve advanced degrees and transition out of poverty.

Aragon (1998) focused her dissertation work in an effort to discover the contributing factors to the accomplishment of the doctorate by Chicanas. Her study was designed to explicate personal and environmental characteristics that contributed to this accomplishment. Her findings revealed five major themes, the first being the importance of family. Her participants addressed the value of parents, siblings, extended family, mentors, teachers, and professors as all valued components of the family unit.

Contreras (1993) study looked at the success factors for both genders of Hispanic graduate students. He also concluded that strong family values were a key to success.

He concluded that the tight family unit helps to build the values and moral fiber of the individual family members.

The results of these studies (Aragon, 1998; Contreras, 1993; Gandara, 1982) varied slightly due in part to the study focus, number of participants, and mixed gender, but all attribute a strong connection to the family as key to success. They also speak of the traditional family unit (father and mother in the same household) as a positive factor to success. In Lydia's case, however, her parents divorced when she was 12 years old. She dealt with this traumatic event by pushing herself to becoming a high achiever and a perfectionist so the lack of a traditional family unit actually attributed to her high academic drive to succeed.

In Gandara's (1994) study the participants emphasized the mother's support as most crucial. In my study, I found that positive family support was provided equally from both parents. Only one participant, Alicia, indicated that she never had family support. Additionally, one participant, Lydia, experienced the divorce of her parents in her adolescent years. Both Alicia and Lydia utilized the events in their dysfunctional family unit to create a strong intrinsic desire to succeed.

I believe it is important to note that in the above referenced studies all study participants were first generation college graduates, and all came from low socioeconomic backgrounds and working class families, as did the participants in my study.

LePage-Lees (1997) interviewed 21 women whom she identified as coming from disadvantaged backgrounds. She identifies several components that attribute to a disadvantaged background. Among these components are minority status, low

socioeconomic background, first generation college graduates, or a dysfunctional family as a childhood stressor. The women in LePage-Lees study came from various ethnic backgrounds. Two of her participants were identified as Hispanic and Chicana, and two were identified as African-American. The remaining 17 women were White. What I find interesting about the contrast between LePage-Lees study and those conducted by Aragon (1998), Blea (1995), Contreras (1993), Gandara (1982), Martinez-Martinez (2001), and my study is that the women of color in LePage-Lees study credited their families for their success while White women rarely did. In fact she indicated that the White women were often ambivalent to the role of family in their education and their success.

Certainly there is much research to support the concept of a strong family support system that attributes to the success of Latinas. However, it is also important to note that barriers to educational attainment also exist within this same family system. Educational attainment is a primary component that in turn leads to economic success.

I remind you of Isabel whose parents did not want her to go away to college. Instead they encouraged her to marry her high school sweetheart. She chose college over marriage but also chose to go away to college. Going away to college is often viewed as contrary to maintaining strong family ties. Elissa likewise experienced some resistance from her father who couldn't understand why she wanted a college education when he perceived that she was just going to get married.

Blea (1995) writes often about the importance of the tight family unit that remains close in physical space as well as emotional space. I can see the evidence of this tight family unit illustrated in physical as well as emotional space, but it is often the physical space that becomes the barrier. Reyna spoke often of the family living in proximity to

one another even into their adult years and certainly all of the women speak of the strong emotional bonds.

Many Latinas face cultural barriers to education imposed by the family. Rendon (1992) relays a story of when she told her mother she was going to college and the response from her mother was, “You’re crazy. How can you think of going to college if no one in the family has? That is just for rich people” (p.57). Rendon states that many Latino families believe that higher education belongs to the wealthy, the elite – and we clearly are not in that group (p.58).

Rendon (1992) tells a story when her mother would encourage her to come home and give up everything [college]. She indicates that her mother was scared for her daughter but not sure why she was scared. This incident reminds me of the account when Isabel called home in tears at the culture shock she was experiencing at a large university and her mother would tell her that she too should come home. Her mother said, “You do not belong at that big university.”

Reflections: Family system

To conclude this section I surmise that the family system can be both a positive and a negative influence on the success of Latinas. This study presents evidence to suggest that strong positive family support is a key factor that attributes to the success of Latinas. A traditional family unit with both parents present in the home is also evidence to influencing success. It is important to note that this study also revealed that Latinas who came from a dysfunctional family unit can, and do, succeed through their intrinsic drive to succeed.

The family unit itself can also become a barrier for Latinas seeking higher education. This study presents evidence that some Latino families do not want their daughters to go to college, or go away to college, and this resistance may be based on fear of the unknown. Also evident among the family barriers to access to higher education is that a college degree should be reserved for the males in the family. Finally, there is the belief by some Latino family leaders who have not gone to college, or acquired a college degree, that college is for the wealthy and the elite.

Economic System

All of the women in my study came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. They all came from working class families where those on the outside might see them as living in poverty. They often lived in small homes where multiple siblings shared one bedroom. One of the participants in my study indicated growing up without running water or electricity. They are not unlike the Latinos in numerous studies where participants share the same backgrounds (Aragon, 1998; Blea, 1995; Contreras, 1993; Gandara, 1982; LePage-Lees, 1997; Martinez-Martinez, 2001) and have moved beyond the poverty level. The one element that all of my study participants have in common is that none of them recognized their living conditions as poor. It was not until they became young adults that they recognized that they were different from other members of the non-Latino community with regard to their economic condition.

The Hispanic women and men in the above referenced studies, including the participants in my study, have moved beyond the poverty level. However, consider the 2000 Census Bureau (December, 2004) data on poverty rates of Hispanics in the United States: 22.6 % were in poverty, compared with 12.4 % for the total population. Their

families emphasized that education was the key to economic advancement. This affirms the belief by Celia's father when he told her, "If you want to get out of these damn fields then you need to get an education." He also observed that women working in the factory where he was employed provided greater opportunities for their families to live in bigger homes and drive newer cars. Money gave these women the power to make decisions. Blea (2003) affirms that when a woman earns money, and that money is used to maintain the family, they have more decision making power and earning more money is tied to higher education. Celia's father saw the benefit of working women not so much as the advancement of women, but that her wages made life for the family unit as a whole better.

