Title
Closing the Racial and Gender Academic Leadership Achievement Gap: Latinas and the EdD

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Publication Date
2023

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA SAN DIEGO

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

Closing the Racial and Gender

Academic Leadership Achievement Gap: Latinas and the EdD

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

by

Amanda J. Corona

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2023

The dissertation of Amanda J. Corona is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

California State University, San Marcos

2023

DEDICATION

This labor of love is dedicated to my mom, Belinda Mugica, and dad, Roberto Martinez, for instilling the value of education, hard work and determination.

To my mentors, colleagues and friends, John Dooley, Laura Deitrick, Pat Libby, Nicholas Ladany, Linda Dews, Emily Rankin, Cheryl Harrelson, Durice Galloway, Doug Kurtz, and Stephanie Venti for speaking life to my deepest aspirations.

To my best friends Norma Reyes and Johan Arias, to my sorority sisters Karla Carrillo, Leslie Cerritos, Adriana Clayborne, Christine Garcia, and Delia Gomez and to doctoral cohort members Sinai Cota and Claudia Peña for being a constant source of community.

To my husband, Ignacio, and daughters, Zoë and Mila, whose unconditional love and support made this dream a reality.

To my grandparents, Rosario and Porfirio, siblings, Evunyy, Jacob, Robert and Mike; aunts, Lupe and Jessica; uncles, Nino, Artemio, Adrian and Armando, cousins, Ashley, Adam, Amy, Amanda, Alexander and Mauricio; nieces, Nevaeh, Izzy, Monika, Addy; nephews, Zeke, Miguel, Santi, Bash and Sonny; in-laws, Hela and Ignacio.

AND to myself past, present and future!

EPIGRAPH

If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

Lilla Watson

Equal rights for others doesn't mean fewer rights for you. It's not pie.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge Professor Theresa Meyerott for spending countless hours, and long nights, guiding me through this doctoral process.

Professor Manuel Vargas for his support as the chair of my committee. Through multiple drafts his guidance has proved to be invaluable.

I would also like to acknowledge the participants of this study, without whom this research would not have come to fruition.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Closing the Racial and Gender

Academic Leadership Achievement Gap: Latinas and the EdD

by

Amanda J. Corona

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2023
California State University, San Marcos, 2023

Professor Manuel Vargas, Chair

Despite being among the fastest growing ethnic minority groups in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2020), Latinx continue to lag behind their White counterparts in almost all aspects of postsecondary academic attainment, including degrees conferred (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; NCES, 2021a, 2021c). As a result of the stunted pipeline of Latinx matriculating through the doctorate, this racial attainment gap extends beyond the classroom and into positions

of leadership in academia. According to Latina doctoral persistence literature, current educational policy and practice are culturally devoid and, as a result, does not consider the unique academic patterns and experiences of Latinx students. Using a phenomenological research design, this study explored the various social and personal capital Latinx students, especially Latinas in educational leadership programs, bring to academia. A dual-lens conceptual framework, of cultural proficiency and community-cultural wealth, guided this study and assisted in conceptualizing the academic experiences of Latinas who completed a doctoral program, with a specific focus on persistence and program completion rates.

Key Terms: Latinas. Doctor of Education. Persistence. Academic Attainment. Sense of Belonging. Cultural Proficiency. Community-Cultural Wealth.

Chapter One: Introduction

Context and Nature of the Study

Latinas are the least likely to pursue a doctoral degree (Gardner, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2021a). As of fall 2018, Latinas represented 18% of female postsecondary enrollment; conversely, White females represented 52% of total female postsecondary enrollment (NCES, 2022b). Furthermore, pursuing a doctoral degree is not synonymous with degree completion (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Santiago et al., 2016; Spencer & Wilson, 2021). For example, in educational majors, such as a Doctor of Education (EdD), attrition—failure to complete—is estimated between 50%–80% (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Kowalik, 1989; McBrayer et al., 2018). This means that for every 100 students who pursue a doctoral degree, only 20 students persist to degree completion. Given the already small sample of Latinas pursuing the EdD, it can be inferred that Latinas doctoral persistence is small, if not smaller than the general EdD population. This is alarming considering educational attainment is identified as a driver of social and economic mobility for Latinx population in the United States (Contreras & Gándara, 2006).

A Doctor of Education (EdD) is a professional degree designed for practitioners pursuing influential educational leadership roles (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Taysum & Slater, 2014; Underwood & Austin, 2016). In higher education, faculty and administrative positions are considered influential because they yield educators with the access and opportunity needed to enact transformational change on behalf of diverse student populations (Flores, 2020; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2012, 2015). Left unaddressed, the phenomenon of EdD program attrition, coupled with the miniscule number of Latinas advancing in the educational pipeline toward the doctorate, indicates a bleak future for Latinx leadership in academia (Contreras & Gándara,

2006; Gándara & Contreras, 2020; González, 2006a; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Utilizing a dual lens of cultural proficiency and community-cultural wealth, this qualitative study investigated the lived experiences of Latinas across three different graduate programs in Southern California, which offered an EdD in educational leadership. This study centers the Latina doctoral experience and voice, consciously and intentionally, in academic literature as a means of integrating minority narratives into decision–making processes affecting Latinx students (Lindsey et al., 2018; Soles et al., 2020; Yosso, 2013, 2005; Welborn, 2019). This study specifically focused on EdD programs in educational leadership with a blended cohort model in which PreK-12 and higher education concepts were rolled into one continuous program of study. This blended model treats education as a continuum; as such, educators at all levels are exposed to the challenges and opportunities that exist throughout the educational pipeline. In addition to infusing learning spaces with the perspectives, skills, and strengths of diverse education leaders, the cohort model has been linked to increased sense of community and collaboration among students, a strategy proven to positively influence doctoral student persistence among Latina students (Cortez, 2015; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Ramirez, 2017; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Santiago, 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Representation among staff members of color in higher education administration is dismal. It is estimated that people of color represent only 14% of all college and university presidents, and only 19% of managerial, executive, and administrative staff (Betts et al., 2009). Based on the percentages of people of color in these positions, it is likely that Latina representation in similar positions of leadership in higher education is much less. Academic

attainment trends mirror these findings. For example, Latina women represent less than 9% of all doctoral degrees awarded in the United States (Gardner, 2009; NCES, 2021a; Rodriguez et al., 2016). This statistic is cause for concern given the doctorate is a pathway to positions of influential leadership in higher education.

As a result of the lack of Latina leadership in academia, institutional policies and practices affecting Latinx students are often created with little to no Latinx input (Lindsey et al., 2018; Santiago, 2012). This decision-making process leads to a significant gap in higher education policy and practice regarding the needs of college students, in the postsecondary pipeline, who identify as Hispanic (Ballysingh, et al. 2017; Lindsey et al., 2018). It is crucial academic institutions, in California specifically and across the country in general, make concerted efforts to retain and graduate the growing Latinx student population in the higher education pipeline (Contreras, 2019; Flores & Leal, 2020). The findings from this study may prove useful to campus administrators, faculty members, and institutions as they build meaningful, impactful, and successful relationships with their students, specifically Latinas pursuing the EdD.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Latinas who completed an EdD at one of three predetermined programs located in Southern California. Examining the lived experiences of this population using a phenomenological approach—a type of qualitative research—allowed the researcher to capture the essence of community and the ways in which student sense of belonging may have played a role in doctoral persistence, especially among Latinas in EdD programs. This study addresses the following overarching research question: What are the experiences of Latina students during their Doctor

of Education (EdD) program? More specifically, the following questions were used to further assist me in addressing the above question:

1. How do Latina EdD students experience their doctoral program?
2. How do Latina EdD students make sense of and cultivate inclusion, a sense of belonging, and community during their doctoral studies?

Questionnaires, individual interviews, and document review, described in Chapter Three, were utilized to address the above questions.

Significance of the Study

Failure to persist in the Doctor of Education (EdD) affects the individual student and results in significant loss of valuable resources for academia, including rich funds of knowledge, which may aid in the social and academic integration of future diverse student populations (Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Gándara & Contreras, 2020; González, 2006a; Moll & González, 1994; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Furthermore, the EdD attrition phenomenon, along with the few Latina women advancing to the doctorate, foreshadows a dismal future for Latinx leadership in academia (Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Gándara & Contreras, 2020; González, 2006a; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Consequently, stakeholders—academic leaders and policymakers—need to understand culturally proficient strategies for influencing Latinx persistence in the doctorate, so they can make informed decisions that will lead to enhanced educational outcomes for Latinas pursuing the doctorate. Therefore, a culturally proficient examination of the Latina experience in the doctorate may lead to a better understanding of underlying mechanisms involved in the formation and maintenance of social systems, relationships among cohort members, and interactions with faculty within the EdD program (Daly, 2010). Such research may enable educational leaders with the

understanding needed to create and support opportunities to transform educational practices that will lead to enhanced doctoral outcomes for Latinas in EdD programs. Although prior research has been done examining the experiences of Latinas in doctoral programs (Achor & Morales, 1990; Arocho, 2017; González, 2006a; Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012), few have comparatively examined the experiences of Latinas in higher education administration doctoral programs, especially in Southern California. Furthermore, little research has been done to compare and explore the experiences of persisters across multiple public institutions in Southern California. Because of the limited research in the field, the findings of this study provide understanding about the lived experiences of Latinas who completed the EdD in Southern California.

Definition of Terms

Latinx refers to people of Cuban, Mexican, Mexican American, Puerto Rican, South and Central American, or other Spanish ancestry or descent; these may include, but are not limited to, Latinas, Chicanas, Hispanics, or Latin American descent. The "x" in the Latinx term presents a gender-neutral option, thus replacing the gender-binary definition for the Latino racial and ethnic identity (American Psychological Association, 2019).

Latina refers to Latinx females who identify as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana, Puerto Rican or Cuban, as well as those who indicate preference for "another" Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish option (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a).

Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's ancestors before their arrival in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Basic assumptions of this study included the willingness and availability of Latinas to share their experiences in their doctoral program with me as part of this qualitative study. This phenomenological research design consisted of individual 90-minute interviews with nine Latinas who completed an EdD program with a blended K-20 cohort model at one of three predetermined public universities in Southern California. Some of the study participants may have had a difficult time remembering specific details surrounding their experiences as doctoral students. Additionally, others may have had reservations about participating.

Limitations

Creswell (2015) defines limitations as, "potential weaknesses or problems with the study" (p. 197). Qualitative methodologies and designs carry their own inherent limitations, many of which the researcher has little to no control over. For example, as a result of the nature of qualitative research, which tends to occur in natural settings, it is difficult to replicate qualitative studies (Wiersma, 2000). Furthermore, weaknesses may arise due to inadequate measures of variables such as small-size samples, lack and loss of participants, errors in measurement, and other factors typically related to data collection and analysis. However, it is important to note limitations play an important role in advancing academic literature, as they help other researchers identify opportunities, gaps, and recommendations for future studies. Additionally, limitations help the reader determine the extent to which findings may or may not be generalized to other people or situations (Creswell, 2015). Limitations of this phenomenological study include validity and reliability. For example, because of this study's emphasis on narrative data, study participants' ability to accurately recall and recreate experiences from memory may be

considered by some as a limitation of the study design (Josselson & Lieblich, 2003). In addition, integrity and truthfulness of responses collected from participants may also be construed as a limitation. Also, congruent with qualitative research design and the intentionally small participant sample size, the data obtained may not be generalizable (Creswell, 2007; Lunenburg & Irby, 2008; Webster & Mertova, 2007). Finally, as a Latina doctoral student pursuing an EdD in Southern California, my positionality provided me with unique access to participants and deeper understanding of their experiences. However, this same positionality may have inadvertently biased my interpretation of participant responses. To prevent this, I built in validity checks throughout the research design including, but not limited to, reflective memoranda, member-checking with study participants, discussions with faculty mentors, and peer debriefings to decrease the likeliness of researcher bias or misinterpretation of data (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2013).