I asked the women in my study if they believed they were successful in their careers. They all responded in the affirmative. I also asked the women if they felt they were paid equitably for the work they performed. Again they all responded in the affirmative. On the demographic form presented to each participant I asked them to designate their income. Several of the women earn over \$100,000 per year. I did not do a comparison to the national average of women in like positions: that however would be an area for future research. In this instance I simply took the participants' word for their sense of equity in pay.

Although the women in my study believe that they are paid equitably, working women in general continue to say that pay is one of the biggest workplace concerns and that they are not fairly paid for their work (U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 1998). Not only are women's earnings important to their family income, but first and foremost, working women are entitled to equal employment opportunities on the job,

including the right to equal pay for equal work and non-discriminatory compensation (U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, 2000).

On average, men with a bachelor's degree earn over \$15,000 more per year than men who only complete high school. Women with a bachelor's degree earn over \$12,000 more per year than women with a high school diploma. This differentiation, however, is based on the comparison of a White man to a White woman. The earnings differential between those with a high school degree is largest for Hispanic women. White men with a bachelor's degree earn 32 percent more than Hispanic women with a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, March 1998).

In spite of the progress over the last several decades, women still do not receive the pay they deserve. On average, women who work full-time earn only about 75 cents for every dollar that a man earns (this compares a White male to a White female). The gap is even larger for African American women who earn just 65 cents, and Hispanic women who earn just 55 cents for each dollar that a White male earns (U.S. Department of Labor, 1999).

I interviewed eleven women for my study. Seven of them never revealed any barriers to their career advancement. Four of the women shared experiences that revealed a sense of not fitting in with the mainstream or Latino culture, needing to prove competency, subtle discrimination and institutional racism. Two of the four women identified in the preceding statement work in higher education and indicated that they had experienced barriers in their careers within academia.

A study conducted by Hernandez and Morales (1999) revealed some specific barriers for Latinas working in higher education. The participants in their study indicated

that in order to succeed in higher education, one must climb a ladder of sorts but there is a barrier between the bottom rung of the ladder and the top rung, making it virtually impossible for them to achieve the heights to which they aspire such as a vice presidency or a presidency.

Celia and Reyna are two participants in my study who work in higher education that discussed barriers to this effect. Celia stated that racism was embedded within her institution and the old boys' network was likewise embedded at every layer making for a very hostile workplace. Reyna describes a situation where she needed to prove herself worthy of her position: an effort that took a couple of years before she was viewed as competent. Tsang and Dietz (2001) state that empirical research reports illustrates that the glass ceiling that effectively restricts the advancement of women and ethnic minorities in the job market persists despite efforts to equalize economic opportunities.

Among the conclusions drawn by Hernandez and Morales (1999) is that higher education institutions are often a setting that is both inciting and constricting for Latinas, creating a ceiling that cannot be seen through and a place where goals cannot be realized. I will state, however, that the remaining four women in my study who are employed in academia did not experience the barriers described by Tsang and Dietz (2001) and Hernandez and Morales (1999).

Catalyst (1999), a research organization focused on the issues of women in leadership, provides insight into the progress of women in leadership positions within various industries and professions. According to Catalyst, women of color report a concrete ceiling barring their advancement. Among the barriers to success for women of

color are not having an influential mentor or sponsor, lack of informal networking with influential colleagues, lack of company role models who are members of the same racial/ethnic group, and lack of high visibility assignments.

Most of the women in my study mention all of these factors excluding the high-visibility assignments as a barrier to their success whether in higher education or other sectors of the economy. Approximately half of the women in my study identified the lack of mentors and role models as barriers to their economic advancement, but they found a way around those barriers. Often times ‘that way’ was persistence, faith and the innate desire to overcome challenges.

According to LePage-Lees (1997) some women from disadvantaged backgrounds feel uncomfortable as they move into higher-level positions. They sometimes feel they must hide certain aspects (unusual/negative) of their backgrounds, feel isolated, different, and question whether their difficulties result from differences or lack of talent. Several of the women in my study echoed this same sentiment. Elissa felt embarrassed to tell people she grew up without running water and electricity. Isabel and Lydia often mention moments of isolation in their movement up the career ladder because they had no one to identify with. The women in LePage-Lees study found that an important part of the achievement process was recognizing that they had to fight for their own identity and never be satisfied with jobs that did not challenge their intellect. Likewise was the case with many of my study participants.

Reflections: Economic system

I surmise that education is the mechanism through which Latinas can advance toward economic equity, and economic equity in turn attributes to their decision making

power. Data from my study suggests that educational advancement is a mechanism through which Latinas advance toward economic equity. This study also suggests that Latinas who have advanced into leadership positions perceive their pay to be equitable.

Although the Latinas in my study perceive themselves to be successful and none identified inequity in pay, the majority of them agreed that the glass ceiling that restricts the advancement of Latinas in the job market still exists despite efforts to equalize economic opportunities. An additional barrier to the success of Latinas is the lack of influential mentors or role models of the same gender and racial/ethnic group.

Educational System

I identify all of the women in my study as high achievers and ambitious within the realm of education. I believe that the desire to achieve was supported by their families (parents) but perhaps more evident is the intrinsic drive within each of them even from an early age. I remind you of Alicia who was determined at four years old to go to school. Her mother allowed her to follow a cousin who was one year older after days of trying to deter her. The kindergarten teacher allowed Alicia to remain in school thinking that she would soon tire and give up after a few days. Alicia, however, did not tire. She persisted and thus began her journey through the educational system, graduating from high school when she was sixteen.

I remind you also about Lydia who at age 12 became a high achiever brought on by the divorce of her parents. "If I could become perfect, than my world would be perfect," she stated. Lydia's perfect world would be parents who did not fight, a father who did not abuse her mother, and a family unit that would remain intact. As her external world fell apart her internal drive became focused on school. Lydia noted a

demarcation line between the fifth and sixth grade when she went from an average student to an A and B student. It was at this young age that Lydia decided she was going to become a lawyer and never swayed from that dream. Juanita and Elissa also speak of being put in charge of their classrooms or the school library as young girls. Recall that both attended rural schools where one teacher taught several grades.

There is an element of the educational system that I think is very relevant to the women in my study that I would like to address. Vazquez and Garcia-Vasquez (1998) wrote about the impact of a differential social power system on Latinos' attitudes toward the high school and the community college experience. Although none of the women in my study attended a community college, I believe the theory is relevant to any college experience and certainly to the high school experience.

Vasquez and Garcia-Vasquez suggest that Mexican-American students will recall their high school experience more negatively if that high school consists of an Unequal Social Power Influence (USPI) (majority Anglo environment) as opposed to attending a school with an Equal Social Power Influence (ESPI) (equal or higher percentage of Mexican-Americans in the environment compared to Anglos). Other studies suggest that if Latino students have a positive ethnic identity experience they are more likely to experience less stress and higher educational achievement (Saldana, 1990, as cited in Vasquez & Garcia-Vasquez, 1998).

Consider the experience of Alicia, Juanita, and Elissa. These three women went to high schools in predominately Latino communities with teachers and school administrators who were also predominately Latino (ESPI). They all speak of a very strong sense of pride in their ethnicity and positive support from teachers. They each

maintained a high level of ethnic identity, high academic achievement and a high level of self-esteem.

Liana, Mari, and Lydia each attended a high school where the distribution of Hispanic to Anglo students was approximately equal. They each identified an overall positive high school experience and high levels of self esteem. However, they did not have a strong sense of ethnic identity during this time.

Now consider the experiences of Isabel and Caridad. Isabel attended a private girls' academy where she was not only among the few Latinas, but she was also marginalized because of her socioeconomic status. She spoke often of feelings of isolation, poor academic performance, and high levels of stress associated with not fitting in with her environment (USPI). Caridad likewise because of her father's military career and the movement of the family across the United States was often the only Latina in her high school environment. She too, identifies periods of extreme loneliness, isolation, marginalization, and poor academic performance (USPI). Isabel and Caridad lacked peers that they could identify with but in addition the school did not offer supportive teachers, mentors, or role models. Neither of these women revealed any sense of ethnic identity in high school and both expressed low self-esteem during this time period, as well as episodes of poor academic performance.

As the women in my study recounted their journeys through the educational system their experiences were certainly varied. Some experienced marginalization and discrimination while others never experienced barriers, but what they all had in common was their desire to achieve.

These women are not unlike the 20 women in Gandara's (1994) study or the five women in Aragon's (1998) study. Gandara presents findings from interviews with 20 Mexican-American women (she also interviewed 30 men but their information is excluded from this discussion) who were from low socioeconomic backgrounds, first generation (to this country and to graduate from college) and who successfully completed J.D., M.D., or Ph.D. degrees. Gandara states that her study was not about successful individuals, but about people who chose education as a vehicle for social and economic mobility or personal fulfillment. Although I am looking at the factors that influence success, I would say that we are both in essence looking at the outcomes of education perhaps through a different lens.

The women in Aragon's (1998) study identified themselves as high achievers. High expectations were communicated and modeled by their parents, extended family members, and teachers. They identified the father, mother, or siblings as encouraging learning at an early age. Each of her research participants performed very well academically in kindergarten through twelfth grade. They all expected to attend college and get baccalaureates and once they started the doctoral program, each was determined to finish that degree. Aragon interviewed only five women for her study therefore it would be lax to assume that all Ph.D. level American women of Mexican ancestry had this type of support from their families. In slight contrast are the participants in my study as not all of them had family support.

Contreras (1993) investigated the reflections of nine Hispanic graduates of higher education and through dialogues with them, reviewed their experiences about the educational strategies they used to attain higher education degrees. The participants in

his study sought the pursuit of higher education degrees to improve their social conditions.

I believe that a discussion on the education system would not be complete without some discussion on the barriers that exist for Latinas. Kanpol (1997) presented a powerful observation when as a neophyte critical ethnographer he relayed an incident in which he was studying school climate. He entered one elementary school and was thunderstruck by the comments of the school principal who stated that the school was a working class school dominated by Hispanic Americans. "I don't know if we can give them what they want here. They are vocationally bound" (p.5). Kanpol concludes that institutions like schools claim democratic virtues, yet espouse a contradictory confusing logic resulting in rampant race, class, and gender inequalities. Contreras (1993) likewise concluded that institutional racism and racist attitudes prevail in the environment of higher education.

It is not an easy task to categorize these educational barriers because they are woven within and across numerous systems. Consider the sociocultural barriers that hold to the belief that higher education is for the elite members of society, the wealthy (Contreras, 1993; Rendon, 1992). This is not only projected by those in authority as described by Kanpol (1997) but often this belief exists within the Latino culture itself. Rendon (1992) relays a story of when she made the decision to attend college and the response from her mother was, "*Estas loca* (your crazy), college is for rich people." She infers that the Latino culture often holds to the belief that education belongs to the wealthy, the elite, and we [Latinos] are clearly not in that group (p.57).

Consider the two women in my study who attended private colleges. Caridad and Lydia both had the ability to succeed at these colleges. Both were high achievers and had acquired the fortitude to persist. They both make reference to never fitting in on their college campuses. In order to fit in at these institutions it is perhaps more imperative to be rich than to be White. Both make reference to the students being rich, and it was the combination of their ethnicity and their social class that separated them. I can state with a degree of confidence that if they came from wealthy Latino families they would have fit in with the majority culture because they may have had the same life experiences as the privileged rich.

Latino traditions constitute many obstacles to education. Among many Latino families, boys are afforded more independence than girls. Latinas therefore, have to overcome familial resistance and often their own ingrained fears in order to consider moving away from their hometown to attend college (Carnevale, 1999). You may recall the story of Celia.

Celia was one of five children in her family. The mindset of her parents was that the boys would go to college and maybe the girls could go if there was a way, but they [girls] needed to learn to cook and clean. Celia's parents were very firm in their belief that she should graduate from high school, but education beyond this point was an option reserved for her brothers.

Other educational barriers are the lack of financial resources, the lack of role models and mentors, inadequate advising, and perhaps the most detrimental of all is the notion that individual students must shed their history and be absorbed into a single

dominant culture in order to succeed (Carnevale, 1999; Contreras, 1993; LePage-Lees, 1997; Rendon, 1992) .