Delimitations

Unlike limitations which are tied to specific research method and design, delimitations result from specific choices made by the researcher (Creswell, 2015). Delimitations are the characteristics that arise as a result of conscious exclusion and inclusion decisions made during the development of the study. Delimitations of this study include site and sample. As a result of the researcher's decision to sample Latinas who completed an EdD with a blended cohort model at one of three specific public universities in Southern California, there was a concern of scarcity of eligible participants expected to meet the selection criteria. Furthermore, participant narratives collected as part of this study may not represent the stories of all Latina doctoral students' academic experiences. Additionally, participants were provided with a copy of the interview guide in advance to help center the conversation and provide an opportunity for participants to

reflect and recall their EdD experience. Lastly, ethnicities and countries of origin may account for differences in personal and academic experiences. For example, this study did not consider factors specifically associated with Asian, African American, or Native American women. Moreover, this study did not consider the nuances associated with doctoral programs housed in private schools or outside of Southern California, nor did this study consider the differences in the experiences of Latinas pursuing doctorates in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) or humanities fields. Lastly, this study did not include the lived experience of Latinas currently enrolled in or considering an EdD program. However, the specificity of this study was crucial for expanding and advancing academic literature that is severely lacking and often outdated about Latinas and leadership roles.

Chapter Summary

Compared to traditional persistence literature, which is limited in scope and outdated, little research has been done to explore the academic socialization experiences influencing Latina outcomes in Doctor of Education (EdD) programs using cultural proficiency and community-cultural wealth frameworks (Achor & Morales, 1990; Bañuelos, 2006; Espino, 2014; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; González, 2006a; Ramirez, 2017). Therefore, this research provides educational leaders with the understanding needed to create, cultivate, and support opportunities to harness the social capital needed to transform educational practices that will lead to enhanced doctoral outcomes for Latinas in EdD programs. Knowledge and understanding of factors contributing to graduate students' persistence in these graduate programs may aid educational leaders' efforts to meet doctoral students' needs, provide inviting culturally proficient academic experiences, and increase retention and degree completion rates (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). Findings are also used, later in Chapter Five, to identify recommendations for future research and

implications for an asset-based approach to graduate program structures, thus ensuring optimal matriculation rates of Latinas in EdD programs (Castro et al., 2011).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The purpose of this paper is to synthesize empirical research on the academic experiences of Latinx in higher education, with special focus on Latinas and leadership, and its association with doctoral persistence and completion. This chapter provides a foundational overview of the significant and increasing presence of Latinx in the United States, especially in higher education. This is followed by a critical examination and critique of educational policy affecting Latinx students in higher education. Next, I unpack doctoral persistence literature and identify key themes and Latinx–serving strategies for narrowing the Latinx doctoral achievement gap. Lastly, I introduce the dual-lens conceptual frameworks that will guide the research design. For purposes of this paper, Hispanic, Latina/o, Latinx, are used interchangeably as noted in scholarly literature (deOnís, 2017). Furthermore, the "x" in the term Latinx, presents a gender–neutral option for the Latino racial and ethnic identity (American Psychological Association, 2019).

In the United States, Hispanic postbaccalaureate enrollments increased by 164% over the past two decades (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021c). This remarkable increase and upward trajectory of Hispanic student enrollments between 2000–2018 is attributed to several educational access–driven interventions, initiatives, and external supports (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Doran & Singh, 2018; Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Malcom, 2010a, 2010b; Mariscal et al., 2019; Moll & González, 1994; Rodríguez et al., 2016). A notable enrollment–driven strategy is the Hispanic–Serving Institution (HSI) designation. HSI is an access-driven federal designation which is granted, as an incentive, to institutions of higher education which enroll 25% or more full-time Hispanic undergraduate students. By meeting the minimum enrollment threshold academic institutions become eligible for Title V funds (Contreras, 2017; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Malcom, 2010a, 2010b; Moll & González, 1994; Santiago &

Stettner, 2013; Terenzini et al., 1994). However, despite the significant growth of Hispanic students enrolling in higher education, there is not an equally significant increase in program completion rates (NCES, 2021a; Spencer & Wilson, 2021). Analysis of Latino student outcomes over the past two decades reveals graduation rates remain stagnant at 50% (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Santiago et al., 2016; Spencer & Wilson, 2021). The phenomenon of noncompletion speaks to the distinction between providing Latinx students with access to higher education versus providing Latinx students with the culturally relevant tools and supports needed to progress through the educational pipeline (Jack, 2019).

The Hispanic–Serving Institution (HSI) designation is an example of the disconnect that arises as a result of educational policy's failure to meet the needs of students from admission through degree completion (Jack, 2019). For example, the HSI designation incentivizes academic institutions to enroll Latinx undergraduate students with no accountability for ensuring degree completion (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). Despite current literature articulating the central challenge affecting Latinx students is lack of degree attainment, the HSI definition, and absence of accountability metrics have remained unchanged since its implementation in 1992 (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Furthermore, the HSI designation solely focuses on undergraduate students, completely neglecting graduate students (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). If redesigned to include undergraduate and graduate completion accountability measures, informed by the unique academic patterns and experiences of Latinx students, the HSI designation has the potential of exerting a positive impact on completion rates for Latinx scholars across the educational pipeline (Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Gándara & Contreras, 2020).

Traditional persistence models serve as a foundation for many educational reform strategies, including the HSI designation (Payne, 2008). According to existing literature, traditional persistence models were developed with a very specific population in mind—White undergraduate males (Offerman, 2011; Sims & Barnette, 2015; Wyatt, 2011). When applied to Latinx students, traditional persistence models become less reliable at predicting persistence and completion (Metz, 2004). As a result, traditional persistence models fail to provide a robust understanding of the deeply ingrained cultural values, expectations, relationships, and experiences that influence Latinx students' educational choices (Flores et al., 2006; Little, 2010; Ramirez, 2017). Therefore, traditional persistence models—for White students—should not be used to define success or be used to measure educational outcomes for Latinx students unless improvements are made (Castro et al., 2011; Cross, et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2018). If Latinx lived experiences are used as counter-narrative stories to challenge dominant discussions on race, power, and privilege, Latinx students may stand to see greater success. By listening to Latina voices in educational leadership programs, this study offers a counter-narrative to the present predominant view (Ikemoto, 1991; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Latina women pursuing a Doctor of Education (EdD) represent a critical population who could benefit from counter–narratives to inform retention and completion support (Bair & Haworth, 1999; Clewell, 1987; Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017). Latinas represent less than 9% of total women obtaining a doctoral degree (Gardner, 2009; NCES, 2021a). Attrition studies reveal as little as 30% of EdD students persist to graduation (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Kowalik, 1989). These statistics highlight the need for a culturally proficient examination of existing policies, resources, and retention practices affecting Latina women in the

EdD (Lindsey et al., 2018). The following review of literature explores and examines the Latinx pathway to doctoral degree attainment.

Latinx in the United States

At 60.5 million, Latinx are among the fastest growing ethnic minority groups in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2020). It is expected the Latino population will increase by 25% in 2030 and will reach 111 million by 2060 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018b, 2018c). As of 2019, California has the highest Hispanic population, with over 15.57 million, followed by Texas, Florida, New York, and Arizona (Statista Research Department, 2020). Additionally, in California Latinx students currently represent 55% of the K–12 population (Contreras, 2019). At this rate, trends suggest Hispanic girls and women will comprise nearly one-third of the country's female population (Gándara, 2015). As the Hispanic population grows, it is expected academic institutions, including those of higher education, will see a surge of female applicants from the Hispanic community (Bumbry, 2016; Gasman & Bowman, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial academic institutions, in California and across the country, make concerted efforts to retain and graduate the significant population of Latinx students who will transition from K–12 to college (Contreras, 2019; Flores & Leal, 2020).

Latinx in Higher Education

Hispanic postbaccalaureate enrollments have seen a notable influx, from 111,000 to 292,000 students, between the years 2000–2018 (NCES, 2021c). Despite this significant increase in enrollments, Latinx students continue to lag behind White counterparts in almost all aspects of postsecondary academic attainment, including degrees conferred (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; NCES, 2021a, 2021c). Data regarding Latinx student increased enrollment is not synonymous to degree attainment (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Santiago et al., 2016; Spencer & Wilson, 2021).

Furthermore, White students complete postbaccalaureate studies at rates approximately 70% higher than Latinx counterparts (NCES, 2021d). The racial attainment gap in higher education significantly widens when controlling for gender (Castro et al., 2011; NCES, 2021a, 2021c; Watford et al., 2006). For example, White women represent nearly 58% of total doctoral degrees conferred to women, whereas Latinas represent less than 9% of total doctoral degrees conferred to women (NCES, 2021a). The achievement gap problem between Latina and White women at the doctoral level is exacerbated by academic policies and practices incongruent with the unique academic patterns and experiences of Latinx students (Bozick et al., 2007; Contreras, 2019, 2011; Flores et al., 2006; Fry & Taylor, 2013; Lee et al., 2011; Little, 2010; Ramirez, 2017; Santiago, 2012). To explain this further, the following section provides an overview of the unique academic patterns and experiences of Latinx students across the higher education pipeline.

The Characteristics of a Latinx Student

Latinx students have distinct educational choices, experiences, and outcomes compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Flores et al., 2006; Ramirez, 2017). In the literature, Latinx students are considered nontraditional because their academic patterns, such as their educational pathway and academic outcomes, are different from traditional students (Contreras, 2019; Santiago, 2012). A traditional student, as defined by the literature, refers to a White undergraduate male 18–24 years of age (Offerman, 2011). Unlike traditional students who generally attend four–year institutions directly after high school, Latinx students typically start their higher education journey at a community college (Bozick et al., 2007; Contreras, 2011; Fry & Taylor, 2013). For traditional students, time for degree completion ranges between 4–6 years (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Offerman, 2011; Sims & Barnette, 2015; Wyatt, 2011).

Conversely, for Latinx students such range is approximately nine years (Lee et al., 2011). Corollary data reveal the decision to attend community college rather than a four–year institution immediately after high school negatively impacts Latinx student outcomes across the educational pipeline (Contreras, 2011; Contreras et al., 2008). For example, extended time to degree completion for Latinx students yields higher levels of attrition (Contreras, 2011; Contreras et al., 2008). Higher levels of Latinx attrition culminate in an even smaller pipeline of Latinx students making their way to graduate school, to terminal degrees, or into faculty positions in higher education (Flores, 2020; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2012, 2015).

Policy Affecting the Latinx Pipeline

Early scholarship on Latinx academic attainment identified access to higher education as the primary impediment affecting the upward mobility of the Latinx community (Contreras & Gándara, 2006). As a result, educators and policymakers focus efforts on access–driven interventions, initiatives, and external supports, such as the Hispanic–Serving Institution (HSI) designation, to increase Latinx enrollments significantly (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Doran & Singh, 2018; Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Malcom, 2010a, 2010b; Mariscal et al., 2019; Moll & González, 1994; Rodríguez et al., 2016). As a result of the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, an institution of higher education can obtain the federal HSI distinction by enrolling 25% or more Hispanic full–time equivalent undergraduate students per academic year (Calderón Galdeano et al., 2012; Garcia, 2013; Santiago, 2012). By meeting the enrollment threshold, HSIs become eligible to apply for Title V funding. Title V is part of the Developing Hispanic–Serving Institutions Program, which provides federal grants to assist HSIs in their effort to expand and improve educational outcomes for Hispanic students (Flores & Leal, 2020; U.S. Department of Education, 2021).

Hispanic–Serving Institution is a federal designation; its creation and formal recognition signal an awareness of the growing Latinx population and a need to allocate educational resources to advance the economic mobility of the Hispanic community (Contreras & Gándara, 2006). Nearly half of all Latinx students enroll at a Hispanic–Serving Institution (Flores et al., 2006; Santiago, 2012), thus indicating that HSIs are a pipeline to educational access for the Latinx community (Contreras & Gandara, 2006). However, despite enrolling increasing numbers of Latinx students, HSIs are not seeing equally high program completion rates, reaffirming the notion that access does not ensure completion (Contreras, 2017; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Jack, 2019; NCES, 2021a; Spencer & Wilson, 2021). The phenomenon of noncompletion suggests access to higher education is only part of the challenge affecting the Latinx pipeline. As such the HSI designation warrants further examination.