In college, Latinas often feel isolated and disconnected (Rendon, 1992). This isolation comes about through reflecting on new learning while at the same time coping with the feelings of not belonging. These experiences make students more introverted, as was the case with Alicia, Caridad and Isabel.

I agree with Rendon (1992) when she states that to succeed we do not need to assimilate. To have public identity we do not need to use only English. Colleges must learn to enhance the educational experiences of students of color. From the beginning of the college career, professors should express their sincere belief that we are capable of learning and can be taught to learn without assimilating into the dominant culture.

Rendon further states:

I do not hunger for the past; it is always with me. Instead, I yearn for the future and believe that the time will come when higher education will be served by caring faculty, counselors, and administrators who know what they must do, not what is politically correct, but what is morally and ethically the right thing (p.63).

Reflections: Educational system

To conclude this section on the educational system, I surmise that Latinas who overcoming significant life events can increase their persistence to achieve. When Latinas are part of an educational environment that fosters a positive ethnic identity experience they are more likely to experience less stress and higher educational achievement. My study suggests that perhaps social class may be more powerful than ethnicity at leveling equality in education.

The educational system must find avenues by which to recruit, hire and retain qualified Latinas and Latinos as counselors, advisors, teachers, and administrators to serve as role models and mentors to Latinas and Latinos entering the educational system. Furthermore, educators must focus on increasing cultural diversity on all avenues and rid themselves of the belief that assimilation is the road to retention and achievement.

Sociocultural System

For the purpose of discussion in this section I present the sociocultural system as that dimension of the general environment represented by norms, customs, and values of the milieu within which Latinas function. Latinas must deal not only with the influence and demands of the majority culture, but they face many social pressures and stressors within their own culture.

Blea (1992) states that Latinas tend to draw from a variety of experiences in order to learn, teach, and communicate. They also have special knowledge because their experience has been different, even unique, since being female is complicated by being a minority, which is further complicated by the unequal distribution of resources and class (p. 4). The women in my study came from poor backgrounds, from working class families who saw education as a way of empowerment and movement up the social stratum. Movement up the social ladder, however, means that Latinas in many situations must deviate from the norm. So what exactly is the norm in Latino culture? I present only a few of the norms as they relate to my study.

Perhaps the most powerful norm is staying close to family (Carr-Ruffino, 1996; Blea, 1992; Rendon, 1992). In a society that rewards mobility, staying close geographically, limits the earning power of Latinas. Although all of the women in my

study indicated a closeness to their families it was those who moved away and experienced a geographic distance that acquired the highest earning power. The amount of money they earned, however, was not a factor they used to define their success. In this respect they simply wanted enough income to provide the needs for their families.

Showing respect for authority is another norm identified by Carr-Ruffino (1996). Isabel relates a story about her father and how his behavior changed whenever he was in the presence of someone in authority. Isabel's father had a fourth-grade education, but she stated that his formal education had nothing to do with his intelligence. He read many books and was well informed about world affairs, but whenever he was in the presence of an authority figure, he became very meek and subservient. She never spoke of this observation with her father but recognized this same behavior in herself as she matured.

Isabel went to law school, became an attorney, and stated that when she entered the courtroom she figuratively became another person. She became the person with authority. This change in the norm, her role shift, placed her in an atmosphere that some would say is abnormal for a Latina. Blea (1992), states that Anglo society is more interested in keeping the Chicana abnormal and that Chicana resistance threatens Anglo dominance (p.10).

I am also reminded of Reyna's experiences. While being an A student in high school she wanted to take advanced placement courses. The school would not allow her to do so and her parents never questioned authority. As a result of this lack of questioning, she was tracked into vocational courses and her parents paid for her college education when she could have received a full scholarship.

Gender relationships and roles is another dominate norm in Latino culture. Men's higher status is more noticeable, their gender behavior is more broadly defined, and the division of labor is more pronounced (Carr-Ruffino, 1992, p. 338). Consider Lydia who married a first generation Mexican-American (in this context I mean his parents emigrate from Mexico). Because she would not be a servant to him he referred to her behavior as abnormal. Celia stated that when she returned to school to get her master's and eventually her doctorate degree her husband was supportive as long as she kept the house clean, the meals prepared, and cared for the children.

Assertive women within the Latino culture are generally disliked (Carr-Ruffino, 1996). Blea (1992) indicates that they are stepping outside their socially prescribed roles; they are addressing their alienation from society's norm. As I reflect upon the experiences of my study participants, I believe that Lydia illustrates the assertive Latina best. Lydia is an attorney, a judge, president of a school board, and a social activist. "I am a very opinionated woman," she stated. "I stand by my convictions and because of this I never feel like I fit in. I am rejected by the Chicano culture and I am rejected by the Anglo culture, but I'm ok with that, I've learned to live with it."

Spiritual beliefs and practices that are closely tied to the Catholic Church is a prominent value of the Latino culture and the norm is to remain faithful to the church for life. I discuss this relationship with the church in a subsequent section on spirituality so I will only state that Latinas are expected to follow the roles prescribed by the church. Many Latinas, the majority of my study participants, find this role of women as defined by the church to be suppressive. Generally when Latinas chose a spiritual path away

from Catholicism their behavior is recognized as deviant because they have violated a strong cultural norm (Blea, 1992).

Reflections: Sociocultural system

The Latina faces barriers to advancement imposed by the majority culture as well as the Latino culture. The Latino culture stresses the importance of maintaining a close geographic distance to the family while the majority culture rewards mobility. My study suggests that Latinas who are willing to adopt some degree of mobility will experience greater earning power.

Respect for authority is a norm within the Latino culture that may add to the oppression of Latinas. Submission to the male(s) in the family as well as submission to the norms within the Catholic Church can prove to be oppressive to the advancement of Latinas. Assertive Latinas who decide to step outside these socially prescribed roles of subservience may be viewed upon by those within her culture as aggressive and rejecting her own culture.

Intrinsic Interrelated and Intersecting Systems

In this section I will speak to the factors that I believe to be internal to the success of the Latinas in my study. I would presuppose that these internal factors have a positive influence on our ability to succeed and also contribute to our resilient nature. I believe that it is that which abides within us as much as that which influences us from that outside that contributes to the makeup of our character and leadership abilities. I have presented specific intrinsic categories but certainly they are all interrelated and not all-encompassing.

Personal Characteristics

I believe it is important to identify the personal characteristics of successful Latinas. Some of the common characteristics of resilient successful women identified by LePage-Lees (1997) were maturity, confidence, benevolence, perfectionism, and perseverance. Aragon (1998) identified additional traits as pride in culture, activist orientation, and a strong work ethic. Wolin and Wolin (1994) further identify resilient characteristics as insightful, independence, initiative, creativity, humor, and morality. Contreras (1993) identified personal attributes associated with resiliency as being assertive, consistent, persistent, having a positive attitude, personal fortitude, making sacrifices, and talking responsibility.

I certainly identify all of these characteristics as present in the Latinas in my study. However, I will also add that they are ambitious, high achievers, resolute, enjoy autonomy, accept challenges, they are courageous, divergent thinkers, empathetic, and resourceful.

Gandara (1994) identified her subjects as having an intense personal drive for achievement, often manifested in vows, in effect, that they would not live in the kind of poverty in which they had been born (p. 38). She further states the characteristic cited most by her participants in their ability to succeed was persistence, followed by hard work and the least important was innate ability.

I did not ask my study participants to identify their personal characteristics; instead I identified these attributes as they conveyed their life histories. All of the women in my study, much like those in Aragon's (1998) and LePage-Lees (1997) studies, exhibit a strong work ethic expending an overwhelming amount of energy towards their jobs.

They all understand this behavior to be normal and all had jobs while they were in college. To them it was normal to work and attend college simultaneously while balancing life's challenges and other obstacles.

Reflections: Personal characteristics

To conclude this segment on personal characteristics I surmise that successful Latinas exhibit personal characteristics that reflect their inner strength, that they thrive in challenging situations, and demonstrate an intense work ethic.

Resiliency

There is no doubt that the Latinas in my study are resilient. They have experienced significant stressors, some perhaps more so than others, but never-the-less they have all overcome. It is their ability to bounce back after being broken, isolated, embarrassed, or experiencing a multiple of other negative events that have given them the ability to persevere. Resiliency can be described in terms of values, attitudes, and behavioral dimensions that impact responsive capacities fostering healthy development, interaction, and adaptation in the face of non-normative challenges (LePage-Lees, 1997).

Resiliency is a term often used by psychologists and sociologists to describe people who function at a high level after experiencing numerous stressors (LePage-Lees, 1997). Resiliency is a relative term in the sense that some situations such as chronic stress or conditions like characteristics of family members influence the amount or expression of its components. Building competence and avoiding negative stressors are important elements of resiliency as are flexibility and creative use of adversity.

In the area of education LePage-Lees (1997) noted that stress made the participants more fearful and that fear made them more vulnerable to criticism and the

need to avoid criticism made them choose majors where they were less likely to receive negative feedback. Chung (1996) revealed that Hispanic students reported significantly higher levels of stress on academics and work situations than other ethnic groups.

I have no doubt that several of the women in my study experienced fear as they entered the realm of higher education. Their stories have been clear so I will not retell what has been told. I will add, however, that whatever fear they experienced was overcome by their innate determination for a better life.

Reflections: Resiliency

To conclude this segment on resiliency I surmise that Latinas deal with multiple stressors that threaten to destroy their character. My study also suggests that their creative use of adversity turns disadvantage into opportunities to excel.

Ethnic Identity

Who are we? By what moniker shall we be called? We are Spanish, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cubans, Dominicans, Central Americans, Panamanians, and Columbians. We are called Hispanics, Hispanas, Mexican-Americans, Latinas, Latina-Americans, Chicanas, and by some, simply American. I attest that the entire issue of ethnic identity is indeed a array of complexities by the very label we choose to identify with.

Juan Gonzales (2000) states that Latino intellectuals in this country continue to debate whether the term *Hispanic* or *Latino* best describes us. He concludes that neither is *totally* accurate but both are acceptable. I agree with his conclusion.

I would also agree with the viewpoint of Stavans (1995) when he states that the Hispanic culture in the United States is many cultures. He states:

A refreshing modern concept has emerged before American eyes – to live in the hyphen, to inhabit the borderland. The American Dream has not yet fully opened its arms to us; the melting pot is still too cold, too uninviting, for a total meltdown...

Although stereotypes remain commonplace and vices get easily confused with habits, a number of factors from population growth to retarded acquisition of a second language and a passionate retentiveness of our original culture, actually suggest that Hispanics in the United States shall not, will not, cannot, and ought not follow paths opened up by previous immigrants (p.9) [the path is assimilation].

Aside from the issue of how we self-identify is the ever present evolution of cultural change that for some perhaps occurs in such minuscule increments. This change goes undetected to a point of total absorption into mainstream culture and is only evident to the observer looking from the outside-in that ethnic identity for some is non other than simply American: whatever that means.

So often I have heard that Latinos have *assimilated* or *acculturated* into mainstream society. As I pondered the fundamental nature of these concepts and struggled to come to term with my own identity I searched for the meanings of these terms and how they might apply to the way in which my study participants self-identified.

I would first like to present the concept of acculturation. Berry (1980) indicates that acculturation refers to the process of change experienced by individuals of a minority group during the adoption of the majority group's culture. Trimble (2003) adds that acculturation includes changes not only at the individual or psychological level but also at the sociocultural level: this includes social and environmental changes on an individual's values, beliefs, behaviors, and affects. The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (1995) found that increased acculturation to American society by Hispanic youth leads to increased alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drug use. Szapocznik and

Kurtines (1993) have suggested that acculturation can occur in a more complex fashion that involves both the retention of the behaviors, customs and values of the culture of origin as well as the acquisition of the behaviors, customs and values of the host culture. I certainly agree with one aspect of Szapocznik and Kurtines (1993) that the entire issue of ethnic identity occurs in a complex fashion.

Now consider the concepts of assimilation, marginalization, and separation. According to Santisteban and Mitrani (2003), assimilation refers to accepting the values and beliefs of the new culture while rejecting the original culture. They present further information on the concept of marginalization and separation. Marginalization refers to a lack of identification with any culture. A marginalized individual is someone who has been placed on the border, on the outside of a social system, making her (or him) less important, and different. It means having contact with two or more cultural groups but not fully accepted in either of them (Webster's Dictionary, p. 829). Separation on the other hand refers to becoming totally embedded in the culture of origin and refusing to participate in the new culture. Santisteban and Mitrani present an additional concept they call integration. They define integration as retaining the original culture while also accepting values and beliefs of the new culture. Given the above information, I am of the understanding that acculturation and integration are one and the same.