Critical Analysis of the Hispanic–Serving Institution (HSI) Designation

By federal definition, Hispanic–Serving Institution (HSI) outcomes are heavily weighted toward enrollment with little incentive or attention on program completion (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). A more fitting term for many HSIs would be Hispanic–Enrolling Institution, in which the focus is enrolling Hispanic students (Ballysingh et al., 2017; Flores et al., 2006; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015), whereas the true mission of a Hispanic–Serving Institution would focus on serving student needs beyond enrollment and ensuring program completion (Ballysingh et al., 2017; Flores et al., 2006; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Several studies have explored critical mass theory (CMT) to explain rationale and limitations of the HSI designation (Garcia, 2013; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Santiago, 2012; Valverde & Rodriguez, 2002). CMT assumes that once a group reaches a certain size within a given organization, the institution will adapt its practices, including organizational culture and norms, to meet the needs of said population (Santiago, 2006,

2012). In the case of HSIs, 25% undergraduate full–time equivalent enrollment is defined as the critical mass needed to effect change (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). However, as previously noted, an increased percentage of Latinx students does not significantly influence their graduation rates (Garcia, 2013). CMT is highly predicated on the assumption that institutions are willing and motivated to adapt their educational practices to meet the needs of Hispanic students leading to degree completion. Under the CMT framework, there are two critical components associated with completion: access and retention strategies. Based on the current HSI definition, institutions are incentivized to focus solely on access (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Flores & Leal, 2020; Garcia, 2013; Rodríguez et al., 2016). Because of the commodification—action or process of reducing someone's value and turning it into a form of capital—of Hispanic student enrollments—a process in higher education that yields more negative consequences than positive ones—many institutions have failed to rise to the challenge of truly serving Hispanic student needs through the educational pipeline. As a result, Hispanic students are not matriculating through the educational pipeline toward doctoral degree completion (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Flores & Leal, 2020; Garcia, 2013; Rodríguez et al., 2016). The current Hispanic–Serving Institution (HSI) definition fails to include the nontraditional academic patterns found among Hispanic populations, including part–time and transfer student status (Contreras, 2019; Santiago, 2012). Furthermore, the current HSI definition completely excludes subsets of the higher education pipeline including graduate students and adult learners (Cherrstrom et al., 2018; Kowalik, 1989; Offerman, 2011; Wyatt, 2011). These examples highlight the difference between providing someone with access to education versus providing access to relevant educational pathways (Jack, 2019). Moreover, these examples

underscore the inability of currently designated HSI institutions to meet the needs of all Hispanic students in higher education.

As a result of increased demographics, the Latinx population may be able to make significant contributions to the economy (Pew Research Center, 2020; Contreras & Gándara, 2006). Early scholars identified academic attainment as the primary means for boosting the Latinx ability to participate in the economy (Ballysingh et al., 2017). As such, researchers implored academic leaders and government agents to focus on raising Latinx enrollments by increasing access to higher education. This resulted in a number of access–driven initiatives aimed at increasing the Latinx student presence in higher education, including the HSI designation (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Doran & Singh, 2018; Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Malcom, 2010a, 2010b; Mariscal et al., 2019; Moll & González, 1994; Rodríguez et al., 2016). However, to much chagrin, the HSI designation resulted in less than satisfactory academic performance (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Santiago et al., 2016; Spencer & Wilson, 2021). The HSI designation, as is currently defined and measured, is not enough to ensure degree completion for Hispanic students.

Persistence

The suboptimal performance of Latinx students in higher education has prompted scholarly critique of previous access–driven initiatives, such as Contreras & Contreras, (2015). From this critique arose persistence literature which posits attrition, failure to persist, as a significant challenge affecting Latinx economic and social mobility (Ballysingh et al., 2017). Persistence and attrition are well documented in educational research (Astin, 1970, 1975, 1985; Bean 1980, Bean & Metzner, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto 1975, 1993). The most cited persistence theory is Tinto's (1975) Integration theory, which suggests a correlation between students'

involvement in social and academic aspects of learning and program completion. Tinto's theory implies students are responsible for integrating into the academic sphere, whereas his predecessor, Spady (1970), places the responsibility of attrition mitigation on the academic institution. Subsequent persistence theorists, such as Bean (1980), focus on student motivations to persist and draw parallels between student and employee retention. Except for Bean and Metzner (1985), who include transfer students, each of the aforementioned persistence theories center around the experiences of the traditional undergraduate student. Traditional undergraduate student characteristics, as defined by literature, include being a White male, 18–24 years old, attending a full–time residential four–year institution (Offerman, 2011; Sims & Barnette, 2015; Wyatt, 2011). This is in stark contrast to the Latinx student who attends community college, typically a Hispanic–Serving Institution (HSI), part–time. Despite being highly ineffective at capturing the rich Latinx scholar narrative, traditional persistence models continue to serve as a foundation for many educational reform strategies affecting Latinx students (Flores et al., 2006; González & Morrison, 2016; Little, 2010; Payne, 2008; Ramirez, 2017; Tierney, 1992). Furthermore, with the addition of aggregated variables, including terminal degree, gender, racial, and ethnic group traditional persistence models become highly ineffective at predicting outcomes (Castro et al., 2011; Watford et al., 2006). More specifically, traditional persistence models do not account for the nuanced experiences associated with being a nontraditional doctoral student.

For Latinx student's traditional persistence models do not accurately reflect the active negotiation of multiple intersectionalities, such as being Latina, mother, wife, full–time student, and professional pursuing a doctoral degree in education (Lehan et al., 2021; Offerman, 2011; Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; West et al., 2011). Therefore, traditional persistence models should not be used to define success, measure

educational outcomes, or be used to validate and uphold current policy and practice affecting persistence and completion of Latinas pursuing a doctorate.

Persistence and the EdD

Studies indicate 40%–60% of students who begin their doctoral studies do not persist to graduation (Bowen & Rudenstine, 1992; Golde, 2005; Ivankova, & Stick, 2007; Sowell et al., 2015; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Moreover, in educational majors, such as a Doctor of Education (EdD), attrition is estimated to be between 50%–80% (Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Kowalik, 1989; McBrayer et al., 2018). This statistic is further compounded for women and other minorities (Bair & Haworth, 1999; Clewell, 1987; Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017). This is alarming considering a Doctor of Education (EdD) is a professional degree designed for practitioners pursuing educational leadership roles (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Taysum & Slater, 2014; Underwood & Austin, 2016). In higher education, these leadership roles include, but are not limited to, specific functional areas of campus: faculty, deans, chancellors, and presidents. These leadership roles are considered influential because they provide educators with access and opportunity to insert diverse perspectives needed to enact transformational change on behalf of historically marginalized students (Flores, 2020; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2012, 2015). For example, diverse educators are more inclined to mentor diverse students, serve as role models for diverse students, and provide diverse perspectives and approaches to pedagogy to help students challenge structures and policies serving as barriers to degree attainment (Flores, 2020; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2012, 2015). Alternatively, EdD graduates may also find themselves in leadership roles, which are adjacent to academia, public office, foundations, nonprofit and for–profit institutions, which also afford opportunity to influence education, policy, and practice (Komives & Taub, 2000; Maddox, 2017). Using a feedback loop, a process in which the Latinx student

experience is incorporated into the development of educational practice and policy, it is imperative Latina women complete the EdD to position themselves in leadership roles on and off campus, thus affording space to transform the next generation of Latinx scholars and educators (Flores, 2020; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Jackson et al., 2018; Pauley et al., 1999).

The EdD

Doctor of Education (EdD) programs vary in size, format, and program focus. For example, there are specialized EdD programs which treat K–12 and higher education leadership as separate programs independent of one another. Alternatively, there is an EdD in educational leadership which blends PreK–12 and higher education concepts into one continuous program of study. A Google search of "EdD programs in California" generated a preliminary list of thirty-eight universities offering an EdD**.** Twenty-four of these universities offer an EdD in educational leadership, combining PreK–12 and higher education concepts into one continuous program of study. The highest concentration of these schools, with a total of sixteen, are in Southern California. EdD programs have several factors in common, including program focus, degree format, and degree length. Additionally, these programs differ in significant ways, including their anchor institution, federal–designation status, and number of degrees conferred to Latinas.

Nontraditional Doctoral Students

The EdD is filled with nontraditional doctoral students, also known as adult learners (Kowalik, 1989; Pauley et al., 1999; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014). Unlike traditional doctoral (PhD) students, EdD students are expected to have extensive leadership experience in an academic setting. Thus, EdD students tend to be older, have more work experience, be at different life cycles, have different needs, motivations, commitments, and experiences than traditional PhD students (Kowalik, 1989; Pauley et al., 1999; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson–

Szapkiw et al., 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Tran et al., 2016; Valverde & Rodriguez, 2002; West et al., 2011). For example, adult learner needs include financial stability, strong family support structures, culturally and professionally relevant curriculum, and rich programmatic resources including faculty and peer relationships (Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; West et al., 2011). Nontraditional student motivations consist of career advancement opportunities, financial incentives, a promotion at work, as well as intrinsic motivations such as self–fulfillment (Pauley et al., 1999; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson–Szapkiw, 2012). Adult learner expectations include clear program communications about time to degree completion, financial cost of the program, mutual respect, and understanding of personal and professional commitments (Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014). Nontraditional student commitments include professional and personal engagements such as work priorities and deadlines, as well as sustainability of family, partner, and friendship connections (Tran et al., 2016).

Historically, academic institutions have tasked students with the responsibility of integrating or assimilating to fit the institution's academic culture (González & Morrison, 2016; Ramirez, 2017; Rendón et al, 2000; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1975). This approach has continued over the years due largely in part to traditional students' ability to integrate seamlessly and assimilate willingly into the academic culture in order to persist (Astin, 1970, 1975, 1985; Bean 1980, Bean & Metzner, 1985; Spady, 1970; Tinto 1975, 1993). The approach further encourages students to abandon their cultural backgrounds to fit into an academic campus mold (González & Morrison, 2016; Ramirez, 2017; Tierney, 1992). Primary critique of traditional persistence theory is the assumption Latinx students are able and willing to dissociate from their culture to persist in academia (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Gonzalez & Morrison, 2016; Tierney, 1992). However,

given the significant increase in Hispanic postbaccalaureate enrollments over the past two decades, at 164%, it is critical scholarship be conducted to explore educational access, persistence models, and completion methods that eliminate the need for nontraditional students to decide between being their authentic selves and attaining degree completion (NCES, 2021a, 2021c; Offerman, 2011; Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; West et al., 2011).

One population of nontraditional learners requiring immediate attention is Latina women pursuing a Doctor of Education (EdD). Latinas in the EdD often negotiate multiple personal, professional, and academic intersectionalities: mother, wife, daughter, sister, aunt, cousin, full–time employee, and full–time student (Lehan et al., 2021; Offerman, 2011; Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; West et al., 2011). As a result, Latina women in the EdD require novel support structures, outcomes and assessment metrics targeted at increasing doctoral persistence to degree completion. Narrowing the achievement gap for Latinas in the EdD requires an examination and innovative overhaul of existing systemic policies affecting persistence and completion rates, utilizing the lens of the nontraditional student, their needs, motivations, expectations, and commitments (Kowalik, 1989; Pauley et al., 1999; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson–Szapkiw, 2012; Tran et al., 2016; Valverde & Rodriguez, 2002; West et al., 2011). To shed additional insights on this need, the following section highlights scholarly persistence strategies and recommendations for narrowing the Latina achievement gap in doctoral programs.

Sense of Belonging

Existing literature contends students increased *sense of belonging* positively correlates with Latina doctoral persistence levels (Abrica & Rivas, 2017; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Garcia,

2013; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Griffin et al., 2012; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The sense of belonging in academia refers to feelings of connectedness (O'Meara et al., 2017). Thus, connectedness is positively correlated to doctoral students' intent to persist (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Rodríguez et al., 2016). Strategies proven to influence doctoral student connectedness include academic cohorts and faculty support (Cortez, 2015; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Ramirez, 2017; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Santiago, 2008). Since the cohort model and faculty support appear to correlate with levels of persistence, the following sections provide a synthesis of literature on the ways in which cohorts and faculty influence Latina doctoral student's levels of persistence.

Cohorts

Scholarly literature highlights academic cohorts as one strategy for increasing connectedness in the doctorate (Cortez, 2011, 2015; Cummins, 1996; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Kezar & Lesther, 2011; Ladson–Billings, 2005; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Moll & González, 1994; Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011; Pauley et al., 1999; Rendón, 1994; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Santiago, 2008; Tran et al., 2016). Specifically, a cohort is defined as a group of students, who start, proceed, and typically complete a program of study together (Lei et al., 2011). The cohort model emphasizes cohesion among peers throughout the doctoral journey which helps foster dynamics of community and connectedness, culminates in an increased sense of belonging, and positively influences persistence levels (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Rodríguez et al., 2016).