When discussing ethnic identity of my study participants, I would conclude that Mari, who identified herself as Mexican-American has been assimilated (i.e. absorbed) into mainstream culture. She indicated that being Mexican-American was never the focus of her life, she is simply an American. Mari did not describe any traditions, events, or stories that focused on ethnic identity.

Lydia, you may recall, had a very difficult time trying to describe her culture although she self-identified as Chicana. Trying to identify an area where Lydia fits in the ethnic identity levels of awareness I would say that she is integrated/aculturated into the mainstream culture in that trying to define her own ethnic culture became a trying task.

Lydia's life with her first husband, a first generation Mexican-American (his parents migrated from Mexico to the United States) is an example of cultural conflict. Cultural conflict develops and is viewed as problematic when individuals understand that they are facing problems resulting from intercultural contact that cannot be dealt with easily or quickly but simply through adjustment or assimilation (Berry, 2003).

When discussing ethnic identity, Alicia stated, "I never knew minority thinking, it was just not a part of my life. I was never minority, I was always majority." It is my conclusion that Alicia is very in tune with her *Latinismo*. I would further contend that this sense of being in touch with one's identity would fall within the definition of integration (Santisteban & Mitrani, 2003) as well as acculturation (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1993). I believe that Elissa illustrated the point of integration best when she stated:

I almost see myself as this dual person because I think people can become Anglicized and still not lose that other part of them. We have to function in the mainstream and be part of that other society, but we have to work very hard to maintain our cultural roots.

Reflections: Ethnic identity

To conclude this segment on ethnic identity I surmise that the heterogeneous nature of the Latino population is extremely complex and that ethnic identity among Latinas is influenced by a multitude of environmental as well as inherent factors.

El Valle culture.

I was born and raised in *El Valle* and more specifically in the small town of San Luis. This town was officially founded in 1851 and said to be the oldest town in Colorado. I always knew that the people in this region were different. Different of course from the Anglos but even more apparent was our inherent difference from other Latinos in the United States. I have stated that this project has become a journey of self-discovery and through this journey I have gained the understanding of why this difference exists. I felt a great need to include this information because five of the eleven women in my study (six when I include myself) have roots in the geographic region I call El Valle. In order to understand their culture one must have an understanding of the history of this region.

In geographic context, the Spanish empire claimed Colorado as part of its New Mexico province. In the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819, Spain and the United States set boundaries that placed most of modern Colorado within New Mexico's jurisdiction until the middle of the nineteenth century. When it became a United States territory in 1861, Colorado acquired northern New Mexico's land, south of the Arkansas River. When Colorado achieved statehood in 1876 many Hispano pioneers had already build adobe homes, Catholic churches, and traditional villages in the San Luis Valley and other settled areas in the state. Therefore, the history of Hispanos in Colorado cannot be understood without first knowing New Mexico history (DeBaca, 1998).

The colonization of the American southwest by the Spanish set in motion a way-of-life that left an imprint that is unmistakable to this day. A civilization based on ancient Spanish law, customs, and traditions, this is the area of southern Colorado and

northern New Mexico often referred to as the Upper Rio Grand (Bailon Payne, 1996). Gonzales (2002) refers to this region in northern New Mexico and southern Colorado as part of the Nueces Strip.

McConnell Simmons (1999) writes about the habitants of Colorado and New Mexico's San Luis Valley as descendents that stretch back to distant times. Native people who claimed the Valley (*El Valle*) as their own were the Utes, Comanches, Kiowas, Navajos, Pueblos, Apache, Arapahos, and Cheyennes. In 1598, European Don Juan de Onate claimed the Valley for King Phillip II of Spain. French traders eventually spread their goods among the people of the region.

The Spanish communities of the San Luis Valley were settled by the Spanish conquistadores and seventeenth century Spanish colonists (Lopez Tushar, 1975). These settlers retained their Spanish traditions because they were almost completely isolated both from Mexico and the Anglo. They did not keep up with the ideas in Spain or Mexico, nor did they learn new words as did those in Mexico and other Latin American countries. Therefore the language remained basically that of the sixteenth century. As the years passed and they had little contact with Spanish speakers outside of *El Valle* they started introducing English words with Spanish endings.

These archaisms, Anglicisms, and assortment of Indian and French words combined to formulate what is know today as Colorado Spanish (Lopez Tushar, 1975, p.v). Gonzales (2002) states that the language of this region, even words used by Anglo Americans, is derived mostly from Spanish words. Among these words are bronco, burro, mesa, canyon, rodeo, corral, and loco (p. 44).

In 1833, the Conejos grant in the San Luis Valley was the regions first communal land grant but Utes and Navajos soon drove the New Mexicans back to Abiquiu. In 1843 Governor Armijo reissued the land as a private grant of one million acres to Charles Beaubien, who renamed it the *Sangre de Cristo* grant. The valley quickly saw the founding of many settlements, from the Plaza de los Manzanares to San Luis – mostly with Spanish-speaking settlers.

Finally, in 1851, Beaubien assigned individual plots and common lands to fifty families from Mora and Chama counties in New Mexico. The settlers called their community San Luis – thus Colorado's first permanent town was formally born. By the end of the decade, the valley contained a dozen villages and forty irrigation ditches that watered the fields of two thousand settlers from New Mexico (De Baca, 1998). To this day, the battle still rages for an estimated 1000 descendants of settlers in southern Colorado and northern New Mexico for access to a 77,500 acre ranch that was part of an 1844 Mexican land grant.

The Spanish people of *El Valle* can be considered, in a sense, a people without a country. They had no affiliation with either Mexico or Spain, and for many years their affiliation with the United States was in name only. As a rule their interests were centered in their villages and small communities, and their main concern was the welfare of their families. They looked upon the Anglos who came into their region as intruders whose ways surpassed understanding. The Anglos, on the other hand, made no attempt to understand the people of *El Valle* and their traditions or to learn their language. Instead, they continually looked down on them because they were different (Lopez Tushar, 1975).