Research demonstrates cohort models support students by aiding in the exchange of social capital and resources needed to persist to degree completion (Hyatt & Williams, 2011; Nimer, 2009; Williams et al., 2010). Social capital, as derived from networks, is a form of

wealth, like money, that affords students the opportunity to make the necessary connections needed to advance in academia (Lin, 2002). Furthermore, network theories suggest a correlation between retention, relationships, and support among academic networks (Johnson et al., 2004). According to the network paradigm, knowledge and information sharing are directly influenced by the quality of ties one has in a particular network (Daly, 2010; Scott, 2011). As such, building and supporting relationships within and among networks is a critical way to access, borrow, and leverage social capital within organizations (Ayala & Contreras, 2019).

Persistence literature identifies an increased sense of belonging, which results from peer support in the form of cohorts, is also proven to help bridge the gap between student and scholar, yielding positive persistence correlation (Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017). Doctoral students experience graduate school in two distinct stages; namely, coursework and dissertation writing, according to West et al. (2011). These researchers also contend that a key distinction between these two phases is the former when described as a shared experience involving high levels of structured peer and faculty interaction in the classroom. Conversely, the dissertation stage is described as a solitary unstructured writing process (West et al., 2011). Research on the challenges associated with doctoral completion identifies the dissertation stage as one of the most significant challenges affecting persistence (Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017). The phenomenon of dissertation noncompletion is commonly referred to as All-But-Dissertation (ABD). Studies suggest doctoral attrition in the ABD stage is exacerbated by students' feelings of social isolation caused by the transition from group coursework to individual dissertation writing (West et al., 2011). Doctoral persistence literature further identifies cohorts as a tool which can be used to combat feelings of isolation (Abrica & Rivas, 2017; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Garcia,

2013; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Griffin et al., 2012; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Faculty

Acceptance and validation from formal institutional agents, such as faculty, can help students transform feelings of self–doubt into a sense of belonging, thus allowing them to persist and develop a passion for education (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Terenzini et al., 1994). Formal institutional agents are defined as educators considered to hold power or authority (Soles et al., 2020; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). In academia, institutional agents include faculty, administrators, mentors, advisors, and dissertation chairs (Soles et al., 2020). These positions are considered formal representatives of the institution because they are often tasked with developing programmatic support structures for students (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; West et al., 2011). Support structures include culturally relevant pedagogy and mentorship, both of which positively influence overall campus climate (Cherrstrom et al., 2018; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Milem, 2003; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). As defined by the literature, campus climate refers to students' interpersonal interactions, perceptions, attitudes, experiences, and expectations associated with campus (Cress, 2002; Woodard & Sims, 2000). Data demonstrate positive campus climate contributes to doctoral students' sense of belonging (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Rodríguez et al., 2016). Furthermore, scholarly literature identifies the purposeful hiring of Latinx faculty and staff as a key strategy for increasing Latina students' sense of belonging and connectedness in the doctorate (Rendón, 1994; Pauley et al., 1999; Tran et al., 2016).

Research demonstrates Latinx faculty and staff play a significant role in transforming Latinx students into powerful learners (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Santos & Acevedo–Gil,

2013; Rendón, 1994), as these faculty are more likely to mentor and serve as empowerment agents for Latinx students (Contreras, 2017; Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015; Milem, 2003). Empowerment agents use their positionality within academia to provide Latinx students with needed institutional support and resources to navigate institutional systems effectively, thus empowering minority students to participate actively and complete the academic process (Bañuelos & Flores; 2021; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Researchers suggest culturally responsive teaching (CRT) in postsecondary education has the potential to increase Latinx student retention (Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011). CRT is defined as intentionally infusing students' cultural identities into all aspects of the learning process (Ladson–Billings, 2005; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This practice validates students' cultural identity as part of the learning process by infusing students' funds of knowledge into teaching practices to create learning communities (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Moll & González, 1994). Funds of knowledge refers to the wealth of cultural resources available within and among Latinx communities including students, parents, and other formal and nonformal members of the group (González, 2006b; Mariscal et al., 2019). This model is centered on a collaborative power relationship, which empowers students and professors to share the role of teacher and learner (Cummins, 1996). However, not all students are expected to learn or get involved in institutional life in the same way, making Latinx faculty–student interaction even more imperative (Contreras, 2019; Kowalik, 1989; Rendón, 1994; Santiago, 2012).

Program Completion

The phenomenon of Latina doctoral noncompletion is attributed to the complexities of persistence, including sense of belonging principally, which is further compounded by intersectionalities of power, privilege, ethnicity, and gender (Arocho, 2017; Cummins, 1996;

Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017; Zamudio et al., 2019). As a result of being culturally devoid, traditional persistence frameworks, when applied to nontraditional students, become a counter-productive means of assessing the student experience (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; González & Morrison, 2016; Tierney, 1992).

Literature addressing the Latina doctoral degree completion gap requires culturally relevant policy and practice derived from Latina doctoral experiences, such as personal stories (Arocho, 2017; Castro et al., 2011; Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Cross et al., 1989; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Golde, 2005; González, 2006a; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Ladson–Billings, 2005; Pauley et al., 1999; Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw, 2019; West et al., 2011). Personal narrative is the autobiographical story people tell about their lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Gaydos, 2005). Storytelling has the capacity to portray abstract concepts into relatable experiences, an essential component needed to increase educational leaders' understanding of doctoral completion (Mertler, 2021; Vargas; 2020).

This document coalesced literature on the Latinx educational pipeline into two overarching sections: Part one provided an overview of Latinx in the United States, the pipeline to higher education, and examined educational policy affecting Latinx students in higher education. Part two explored persistence levels in doctoral programs and identified a key theme-sense of belonging- and support strategies for narrowing the doctoral achievement gap for Latinx students pursuing a Doctor of Education (EdD). Knowledge and understanding of factors contributing to graduate students' persistence in doctoral programs may aid educational leaders in efforts to meet doctoral students' needs, provide inviting culturally proficient academic experiences, and increase retention and degree completion rates (Ivankova & Stick, 2007).

Conceptual Framework

Cultural proficiency and community-cultural wealth as dual-lens framework served to conceptualize doctoral program completion rates. Utilizing this dual lens, this literature review critically examined empirical research on the academic experience of Latinx students in higher education, and its association with doctoral program persistence and completion rates.

Cultural Proficiency

One way to infuse relatable, personal experiences into the educational paradigm is through the understanding of cultural competence across educational systems based on Cross et al.'s (1989) findings. In their monograph, Towards A Culturally Competent System of Care, Cross et al. introduce cultural competence as a philosophical framework for improving service delivery to children of color. In this context, these authors define cultural competence as a developmental process, consisting of behaviors, attitudes, and policies, within a given system, which equip professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. This model emphasizes the value of a strengths-based approach to navigating cultural differences and simultaneously highlights the importance of meeting the needs of minority clients in the context of their culture (Cross et al., 1989).

Lindsey et al. (2018) expand the cultural competence framework to provide educators and organizations with unifying language and concepts to help center transformational work on the needs of students. The cultural proficiency framework, as adapted by Lindsey et al., consists of four tools: the Barriers to Cultural Proficiency, the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency, the Cultural Proficiency Continuum, and the Essential Elements of Cultural Proficiency. In the words of these authors,

> To provide further context, the Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency provide the moral framework, or rationale, for doing what is right and responding to the

> Barriers to Cultural Proficiency. Then, the Cultural Proficiency Continuum describes a range of unhealthy and healthy values, behaviors, policies, and practices. Finally, with those tools providing perspective, the essential elements guide the intentional selection and use of ethical educator behaviors and school practices that promote equitable outcomes for all students. (p. 143)

The cultural proficiency framework, informed by cultural competence, emphasizes the importance of consciously and intentionally integrating minority narratives into decision-making processes (Welborn, 2019).

Community-Cultural Wealth

Scholarly literature calls for the infusion of Latinx student voices as a means of countering deficit-based understandings of Latinx student outcomes; such views permeate academic literature. More specifically, community-cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) serves as a framework to center the Latina student experience and voice in academia. Yosso's community-cultural wealth framework highlights Latina cultural wealth as a valuable resource aiding graduate students' sense of belonging and empowerment. Community-cultural wealth is defined as the historically undervalued and unacknowledged skills, abilities, and social networks utilized by communities of color to survive and resist both macro and micro-forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005). Yosso identified six forms of cultural wealth capital: aspirational, linguistic, social, navigational, familial, and resistance. Aspirational capital refers to the "ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers'' (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Linguistic capital "includes the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). Familial capital "refers to those cultural knowledge elements nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community and history, memory, and cultural intuition" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Social capital signifies networks of people that enable access to information, knowledge, or resources (Bourdieu, 1972; Yosso, 2005). Navigational capital refers to the skills needed to maneuver

institutions, such as education (Yosso, 2005). Resistance capital is the knowledge and skill that develop from having "oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). Scholars suggest resistance capital, derived from community-cultural wealth, may yield positive effects on Latina student retention, persistence, and degree attainment (Coleman, 1998; Putnam, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Yosso, 2005). As such, community-cultural wealth provided a lens to explore capital Latina doctoral students brought with them and to help understand the various meanings study participants assigned to their graduate student experiences.

Addressing current and future challenges associated with Latina doctoral program completion requires a new way of thinking, one which places value on the individuality of each student and the rich funds of knowledge each brings to the learning environment (Cross et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2018; Mariscal et al., 2019; Moll & González, 1994). This claim is further supported by studies that suggest student voice is a critical empowerment tool for validating student perspectives, experiences, and expectations (Estrada, 2017). Furthermore, researchers posit students' perspectives are a much–needed resource for building responsive school cultures, meaningful and effective instructional practice, and relevant support for the personal growth of all students (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). Moreover, critical race theorists advocate for the incorporation of voices that provide an oppositional perspective to the master narrative permeating institutions of learning (Zamudio et al., 2019). Counter-narrative, as defined by the literature, is a form of resistance, it is a method of telling the stories of people whose experience is often excluded from traditional teachings (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Vargas, 2020). According to the literature, counter–narrative is a tool to help uncover, explore, and question mainstream stories cloaked in racial privilege (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Vargas, 2020). In this context, personal stories present a critical tool to decentralize the master–narrative and inform

persistence practices leading to enhanced educational outcomes, completion, for Latina students in the EdD (Vargas, 2020).

Stories empower communities to voice their experience and put a face to the injustices and inequalities embedded within the educational system (Vargas, 2020). This creates space for all learners to begin to see themselves in academia, resulting in increased sense of belonging (Cross et al., 1989; Cummins, 1996; Lindsey et al., 2018). Consequently, centering the counter–narrative of Latina students, is a culturally proficient means by which to approach, explore, and address the Latina doctoral achievement gap (Arocho, 2017; Cummins, 1996; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017; Zamudio et al., 2019). Knowledge and understanding of factors contributing to and hindering students' persistence in doctoral programs, such as the ones explored in this literature review, may aid policymakers and educational leaders in their efforts to ensure optimal persistence and completion rates of all students (Castro et al., 2011; Cross, et al., 1989; Lindsey et al., 2018).

Counter–narrative and Program Completion

Addressing Latina persistence in the Doctor of Education (EdD) requires a multidimensional holistic approach, one that looks beyond the scope of access and into the core of inclusion (Jack, 2019). This requires a culturally proficient examination of existing policies, resources, and retention practices affecting Latina women in the EdD (Lindsey et al., 2018). According to existing literature, counter–narrative is a culturally proficient means of exploring the Latina experience in higher education and improving policies which negatively influence Latina doctoral completion, such as the Hispanic–Serving Institution (HSI) designation (Ikemoto, 1991; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

Hispanic–Serving Institutions (HSIs) have successfully navigated the enrollment of Latinx students (Flores et al., 2006; Santiago, 2012). However, because of the HSIs enrollment focused definition, HSIs fail to serve and retain Latinx students (Contreras, 2017; Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Jack, 2019; NCES, 2021a; Spencer & Wilson, 2021). To be effective, HSIs must make explicit institutional efforts to recruit, retain, and graduate Latinx students (Flores & Leal, 2020). One such way to demonstrate *servingness,* in addition to enrolling Hispanic students, is to incorporate culturally relevant practices into the institution's core mission, vision, and purpose (Flores & Leal, 2020; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Garcia et al., 2019; Lindsey et al., 2018). Relevant institutional practices for meeting the needs of Latina students in the EdD include student support programs and culturally proficient curriculum (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015).

One opportunity to inform policy and practice, affecting doctoral program completion, is to utilize Latina doctoral students' counter–narratives to expand the Hispanic–Serving Institution (HSI) definition to account for the unique academic patterns and experiences of Latinx students throughout the educational pipeline (Jack, 2019; Vargas, 2020). Reimagining the HSI designation by utilizing the dual lens of cultural proficiency and community-cultural wealth may help academic institutions close the achievement gap for Latinas pursuing a Doctor of Education.

Literature Review Summary

The Latinx pathway to leadership is distinct compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Flores et al., 2006; Ramirez, 2017). As a result of educational choices—the tendency to enroll in community college instead of a four-year university—Latinx students have greater exposure to academic barriers—increased time to degree completion—which directly affect student outcomes—increased levels of attrition resulting in a stunted pipeline of Latinx matriculating through the educational pipeline into positions of influence in academia (Contreras, 2019;

Santiago, 2012). This is cause for concern given persistence literature indicates the presence of Latinx faculty, and administrators, in higher education play a critical role in fostering academic excellence, mentorship, and overall campus climate—Latinx student belonging factors associated with Latinx student persistence (Cherrstrom et al., 2018; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Milem, 2003; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). Despite correlating persistence literature Latinx faculty and administrators continue to lag behind White counterparts in higher education (NCES, 2021e).

Increasing Latinx leadership in academia requires a culturally proficient examination of the Latinx experience in higher education (Kowalik, 1989; Pauley et al., 1999; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson–Szapkiw, 2012; Tran et al., 2016; Valverde & Rodriguez, 2002; West et al., 2011). Paying specific attention to Latina students pursuing a Doctor of Education (EdD) as an identified pathway to positions of leadership in academia (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Underwood & Austin, 2016; Taysum & Slater, 2014). Furthermore, according to the literature, there exists a need to conduct an innovative overhaul of existing systemic policies affecting persistence and completion rates of Latinx in higher education (Kowalik, 1989; Pauley et al., 1999; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson–Szapkiw, 2012; Tran et al., 2016; Valverde & Rodriguez, 2002; West et al., 2011). Cultural proficiency and community-cultural wealth, the dual-lens conceptual framework guiding this study provided an opportunity to conceptualize the academic experience of Latinx students in higher education, as well as its association with doctoral program persistence and completion rates. This asset-based dual-lens emphasizes the importance of centering the Latina student experience and voice in academia as both a resource for administrators and source of empowerment for Latinx students (Yosso, 2005). For example, if the Hispanic–Serving

Institution (HSI) designation is redesigned to include culturally relevant undergraduate and graduate completion accountability measures, it has the potential to positively impact sense of belonging whereby increasing completion rates for Latinx scholars across through the educational pipeline (Contreras & Gándara, 2006; Gándara & Contreras, 2020).

Chapter Three: Methodology

Research Design

Overview

This chapter provides a description of the various components of the research study, including methodological design and tools used to examine collected data. I begin by introducing the nature of the problem and describe phenomenological research and why I chose to use it as my methodology and methodological tools. Next, I state my research questions. Afterward, I describe the research settings, selection criteria, and sites. Subsequently, I discuss sample size, study participants, and sampling invitations. The following sections describe data collection processes, including questionnaires, interviews, and document review and data analysis. Finally, I address trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study.

Research Design

As a result of the lack of Latinx representation in positions of leadership in higher education, this qualitative study explored the lived academic experiences of Latinas from three Doctor of Education (EdD) programs located in Southern California. Knowledge and understanding of factors contributing to Latina graduate students' persistence in doctoral programs may aid educational leaders in efforts to meet doctoral students' needs, provide inviting culturally proficient academic experiences, and increase retention and degree completion rates (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). Findings may also be used to identify recommendations for future research and implications for an asset-based approach to graduate program structures thus ensuring optimal matriculation rates of Latinas in EdD programs (Castro et al., 2011).

This study used a qualitative approach to explore the narrative of Latinas who have completed the EdD. A qualitative approach was best suited for the purpose of this study which

sought to understand the doctoral experience from the participants' perspective (Creswell, 2007; Lareau, 2021). Qualitative research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data, largely narrative and visual in nature (Mertler, 2021). Unlike quantitative studies, which focus on numerical data, qualitative studies place greater emphasis on capturing descriptions that are thick and rich in detail (Mertler, 2021). In particular, this study utilized a phenomenological approach to expose the underlying structures associated with a shared social experience (Fraenkel et al., 2012; Mertens, 2005). The goal of this approach was to understand better how people make sense and meaning out of their daily lives (Bogden & Biklen; 2007). Key in such research is the ability to center the voice of the person who has experienced the phenomenon. In essence, the study participant is viewed as the subject matter expert (Lareau, 2021; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). As a result, the final product of phenomenological inquiry is a thick description and understanding of what it is like to have experienced that phenomenon. In this case, Latina doctoral students were poised to speak on their lived experiences navigating the EdD.

Research Questions Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of Latinas who completed an EdD at one of three predetermined programs located in Southern California. Exploring the phenomenon of lived experiences in this case represented the focal point of this research. The following sub-questions further assisted me in addressing overarching theme:

1. How do Latina EdD students experience their doctoral program?
2. How do Latina EdD students make sense of and cultivate inclusion, belonging, and community during their doctoral studies?

Questionnaires to recruit study participants, individual interview questions with study participants, and document reviews associated with EdD programs in educational leadership, described below, were utilized to address the above questions.

Settings, Selection Criteria, and Sites

To capture cross-sectional data, I solicited Latina perspectives from three different graduate programs in Southern California, which offer a blended, cohort-based EdD in educational leadership. The blended EdD in educational leadership combines PreK-12 and higher education concepts into one continuous program of study. The blended PreK-20 educational continuum is unlike specialized EdD programs which treat K-12 and higher education leadership as separate programs and independent of one another. On the other hand, the blended cohort model infuses learning spaces with the perspectives, skills, and strengths of diverse education leaders. According to the literature, this model fosters a culture of community and collaboration among cohort members, a strategy proven to influence doctoral student connectedness (Cortez, 2015; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Ramirez, 2017; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Santiago, 2008). Connectedness, resulting from the cohort model, has been identified as fostering an increased sense of belonging among Latinas in higher education (Ramirez, 2017). According to persistence models found in literature, students increased sense of belonging is positively correlated with Latina doctoral persistence (Abrica & Rivas, 2017; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Garcia, 2013; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Griffin et al., 2012; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

For purposes of this study, I focused on EdD programs located in Southern California. In order to preserve anonymity, I assigned the following pseudonyms: University One, University Two, and University Three. These schools were chosen utilizing maximum variation principle. The goal of this strategy was to build the complexity of the world into the research design

(Mertler, 2021). This was done by identifying specific characteristics and then purposefully selecting sites and individuals who displayed different dimensions or qualities of that characteristic (Mertler, 2021). The three programs selected for this study have several factors in common, including EdD program focus, degree format, and degree length. These programs differ in significant ways, including their anchor institution, federal designation status, and the number of degrees conferred to Latina women. This variation increased the likelihood of finding participants who were information rich (Creswell, 2015), which is essential for carrying out qualitative research. The following is a summary of each institution.

University One

This site is federally recognized as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI), Minority-Serving Institution (MSI), and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI). The Doctor of Education (EdD) at University One is designed for those who seek leadership roles in educational organizations and are committed to addressing the challenges of urban education through relevant and meaningful scholarship and practitioner-based inquiry.

University Two

This site is an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution (eHSI). The EdD in educational leadership curriculum at University Two spans the PreK-16 spectrum, focusing specifically on the needs of Southern California.

University Three

This site is an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution (eHSI). University Three offers a joint Doctor of Education (EdD) program which focuses thematically on advancing social justice.

Study Participants

Participants for this study were Latinas who completed an EdD program with an educational leadership focus. This study included nine study participants. Criteria for selecting study participants included: (1) admitted to an EdD program, in Southern California, with an educational leadership focus; (2) have graduated, withdrawn, or been terminated from said EdD program; and (3) identify as Latina, defined here as individuals of Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana, Puerto Rican, or Cuban descent—those who indicate that they are another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin. Origin includes heritage, nationality, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's ancestors before arrival in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2022a).

Data Collection

This study utilized a phenomenological approach, which focused on individuals who can accurately speak to the phenomenon at hand (Mertler, 2021). For this study, the target participant saturation was nine Latinas who reached EdD program completion. Qualitative research suggests this number of study participants is large and varied enough to capture adequately the phenomenon in rich detail (Grossoehme, 2014; Malterud et al., 2016). The goal of this phenomenological study was to portray accurately a particular group's phenomenon, where the quality of data is by far more relevant than the sheer quantity of such data. As a result, this sample size was sufficient for gathering rich descriptions of the participants' lived experiences.

Participants were recruited from three designated programs using purposeful and snowball-sampling techniques, until the saturation goal was met. Purposeful sampling is a method of recruiting study participants who fit specific criteria and possess experience with a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). Snowball sampling occurs because of personal

recommendation (Creswell, 2015). In this case, existing participants were asked to refer a friend, colleague, or acquaintance who fit the study criteria.

As the primary researcher, I used pre-existing professional networks in higher education to disseminate information about the study, including the criteria required for participation. I identified and utilized dissertation databases and EdD program social media pages including Facebook and Instagram to identify participants. Then I utilized LinkedIn and Google search to help confirm participant eligibility. Next, I sent direct messages to participants via social media and or direct email, when email was readily available. To help increase the likelihood of response rate and, in turn, increase the pool of participants, I as the researcher made sure to identify multiple points of entry.

The introductory message to participants included information on the research study, eligibility criteria and encouraged interested parties to contact me directly for further consideration. The recruitment message to potential study participants indicated participation is voluntary, and should they choose not to participate, they can simply disregard the message or forward it to someone who does fit the criteria (Mertler, 2021). By responding to the email, potential study participants provided initial consent to participate (Mertler, 2021). Interested participants were then provided with an initial set of screening questions to help confirm their eligibility. Next, maximal variation principle was used to invite purposeful participation into the qualitative phase, which explored graduate student narratives in depth through semi-structured interviews.

Data collection is a critical component of qualitative research since the methods used can significantly alter the depth and breadth of information uncovered about a particular phenomenon (Fink, 2000). In qualitative studies, data collection is a lengthy and ongoing

process, which includes collecting data directly from study participants through observations, interviews, and review of records or artifacts (Mertler, 2021). For purposes of this study, data was collected using the following techniques: questionnaires, individual interviews, and document review. Questionnaires were used to ensure respondents met study inclusion criteria. Interviews were the primary data-collection method used in this study as they provided the researcher with a window into the participants' views, experiences, beliefs, and motivations (Creswell, 2015), thus providing the researcher ample opportunity to explore participants' lived experiences. Data collected were stored in a secure, password-protected computer accessible only by the researcher. The data from the interviews were anonymized and used to explain themes, articulated in the conceptual framework, identify commonalities and differences between respondents, and point out potential solutions to benefit future EdD Latina students and institutions offering this program.

Questionnaires

A screening questionnaire was the first point of data collection. The questionnaire was designed to gather information on participants and confirm eligibility for inclusion in the study. Questionnaires were made available to participants electronically. The questionnaire was administered via email. Using this type of method allowed for collecting data in written format.

Interviews

Once inclusion criteria were met, respondents were invited to participate in an in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interview with the researcher. This type of phenomenological research is typically conducted through the use of lengthy, 1–2-hour, in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). The objective is to let the participant do most of the talking and for the researcher to focus on active listening. Unlike structured interviews, in

which the researcher sticks to a prescribed set of questions and only those questions, semi-structured interviews allow for a desirable amount of flexibility to ask follow-up questions based on emergent themes (Mertler, 2021). The benefit of conducting semi-structured interviews was the ability to invite the participant to delve deeper, using probing questions, into a particular theme that may not have initially occurred to the researcher.