Latino communities of any size are usually central to the Catholic Church. The people accept direction from and protection by the parish priest. The five Latinas in this study who identified their roots in El Valle experienced life in such a community. The entire community functions as a family system, caring for one another. This sense of community is perhaps not so unique to any other small community across America. However, with regard to a Latino community this is unique. It is tradition within these communities to celebrate holidays that are central only to that community and centered on the Catholic Church. They honor the patron saints of *their* community. Although these saints may vary from community to community and the celebratory traditions may be slightly different, one thing remains constant. None of these communities celebrated *Cinco de Mayo* (fifth of May) that celebrates a Mexican victory over the French in 1862 or *dieciseis de Septiembre* (September 16th) Mexican Independence Day. Alicia, Liana, Elissa, Inez, and Isabel agreed that these are Mexican holidays that are far removed from their communities of origin and from the participants individually. To this day they have no sense of ownership to these holidays.

Elissa stated, “When I was first exposed to the Cinco de Mayo celebrations I was totally disconnected from its significance, I still am.” Alicia stated that she had never heard of these two holidays until she was well into her adult years and had moved away from *El Valle*.

El Valle is a special place for these women. Liana mentioned *La Plaza de los Manzanares* and how proud she is that her family has been in this region for centuries, since Thomas Jefferson was president. Isabel refers to this region as a sacred and special place:

There is something historically special about the valley. There was this intermingling of cultures and for whatever reason everyone else went the other way and there remained the Santos, the carvings, the essence that is very special to the valley.

Alicia stated, “Our culture was very different from other Latinos. Our language and our food was different, and certainly our beliefs and values were different.” Alicia referred to this culture as a *manito* culture: roughly translated to mean brotherhood.

Elissa speaks of her ancestors settling in what is now northern New Mexico in the 1600s. She talks with fondness about her Native American, Spanish, and Mexican roots but in the same breath she expresses frustration at the lack of American history knowledge that is characteristic of many Americans today. “I get weary of having to explain that my ancestors did not immigrate to the United States. We have been here for a very long time,” she states.

Stavans (1995) states that many Latinos in the United States believe they come from mixed ancestries. At least six in every ten in the United States, believe they have aboriginal claims to the land north of the border. As native Americans we (I intentionally use the term *we* because I am a member of this group of native Americans) were in these areas before the Pilgrims of the Mayflower and understandably keep a telluric attachment to the land. The five Latinas in this study claim this connection to the earth and Aztec roots in the archetypal region of Aztlan: somewhere in the region of New Mexico, California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Colorado, Wyoming, Texas, and the Mexican states of Durango and Nayarut (Stavans, 1995).

About a million Latino Americans are descendents of Spanish and Spanish American settlers. Many of them have ancestors who lived in the West before it became part of the United States. As a group they do not have the same profile or issues as the

other subgroups because they were never immigrants to the United States (Carr-Ruffino, 1996, p. 326).

Reflections: El Valle culture

To conclude this segment on *El Valle culture* I surmise that the culture of the people of *El Valle* is unique to any other segment of the Latino population in the United States. The people of this region hold to customs, traditions, values, beliefs, artifacts, and norms that date back centuries. Five of the Latinas in my study have roots in this geographic region therefore inspiring me to include a section on it's history.

Spirituality

I have deliberately reserved the concept of spirituality for the final piece of reflection. When I began this study I wanted to know everything possible about the lives of the Latinas I identified as successful. In viewing their life's journey from a holistic perspective we engaged in dialogue about their physical, mental, and spiritual ideologies.

I considered the physical to be all the events they experienced from childhood to adulthood whether they were positive, like affection received from a loved one, or negative, like being placed on the border because they were different. I looked at the mental aspects of their lives as knowledge gained through life experiences and progression through the educational and economic systems. They shared their beliefs, values, norms, and moral understandings as they shared experiences in the sociocultural environment as well as their concepts of ethnic identity. Then there was that final piece that encircled their lives and gave them the strength to preserve: their spirituality.

Blea (2003) states that for Chicanas and Latinas who have taken control of their own spirituality, religion and spirituality have become a system of shared Christian and Indian beliefs and practices built around the idea of harmony between human, natural, and supernatural forces (p. 63). I can state with confidence that the Latinas in my study have indeed taken control of their own spirituality as described by Blea.

I use the voice of two participants to illustrate the preceding concept. Elissa stated, "I am not religious, but my spirituality is reflected in my connection to the earth, my Indian roots, and to the art that is religious in appearance but is more a reflection of my culture." Isabel stated, "I believe in God but I am not religious. I don't go to church. I write and create tapestry, but I do it in a special place that for me is very spiritual, I go to the Valley."

Elissa and Isabel have taken control of their spirituality as have the other nine women. All of the women in my study were raised in Catholicism but only two of the eleven women have maintained membership in the Catholic Church. My intent here is not to debate the theology of the Catholic Church or its dogma surrounding the role of women but more so to make an observation.

I believe that as Latinas gain knowledge they are enlightened in many ways. They begin to question those who would attempt to govern their choices and in this process of questioning authority they embrace the freedom that is rightly theirs to experience.

These women claim a connection to the earth, the heavens, and to one another. Blea (1995) states that Latina spirituality embraces indigenous elements that permeate the soul, the core of what constitutes identity. It is the belief in something larger than what is

experienced on earth and explained by science or religion. It is a belief in a supreme being, or beings, who permeates the social consciousness to influence creativity, hope, charity, and life pursuits.

These are phenomenal women who embrace the milestones along the journey of life. They are passionate about their values, beliefs, and the very core of their existence. They are committed to making their world a better place through the expressions of empathy, fortitude, gratitude, and faith.

Reflections: Spirituality

To conclude this segment on spirituality I surmise that the Latinas in my study embrace an innate sense of spirituality that is not associated with traditional religious beliefs or practices but rather is an intrinsic connection to a supernatural Source. They claim to draw from this Source and gain the fortitude to persevere.