The in-person interviews were scheduled based on researcher and study participant availability. In-person interviews were preferred; however, due to personal constraints and ongoing COVID-19 health limitations, the researcher provided participants with the option of conducting virtual interviews via Zoom—an online platform video conferencing. Interviews were scheduled for 90-minutes. The researcher utilized the interview guide (see Appendix E) and interview protocol (see Appendix F) to help guide the semi-structured conversation. With study participant permission, interviews were audio- and video-recorded using capabilities of the Zoom platform. This helped ensure the researcher was able to capture all participant responses. Data collected from the interviews were recorded, transcribed, anonymized, and stored on a password-protected device to ensure confidentiality. The transcription method used for this study was Zoom transcription services.

At the beginning of each interview, the researcher reviewed consent forms, confirmed the study participants meet inclusion criteria, and shared general information about the study. This meeting format helped me, the researcher build rapport with each study participant (Creswell, 2015). The individual semi-structured interviews provided space for the interviewees to explore, reflect, and elaborate on their doctoral experience. Interviews were used to identify commonalities and outliers within graduate school experiences specifically to the EdD program, and also allowed for comparison between and among different programs, cohorts, and

ethnicities. The interview process allowed the researcher to identify and understand the extent to which the graduate school experience impacted and/or informed their experiences as Latina students in the EdD. These interviews served as the phenomenological portion of the study, meant to identify the experiences of a specific group at that specific point in time.

Document Review

In addition to questionnaires and interviews, data collection also included review of artifacts, as secondary sources. Documents included existing materials and records which shed additional light into the study in question. For purposes of this study, participants were asked to provide the researcher with their resume, Curriculum Vitae or a link to their LinkedIn or company profile. This information was used to explore study participants' post-EdD professional trajectory.

To encourage participant involvement in the study and to thank them for their time, each participant received a $25 electronic gift card upon completion of the 90-minute interview (Singer & Couper, 2008).

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data are analyzed inductively by organizing information collected, from multiple sources, and into common themes or patterns (Mertler, 2021). Phenomenological research is one of the more difficult types of qualitative research to conduct because the researcher must get the participants to relive and relay experiences accurately, as well as reactions and perceptions (Fraenkel et al., 2012). This analytical process relies heavily on narrative summary and rich description. Therefore, to draw rich conclusions, based on analysis of data, it is essential the researcher first attempts to identify and describe aspects of each study participant's perceptions, and associated meanings, in detail (Fraenkel et al., 2012). Once data are

collected, such data need to be synthesized to produce generalizations (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). This process is referred to as inductive reasoning (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). Inductive reasoning is an essential component of qualitative research because it allows the researcher to be open to new information and new ways of understanding the phenomenon of interest (Mertler, 2021)

Interviews were transcribed using Zoom capabilities and were hand coded using in vivo and pattern coding. The coding process included line-by-line and paragraph-by-paragraph, followed by thematic synthesis of the emergent themes (Charmaz, 2006; Flick, 2014). Thematic analysis was used on the information gathered via interviews and artifact collection periods. Qualitative research allows insights to emerge from interviews and participant observation, also allowing for adjustments and changes as the researcher goes along (Lareau, 2021). After the initial round of interviews were completed, the researcher combed through the data to identify emergent themes. Data were reviewed multiple times, by the researcher and with the study participant, via member-checking to ensure emergent themes were correctly identified. This process helped eliminate researcher bias. Themes were coded and then assessed quantitatively to compare any similarities and differences found.

Issues of Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

Validity "… has to be assessed in relation to the purposes and circumstances of the research" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 121). Moreover, validity is not a commodity that can be purchased with techniques (Brinberg & McGrath, 1985). Instead, validity "depends on the relationship of your conclusions to reality" (Maxwell, 2012, p. 121). In qualitative methods, as is the case with other methodology, there are several potential threats to validity. Two common threats include researcher bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2012). Researcher bias refers to the values and beliefs held by the researcher (Maxwell, 2012). Meanwhile reactivity pertains to the ways in which

participants react to the researcher (Maxwell, 2012). While it is impossible to eliminate one's own bias, or the ways in which participants react to the research, it is possible to understand the ways in which said bias, or reactivity, might influence the study. Aware of my personal history and potential biases, as a member of the community I studied, it was essential that I remain keenly aware that my personal experience and positionality would at times, be part of my interpretation.

To increase the credibility of conclusions drawn in this study, I utilized Maxwell's (2012) Validity Test Checklist to help guide my methodology. Maxwell suggests using data, including verbatim speech, transcriptions, and detailed note-taking as the grounds for making conclusions. Additionally, I incorporated member-checking, also known as respondent validation, to confirm that what I heard and interpreted was in fact what the interviewee was trying to convey. I practiced member-checking during interviews by using the respondents' own words to describe what I heard. Next, I looked for discrepant evidence to help explain or uncover alternative viewpoints. Furthermore, to strengthen validity of the study I incorporated multiple sources of data collection, also known as triangulation—the collection of information from diverse sources—observations, people, and websites (Gay et al., 2011; Fraenkel et al., 2012). By reducing the risk of bias, triangulation helps provide an added level of confidence when drawing conclusions (Mertler, 2021). Lastly, I used reflective memos to help me identify emerging themes along the data collection and analysis process.

Ethical Issues, Roles of Researcher, and Positionality

To offer additional context, and address researcher bias, I share the following positionality in relation to this research. I, Amanda J. Corona, am Latina, a first-generation college graduate, mother of two, full-time student pursuing a Doctor of Education (EdD) in

Southern California during the COVID-19 pandemic. All while working full-time as an administrator. As a result of my positionality, being a member of the community, I am studying, I place myself as an expert in my own experience. As such, I view myself as a built in "member check," which is an asset that helped strengthen and reinforce my findings.

According to existing literature, the researcher's positionality and reflectivity provide insight into the factors that may influence the research's construction of knowledge and how these influences are revealed in the planning, conduct, and writing up of the research (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Furthermore, positionality is a form of sharing personal narratives as they relate to one's own social identities, personal biases, beliefs, and values (Cedillo & Bratta, 2019). As such, a deeper understanding and awareness of the complexities associated with the ways in which researchers make meaning requires a willingness to consider one's positionality and engage in reflectivity (Hsu, 2018).

I struggled to survive during the formative years of my postsecondary education. In college, after feeling overwhelmed, embarrassed, and culturally devoid, I began to resent the very part of my education I had worked hard to achieve. After years of suffering in silence, feeling alone, and out of place, I finally decided it was up to me to create an environment where my needs could be addressed. I joined Lambda Theta Nu Sorority, Inc., a Latina based sorority. This group of women became my family, community, mentors, and my most significant support system. We encouraged each other, validated each other's struggles, and fought to create a positive climate for current and future students. This sub-community opened my eyes to the difference between surviving and thriving in postsecondary education. This distinction fuels my passion for addressing the underdevelopment of people of color in higher education, which has led me down a personal, professional, and academic journey of cohort-based situated learning.

Consequently, my position likely influenced the study because in essence, I dove into my own experience as a Latina in an EdD program. I anticipated and was able to relate to many of the experience's participants shared related to postsecondary education, especially the EdD graduate program. Though my experiences differ, albeit slightly, I believe lived experiences matter and are valuable sources of knowledge that can be leveraged to scaffold academic learning in support of increased students' well-being. My positionality as first-generation college student progressing through the educational pipeline toward the doctorate informs my desire to inquire into how Latinas experience the EdD. As a researcher, I view this positionality as an asset for this study but remain mindful about subjectivity.

Limitations of the Study Design

The strengths of this study, paradoxically, also became its limitations. Qualitative research is meant to capture descriptive data on a particular entity (Mertler, 2021). Narrative inquiry is specific to the participant's experience in a particular time and place. Therefore, qualitative studies may not be reproduced. Furthermore, narrative inquiry is based on capturing stories unique to the participant and then taking a deep dive into the nuances of each study participant in order to truly understand their experiences (Gay et al., 2011). Therefore, generalization cannot be adopted to describe the experiences of all Latina doctoral students in all doctoral programs (Mertler, 2021). In addition, reliance on self-reported data is a point of concern (Mertler, 2021). This is a challenge because narrative inquiry is specific to the participant's experience in a particular time and place; thus, it is crucial that the study participant be able to recall their experience accurately. Moreover, this study gathered nine narratives from only three programs in Southern California. While there is a total of six institutions, in California, that could have been used for the study, I limited the study to three institutions as a

way of managing the scope of the study. Therefore, this study cannot provide generalizations to EdD programs outside of Southern California. Instead, a more in-depth study of all California EdD's is left for further research on the topic of doctoral student experiences. Lastly, a significant limitation of this study is that qualitative research is a subjective, time consuming, iterative process which involves collecting data directly from participants before arriving at final interpretations of analysis and conclusions (Mertler, 2021).

Methodology and Research-Design Summary

Latinas are the least likely of all women to complete a college degree, let alone pursue a doctoral program (Gardner, 2009; NCES, 2021a). Addressing the doctoral achievement gap for Latinas in the EdD requires a socially just approach which infuses diverse perspectives and incorporates cultural knowledge in the formulation of educational policy and practice affecting persistence and program completion. One opportunity to inform policy and practice, which directly and indirectly affects doctoral completion, is to infuse Latinas' counter-narratives in the development of educational processes (Flores, 2020; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Pauley et al., 1999). This study explored the various social and personal capital students bring to academia. Furthermore, its findings provide suggestions for future research, and implications for asset-based approaches to graduate program structures to ensure optimal matriculation and program completion rates of Latinas in EdD programs (Castro et al., 2011). Utilizing the dual-lens of cultural proficiency and community-cultural wealth to address the doctoral achievement gap, it is essential we include the voices of Latinas who have completed EdD programs (Flores, 2020; Pauley et al., 1999). While these study participants may not have a formal role within the EdD, their counter-narrative may aid educational leaders in their efforts to ensure optimal matriculation rates of Latinas, and, by extension, all students (Castro et al., 2011; Lindsey et al., 2018).

Chapter Four: Findings

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of nine Latinas who completed a Doctor of Education (EdD) in educational leadership at one of three predetermined public universities located in Southern California. Individual interviews, which represented the main data-gathering activity, provided additional insight into study participants experiences navigating the EdD which will not be part of the study's primary data analysis. Instead, such insight about other emerging themes will be shared later in the implications for the future research section of the dissertation. The overarching research question guiding this study was, What are the experiences of Latina students during their Doctor of Education (EdD) program? The following sub-questions were used to further assist in addressing the above question:

1. How do Latina EdD students experience their doctoral program?
2. How do Latina EdD students make sense of and cultivate inclusion, belonging, and community during their doctoral studies?

Utilizing a dual lens of cultural proficiency and community-cultural wealth, this qualitative study focused specifically on the ways in which study participants interpret and assign meaning to their EdD experience. The findings presented in this chapter derived from several months of interviews, reflection, and coding. This chapter is organized as follows: first, the chapter re-visits the study's conceptual framework, provides a description of the research sites, and describes study participant profiles. Then, the chapter presents themes, subthemes and concludes with a chapter summary. Altogether, this chapter narrates experiences of nine Latinas who successfully navigated—defined here as a program completion—a blended cohort-based Doctor of Education (EdD) in educational leadership program in Southern California.

Brief Review of the Conceptual Framework

Together, cultural proficiency and community-cultural wealth theory formed the conceptual framework and provided a way to navigate and interpret the study findings. Cultural proficiency is defined as the actions of an organization or an individual that enable the agency or person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment (Lindsey et al., 2018). Rooted in cultural competency, cultural proficiency emphasizes the value of a strengths-based approach to navigating cultural differences and simultaneously highlights the importance of meeting the diverse needs of minoritized students in the context of their culture (Cross et al., 1989). This approach implores policy makers and educational administrators to develop culturally proficient policy and practice anchored in the experience of minoritized students. As such, this asset-based model of service delivery emphasizes the importance of consciously and intentionally integrating minority narratives into decision-making processes (Welborn, 2019). Figure 1 outlines the four tools of cultural proficiency.

Figure 1. *The Tools of Cultural Proficiency*

Note. From Cultural proficiency. Corwin. (2019, November 20).

Community-cultural wealth is defined as the historically undervalued and/or unacknowledged skills, abilities, and social networks utilized by communities of color to survive and resist both macro and micro-forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005). Yosso identified six types of capital: social, familial, linguistic, navigational, aspirational, and resistant. As such, community-cultural wealth serves as a framework to center Latina students' experience and voice as a critical resource aiding Latinas persistence and doctoral degree attainment. Used together, this dual-lens framework provides a unique perspective to explore and understand the ways in which Latinas experience the EdD program. Figure 2 outlines the six forms of community-cultural wealth.

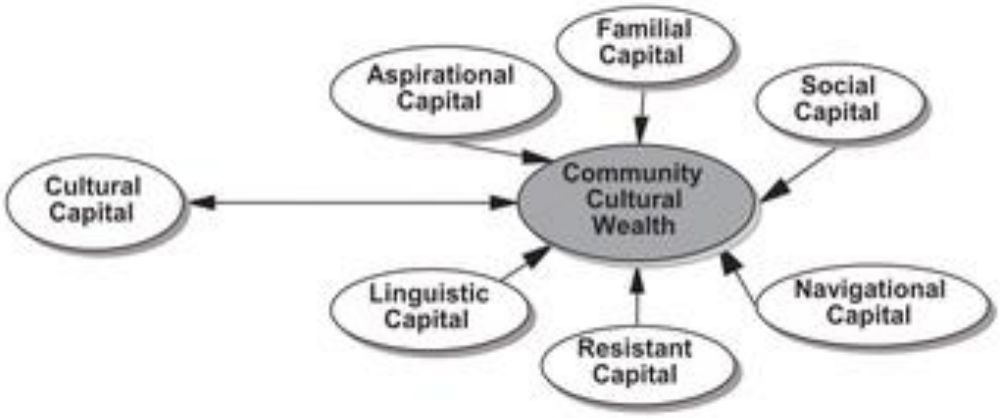

Figure 2. *Community-Cultural Wealth Theory*

Note. Adapted from Oliver, M., & Shapiro, T. (2013). *Black wealth/white wealth: A new perspective on racial inequality*. Routledge.

Overview of Emerging Themes

Various forms of community-cultural wealth became evident throughout the recollection and retelling of participants' lived experiences. From personal and professional experiences in academia, characteristics they held, to how they understood themselves as they navigated their experiences as Latinas pursuing a doctoral degree. Participants individually shared what they did

to persist to degree completion. Four themes, and two to three sub-themes under each theme, emerged from the interviews and document review related to study participants experience navigating the EdD. The themes that emerged from findings, presented using community-cultural wealth lens, describe how the doctoral experience was influenced by factors in and outside of the degree program. Theme One—Resistance Capital, the knowledge and skill that develop from having "oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). This theme highlighted early academic experiences that propelled participants to pursue the EdD. Study participants talked about how their upbringing and early academic experiences influenced their experience as doctoral students. Theme Two—Aspirational Capital, "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers" (p. 77) focuses on participants sense of purpose, hopes and dreams for the academic advancement of the Latinx community. Participants identified as role models for the Latinx community which included family, friends and strangers. This sense of purpose and hope for a better future served as a primary motivation to persist to degree completion. Theme Three—Social Capital signifies networks of people that enable access to information, knowledge, or resources (Bourdieu, 1972; Yosso, 2005). This theme explores how study participants leveraged available networks to gain access to resources and supports needed to persist to degree completion. Participants spoke of being supported by one or several persons throughout the doctoral program. Theme Four—Navigational Capital describes the skills study participants acquired or developed in order to maneuver through the doctoral degree program (Yosso, 2005). Participants describe the challenges they experienced as Latina doctoral students and the ways in which these participants navigated these challenges.

Institutional Profiles

Three public universities located in Southern California served as the sites for this study. To maintain anonymity, each institution has been assigned the following pseudonyms: University One, University Two, and University Three. Each institution is marketed as a full-time program designed for full-time working professionals. Each institution offers a blended cohort-based Doctor of Education (EdD) program in educational leadership. For purposes of this study, a cohort is defined as a group of students who start, progress, and typically complete a program of study together. A blended EdD in educational leadership program is defined as a program which infuses PreK-12 and higher education concepts into one continuous program of study. Table 1, Institutional Profiles, provides at-a-glance view of the three university sites.

Table 1. *Institutional Profiles*

Institution	University Designations	EdD Program Focus
University One	Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI)	Urban education focus as it relates to organizational leadership, educational equity and access, and community engagement.
University Two	Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution (EHSI)	Social justice focus as it relates to legal requirements, structural changes, and educational system reforms in Southern California.
University Three	Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution (EHSI)	Social justice focus as it relates to learning, societal diversity, organizational change, organizational development, and the future.

Study Participant Profiles

There were nine study participants in total, three from each academic institution listed above. All participants self-identified as Latina and had completed an EdD in educational

leadership at one of the three university sites, listed above, prior to participating in this study. In this study, I use the Spanish salutation doctora (Dra.) to address study participants as a way to pay honor study participants salient Latina identities. One participant shared that after earning her EdD, she did not feel comfortable being addressed as doctor (Dr.). I proceed by providing how the study participant came to the decision to use the Spanish salutation, because it illustrates, the sentiments behind my reasoning for using Dra. throughout the study:

> People think of you as pompous, like you're not going to be down with the people anymore, because you're up here, and I didn't want people to see me that way. Plus, I didn't like the sound of doctor in front of my name. I felt like it split my identity. Then, during that pandemic I ended up thinking to myself wait a minute, I can use Dra. in front of my name. Now I put doctora on everything… it's conversation starter, it's a political thing for me. I want people to ask me. I want people to know that I am Latina. I want my students to know that, too (Dra. Valeria).

Each participant shared the unique circumstances that contributed to their decision to pursue the EdD. Although there were shared identities and similar experiences among the nine study participants, spanning three different institutions, participants differed in the ways they interpreted and reacted to their experience pursuing the EdD, thus making their educational journey somewhat unique from one another. The varied identities included being immigrant, first-generation, mother, wife, single parent. The intersectionality of these shared and non-shared identities appeared when study participants spoke about their cultural upbringing and early academic experiences. Inflection, tone, and language slightly changed based on the topic of discussion. In addition to identifying as Latina, all participants had at least 10 years of experience working in education. The years of experience ranged from 10 to 25. Table 2, Participant Profiles, located after a brief description of each participant, provides at-a-glance view of participants.

Dra. Franca

Franca self-identifies as Mexican. She was born in Mexico and emigrated with her parents to the United States as a toddler. She spent most of her life living in Southern California. She recalls growing up, like most immigrant families, in poverty. She stated: "I was born in Mexico, so I leaned toward just calling myself Mexican… I came here as a toddler. Our story's not unique. It's like a lot of other immigrant families…I didn't know English when I came, so I was definitely a bilingual student. I grew up in, you know, like a lot of immigrant families pretty abject poverty, and in gang infested neighborhoods." Dra. Franca teaches middle school, seventh and eighth grade, English, Spanish, Social Studies, and Drama. She holds a Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Spanish Literature, a Master of Arts (MA) in Education, and completed the Doctor of Education (EdD) in 2021. Dra. Franca is a single mother to a son in high school. She enjoys yoga as a way to find and maintain balance in life.

Dra. Iris

Iris self-identifies as Mexican. She was born in the United States to first-generation Mexican-American parents. She describes her parents as "Chicanos from the Chicano movement." Dra. Iris says, "one of the things that I'm really grateful for is that my family never abandoned our culture." Her parents were insistent that she and her siblings be bilingual. Dra. Iris speaks English and Spanish fluently and credits her ability to speak both languages as professional asset. Dra. Iris is the assistant principal at a high school in Southern California. She holds a BA in Literature and a MA in Teacher Education. She completed the EdD in 2022. She has been married to her high school sweetheart for the past 17 years.

Dra. Esperanza

Esperanza is Mexican and further self-identifies as Chicana. Her family emigrated to the U.S. before she was born. As the first in her family to be born in the U.S., Dra. Esperanza recalls experiencing marginalization in school, including language and culture. Dra. Esperanza has spent the last four years working as a chief of staff and assistant corporate secretary for a law school in California. Dra. Esperanza described herself as having nearly two decades of experience advising legislators, local elected officials, and senior administrators on education policy and the implementation of equity focused education initiatives in California. She holds a BA in Political Science, a Master in Public Policy and Administration (MPA), and a Certificate in Public Relations. Dra. Esperanza completed the EdD in 2021.

Dra. Sally

Sally is Mexican and further self-identifies as Chicana. She was born in Mexico and emigrated to the United States with her parents when she was one year old. Sally's identity and experience in the U.S. were shaped by her immigrant experience. Dra. Sally is an elementary school teacher in Southern California. She holds a BA in Speech Communication, a Teaching Credential, and earned the EdD in 2003. Dra. Sally is the mother of two boys, a junior in high school and a junior in college. She prioritizes mental health, work life balance, and spending time with her husband and children.

Dra. Testimonia

Testimonia is the daughter of interracial parents and self-identifies as Mexican. She was born in Southern California and attended kindergarten in Mexico; her first language was Spanish. Dra. Testimonia is the coordinator of a music department at a university in Southern California. Testimonia describes herself as an educator, education consultant, and disability and performing

arts advocate. She holds an Associate of Arts (AA), BA and Master of Music, and earned the EdD in 2020. Dra. Testimonia is a professional musician. She has performed with several orchestras and has performed for former U.S. presidents.

Dra. Anya

Anya is Mexican-Ecuadorian, but feels a stronger connection to her Mexican roots. She was born in Chicago, and moved to Southern California when she was two-years old. Anya attended kinder, first grade, third grade, and summer school in Mexico. Dra. Anya is a high school special education teacher in Southern California. She holds a BA in Urban Learning, a MA in Special Education and Teaching, and completed the EdD in 2021. She was raised by a single mother and she herself is a single mother of two toddler boys.

Dra. Josefina

Josefina is a first-generation American of Colombian descent. She was born in California to Spanish-speaking immigrants and says "I often find that sharing emotions is a little bit easier in Spanish than in English. Spanish is my heart language." Dra. Josefina is the assistant superintendent of a school district in Northern California. Josefina firmly believes schools can make a difference, educational leaders can drive positive changes in their communities, and educators can open opportunities through education to students who are otherwise destined to a life of poverty. She holds a Master of Public Administration, a Teaching Credential, and earned her EdD in 2011. Dra. Josefina is the mother of two daughters, the eldest a college graduate, and the youngest currently attending college.

Dra. Izel

Izel self-identifies as Chicana Latina. She was born and raised in Northern California into what she called a "Chicano activist family." Dra. Izel has spent the last four years working at a

public university in Southern California. She described herself as an award-winning author, a national college admissions expert, researcher, and advocate for Latinx students pursuing higher education. Dr. Izel holds a BA and MA in English Language and Literature. She earned her EdD in 2017. Dr. Izel has been married for 25 years, she is the proud mother of three children and is a soon to be grandmother.

Dra. Valeria

Valeria is Mexican and further self-identifies as Chicana. Valeria was born in California to Spanish speaking parents. Dra. Valeria has spent the last 16 years working at a public university in Southern California. Valeria's current role is associate dean of student affairs/director of residence life. Dra. Valeria holds a BA in Sociology and an MS in Higher Education and Student Affairs. Valeria earned the EdD in 2011. Valeria is a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

Table 2. *Participant Profiles*

Institution	Participant Pseudonym	EdD Completion Year	Latina Identity
University One	Dra. Franca	2021	Mexican; emigrated to the U.S. as a toddler, bilingual, mother
	Dra. Iris	2022	Mexican; born in the U.S. to Chicano parents, bilingual, mother
	Dra. Esperanza	2021	Mexican; family emigrated to the U.S. before she was born
University Two	Dra. Sally	2003	Mexican, further identifies as Chicana; emigrated to the U.S. as a toddler, mother, wife
	Dra. Testimonia	2020	Mexican; born in the U.S. to interracial parents, bilingual; attended school in the U.S. and outside of the U.S., musician
	Dra. Anya	2021	Mexican-Ecuadorian; born in the U.S., bilingual; attended school in the U.S. and outside of the U.S.; single mother
University Three	Dra. Josefina	2011	Columbian; born in the U.S., bilingual; attended school in the U.S. and outside of the U.S., mother
	Dra. Izel	2017	Chicana; born in the U.S. to Chicano parents, mother, wife
	Dra. Valeria	2011	Mexican; bilingual, LGBTQ+

Data Collection and Analysis

Data Sources: Interviews and Document Review

Over the course of several months, nine Latinas shared their experiences in completing the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree. Each study participant engaged in a one-on-one, 90-minute, semi-structured interview consisting of ten questions (See Appendix E). During this

interview I inquired about their personal identities as Latinas and asked how, if at all, this influenced their decision to pursue the EdD. Upon interview completion, participants were asked to provide supporting documents such as a resume or CV (Curriculum Vitae) to help me, as the researcher, better understand their leadership and academic trajectory.