Implications

I began the reflective process with a reference to General Systems Theory. I conclude with a reflection of Latina as a human systems that is unique, complex and fascinating. I believe there subsides within us all such hidden wonders that surface at the most unexpected times and surprises even ourselves. This human system contains abilities and creativity that drives many to greatness. It is this system that will find a way to further link the theories that relate to the advancement of all Latinas.

In 1999 the National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organizations (COSSMHO) conducted a study on The State of Hispanic Girls. They indicated that Hispanic girls rank as the largest minority group of girls in the country and

are projected to remain so for the next fifty years. They are also at the greatest risk of suffering physical and psychological morbidity dangers than any other cultural group of girls in the nation. They concluded that cultural protective factors play a critical role in buffering Hispanic girls from risky and health damaging behaviors. Among these cultural protective factors are bilingual and bicultural professional and peer role models and mentors, strengthening families, and developing support networks for Hispanic girls that will teach them critical resiliency skills.

It has been approximately three to four decades since the participants in my study were adolescents. As I reflect on the above referenced report I recognize that the experiences of young Latinas today is not much different from the experiences faced by young Latinas thirty or forty years ago.

What can we do to empower Latinas to achieve success? We begin by empowering young girls to believe in themselves and to hold on to, and take pride in their cultural roots. We develop and support strategies that strengthen families and create support networks for young Latinas. We encourage, no, we demand that Latino students moving through the educational system be afforded the presence of people they can identify with in a positive light. We demand that Latino students be afforded the same rights to education; not through words but through actions.

Although I believe great emphasis must be place on the empowerment of young girls we cannot forget the Latinas at every life stage. There are those in our society who are women broken in spirit because of bad relationships, or a social system that has ignored their cry. They are not unlike the women in my study who identified as the

walking wounded. Latinas are often outsiders within, marginal to the academy, mainstream views, political groups, or even our own families (TLFG, 2001, p. 201).

Latinas at every stage of life need to know that it is never too late to initiate change. When women change, men change, relationships change, and society changes, but most important culture changes (Blea, 2003). Change will come in incremental pieces through a gradual process. We will create a world not of hierarchies but of encircling partnerships and growth will require passage through the fearful realms of disintegration (Wheatley, 1999).

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Conduct a comparative study of the success factors of women of color to White women.
2. Conduct further studies in the high schools, community colleges and universities using the Unequal Social Power Influence/Equal Social Power Influence Scale.
3. Conduct a comparative study of Latinos in the San Luis Valley to Latinos in the southwest.
4. Conduct a comparative study of the cultural belief system of White students who live in a predominately Latino environment to those who live in a predominately Anglo environment.
5. Study how our ancestors, parents, and especially the women in our lives validate our right to think and trust ourselves.
6. What is the process of resistance and recovery for Latinas?
7. Data suggests that Latinas in leadership positions are either divorced, never married or married to White men. A deeper analysis of this observation may

reveal valuable insight into the relationship between men and women in the Latino culture.

8. Do a comparative study with emphasis on pay equity between Latinas, other women of color, and White women in comparable leadership positions.
9. Do a comparative study between Latinas and White women on the role of the family unit as it relates to success.
10. Do a comparative study on the academic achievement of Latinas who exhibit a high degree of ethnic identity to those with a low degree of ethnic identity.

CHAPTER VI: EPOLOGUE. *PAPELITOS GUARDADOS*

Papelitos guardados is a concept I borrow from the writings of the Latina Feminist Group, (2001). This phrase literally translated means papers; documents that are guarded, hidden away; watched over; taken care of; kept in a safe place. *Papelitos guardados* evokes the process by which we contemplate thoughts and feelings, often in isolation and through difficult times. We keep them in our memory, write them down, and store them in safe places (p.1). Perhaps at some point in time we will share them with others, or they may remain hidden secrets forever.

For many years I have kept a journal. There were times in my life when I recorded my daily thoughts, and then suddenly, there was no entry for months and sometimes years. I know that I cannot recall the daily events of years gone by and I often wonder what my children will think when they, one day, will discover my *papelitos guardados*. What will they think, or remember about, the missing pieces of my life? Will they see me as an accomplished woman? One who has fought the good fight and persevered. I hope so. From my journal I produced, in part, the autoethnography presented earlier in this work. The Latinas in my study likewise, explored the hidden memories of events lived out and bravely shared their *papelitos guardados*.

As I approach the end of this dissertation I reflect back to the beginning. I started the journey toward a doctorate degree to see if I could identify the factors that lead to the success of Latinas. I wanted to know first hand if I attained, or could acquire these

qualities so I too could succeed. I discovered that the only major difference between my study participant and me is time.

It took me many years to get my postsecondary degrees. When the women in my study were beginning their careers I was raising a family. I have no regrets because that too is a major accomplishment. When I started my doctoral studies I was working as an adjunct faculty. I thought that pursuing a doctorate degree would open doors for me that I believed were tightly shut. Throughout this writing process I have reflected on my career path and one element remains clearly hidden away in the recesses of my thoughts; I have always been in a position where my educational accomplishments were greater than the job required.

Today I am a director. I supervise professional staff, I provide training for faculty and staff at a college, and my journey continues. This too is a position where my educational accomplishments are greater than the job requires. I recently interviewed for a dean position at my college but the position would not be mine. Instead my dear friend, another Latina was offered the position. I rejoice because she is Latina, and she will pave the way for others to advance in academia. My time will come.

Almost four years have past since I first contacted the Latinas for my study. I have lost touch with some of the women, but I have also developed close and lasting friendships with others. Our friendships have evolved into relationships of respect, honor, and love. We continue to share the struggles of everyday life as we talk about family, work, love, and dreams. As Latinas we continue to struggle in our homes, professions, and communities with covert racism, precarious economic circumstances, the consequences of being born female, and resistance to our presence in academia. We

are also influenced by our families, friends and life events that help us to negotiate the markers of our achievements and validate our right to pursue our goals (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001, P. 25). We acknowledge a sense of pride in our accomplishments and receive strength from our cultural heritages and spiritual awareness. I recognize that our individual accomplishments are shaped by resiliency and fueled by our resolute nature. My hope is that this work will bring a deeper understanding of the multilayer lives of Latinas and that more Latinas will courageously share their stories. I realize that knowledge doesn't end and questions aren't answered, there are only more questions left unanswered as the journey continues.

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