Data were collected using one-on-one interviews and document review. One-on-one interviews took place via Zoom, an online video-conferencing platform, which provided virtual face-to-face interaction and recording capabilities. This platform was helpful and necessary because of COVID-19 pandemic social-distance restrictions in the United States during the year 2022, when interviews were conducted. The interviews were recorded on a secure device with the permission of the participant. Recordings were then transcribed using Zoom capabilities and later reviewed by the researcher for accuracy and validity.

To answer both research questions, I performed two types of coding. The first, in vivo coding, utilizes verbatim speech—direct words used by study participants— to establish commonalities. Impactful quotes were highlighted and used to provide rich context and insight into each person's individual experience. I reviewed each study participant’s transcript several times, each time looking for words and sentences that were important to and inspired by the participant (Saldaña, 2013). I also looked for words and sentences that were communicated frequently. The second method of coding I utilized was pattern coding. Pattern coding was helpful in grouping common experiences among doctoral students into themes (Saldaña, 2013). By the time the fourth participant was interviewed, themes began to emerge and I proceeded by inquiring about them to see how much they resonated with remaining study participants. For example, participants spoke of the early encounters with discriminatory practices in academia that prompted them to challenge inequalities experienced by Latinx in the U.S. education system.

This led to the first theme—Resistance Capital. Using in vivo coding and pattern coding also allowed me to hone in on each participant's shared and unique experiences. This practice provided space for me to identify and reflect on salient experiences unique to each participant, while simultaneously looking for common experiences undergone by all or most of the study participants.

Additionally, as the researcher, I kept a detailed journal of notes from each interview session. These reflective notes resulted in profound clarity and allowed for cross-analysis to ensure data were interpreted correctly. The data were then analyzed and hand-coded. Hand-coding was ideal because it helped me understand and interpret data. Data analysis revealed that the Latina doctoral experience is influenced by factors in and outside of the degree program. Interestingly, various forms of community-cultural wealth throughout the study participants' doctoral experience were illuminated by information they provided regarding their personal academic journey. Therefore, the following data and analysis, drawn mostly from the interviews, tell the story of participants navigating the EdD in educational leadership program. Table 3 provides at-a-glance view of themes and sub-themes as they relate to each research question.

Table 3. *Primary Themes and Sub-Themes*

Overarching Question	Research Questions (RQ)	Theme	Sub-theme
What are the experiences of Latina students during their Doctor of Education (EdD) program?	RQ 1: How do Latina EdD students experience their doctoral program?	Resistance Capital	Vision and Persistence. Doctoral Academic Identity Development.
		Aspirational Capital	Latinas Doctoral Students as Role Models. Advice for Future Doctoral Students.
	RQ 2: How do Latina EdD students make sense of and cultivate inclusion, belonging, and community during their doctoral studies?	Social Capital	Programmatic Support; Cohort, Faculty and Dissertation Chair Interactions. Community Support; Family, Friends and Colleagues.
		Navigational Capital	Dealing with Discrimination. Responding to Impostor Syndrome. Unprecedented Times; The COVID-19 Pandemic.

Emerging Theme One: Resistance Capital

This theme explores the ways in which study participants leveraged their positionality as Latina EdD students, as a form of resistance capital, to contribute to the advancement of the Latinx community. Resistant capital represents a student's ability to understand various forms of oppression and therefore challenge inequality through oppositional behavior (Yosso, 2005).

Participants exhibited resistance capital in two specific examples, which are identified as sub-themes, such as Early Vision and Persistence. In response to negative early academic experiences, participants became aware of inequalities experienced by marginalized communities in academia. For example, Esperanza shared, “because I spoke English with an accent. I was put in remedial classes, and I was treated like I had zero intelligence.” This early exposure to oppressive pedagogy ignited in participants a sense of duty to expose and challenge inequalities affecting the Latinx community in education. Such as the sub-theme Doctoral Academic Identity Development. In response to becoming aware of the various forms of oppression Latinx students experience in academia, study participants utilized their positionality as Latina EdD students to challenge inequality through oppositional behavior. Study participants described oppositional behavior as the act of pursuing a doctoral degree and their subsequent choice in dissertation topic, both of which contributed to the development of study participants doctoral academic identity. With tears streaming down her cheeks, Dra. Valeria shared her motivation for pursuing the EdD and her dissertation topic:

> He's [undergraduate Sociology professor/mentor] the one that inspired me to pursue my doctoral degree. It was hard as hell. But I finished. My dissertation focused on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and their academic persistence. I wanted to know why I had persisted. It was research about me. It was so personal. I needed to find [outcomes] where I didn’t have to think about my sexual orientation. For me to be able to transcend at any level, and feel comfortable with who I was. I needed to have critical leaders and resources.

Participants spoke of the ways in which they harnessed their early academic experiences as motivation to pursue the EdD. Dra. Iris shared the following: “I was an English learner growing up, and it was important for me to make sure that those students had an opportunity to learn anything and everything that they wanted.” Additionally, doctoral academic identity manifested in study participants dissertation topic choice. Dra. Iris’s doctoral research focused on supporting bilingual students in sciences by working with teachers to understand methodologies

for creating a safe and inclusive environment for diverse learners in a science classroom. As a result of decades of racially and ethnically discriminatory practices in education participants felt the need to infuse academic spaces with asset-based narratives about their ethnicity and culture. What follows are different interpretations of how Resistance Capital presented itself throughout the study participants' doctoral journey.

Sub-theme: Early Vision and Persistence

This sub-theme explores the pre-doctoral experiences that influenced study participants understanding of what it meant to be a Latina in the U.S. education system (Research Question 1). Although participants shared similar experiences, their identity as Latinas in academia were intimately upheld in different ways. For Dra. Franca, school was a refuge from an immigrant life of poverty. Meanwhile, Dra. Iris depicts K-12 education as place where students with learning challenges fall through the cracks. Dra. Testimonia describes being bullied by teachers as a result of being an English learner and having to resort to assimilation practices in order to survive. Dra. Josefina describes being stunted academically by discrimination because of her immigrant background. These divergent interpretations of the Latina identity, explored further in this section, provided insight into each participant's journey leading up to the doctoral program. Consequently, participants shared a pattern, they were familiar with and understood how their early academic experiences exposed them to the various inequalities in education.

Dra. Franca describes her early academic experiences as follows: “I grew up in, you know, like a lot of immigrant families pretty abject poverty, and in gang infested neighborhoods.” When asked to elaborate on her experiences in education that affected her decision to pursue a doctoral degree Dra. Franca said: “I still found a way to find comfort and kind of a home within the school culture, you know, reading and bonding with some of my

teachers, and just kind of really finding refuge in an educational setting. I think that set the tone for me." Education, consequently, became a refuge for Dra. Franca, she fancied herself a book worm and relished the days when her mother could afford to buy her a .25 cent book from the thrift store, the same place where family members would buy their clothes growing up. Dra. Franca's experience demonstrates that at an early age, she understood that educational attainment was the path out of a life of poverty and violence.

Conversely, Dra. Iris describes her K-12 academic experience in the U.S. as being less than supportive. She stated: "To be very honest, I didn't have a whole lot of academic support…I went through K-12 school with no one ever recognizing that I had a learning disability…I decided, based on that experience, that we had to do better for kids." As a result of personal experience, navigating K-12 education with an undiagnosed learning challenge, Iris made it her mission to help educators better serve students. Dra. Iris's example is significant because it addresses underlying experiences—learning challenges— that are often ignored, overlooked, or mis-diagnosed among the Latinx community. (This concept is further explored in the next section, in Dra. Anya's dissertation research topic). For Iris, this experience planted the seed that educators could negatively or positively influence the trajectory of their students, depending on how they supported their students. The following further illustrates this point.

Testimonia is the daughter of interracial parents and self-identifies as Mexican. She was born in Southern California and attended kindergarten in Mexico; her first language was Spanish. She describes her childhood as interesting in the following description:

> I was born here in Southern California. However, I went to kindergarten in Mexico. Spanish is my first language, and I didn't really learn English till I was in first grade. I'm an English learner. I think that's really influenced my trajectory and my attitude and beliefs. For instance, my mom had me and my brother at this [U.S.] elementary school, but they didn't tolerate English learners that well. She actually had to move us. I have a little trauma from a teacher being a bully to me,

> and obviously that really bothered my mom enough to move us. You know, when you're kids you're innocent, you don't know why they don't like you, or what's wrong with you, or whatever. Ever since then I was just always kind of shy and alone. I didn't have a lot of friends. I had a hard time making friends. I just. I hated going to school.

Testimonia internalized being bullied by teachers as a slight because it was tied to her cultural background. These experiences made it difficult for her to appreciate her cultural upbringing and instead she associated her Latina identity with negative school experiences. As a result, she tried to hide her Latina identity in order to survive education. As the daughter of an interracial couple, Dra. Testimonia had certain features and characteristics which could be described by some as White passing. For example, she says:

> My dad is from here. That's why my last name is Adams. And because I'm light skinned I hid my Latino heritage, my Mexican heritage as much as I could. With a White passing last name like Adams. I wouldn't even tell people about my middle name, and I made my first name sound kind of White…I don't want to say I feel shame because I know shame is a really toxic thing to put yourself through. But I am embarrassed that I did that, but also like I said as a kid, it's like … Well, what do I have to do to fit in? They don't like me. This [experience] really informed my trajectory in terms of making sure people feel heard, seen, and validated. I feel like I get dismissed all the time as a woman, and a Latina.

Testimonia brought up the following two concepts: White passing—when someone perceives a person of color as being White— and name erasure—the act of erasing cultural and racial traces associated with one's name— as coping mechanisms for dealing with perceived attacks on her cultural identity. Folkman and Noskowittz (2005) define coping as the thoughts and behaviors mobilized to manage internal and external stressful situations. Unlike defense mechanisms that are unconscious adaptive responses, coping is the conscious act one must take in order to reduce or tolerate stress (Venner, 1988). For example, in an effort to minimize exposure to stressful situations, Testimonia leverage her mixed-race features and altered her name.

Similar to Dra. Testimonia, Dra. Josefina experienced K-12 education in and outside of the United States. Josefina's experience, however, was unique in that she attended elementary school in California, middle school and part of high school in Colombia, and returned to California to finish high school and pursue higher education. Josefina describes her early academic experience as follows:

> When I was in the eleventh grade, we moved back here to the United States because of the situation in Colombia, in the late eighties being the unsafe environment that it was…. My high school experience in the U.S. wasn't positive. In Colombia I had a very high academic demand, and when I came here in high school, because I spoke English with an accent, I was put in remedial classes, and I was treated like I had zero intelligence, and the things that were said to me in high school were really derogatory.

In Colombia, Josefina cultivated a passion for science and math. She dreamt of pursuing a career in the medical field. However, upon enrolling in U.S. high school classes, she was placed in remedial math, even though she had been taking Calculus in Colombia. As a result of having to validate her Colombian education, Josefina says she fell behind academically. She stated:

> I wanted to go into the medical field. I was actually really good at science and math like I was really good at it. But I got pulled out of AP [Advanced Placement] physiology because I couldn't keep up, because my English wasn't quite there yet, and I was trying really hard, and I would stay up late at night [to study]. I eventually got pulled out of all my AP classes. I was in AP chemistry and got pulled out of AP chemistry because I was put in remedial math. You had to have a certain math level to be an AP. But they made me go all the way back to like algebra. When I was in Colombia I was already in calculus. I had to validate all my math education, and I did it in like record time. And then they took me out of this low math class, and by the time I got into the pre-calc [pre-calculus] class it was already like five weeks into it [instruction]. Nothing was really setting me up for success.

Josefina's experience speaks to the disconnect between the cultural experiences of Latinx students and academic policy in the United States. Challenges associated with language acquisition for English learning Latinx students stem from U.S. policy which fails to recognize that English learning students are simultaneously navigating education in a foreign country, and

language. As a result of deficit-based perspectives and practices—linguistically and culturally biased assessments—English learning students have to work twice as hard to in order to prove their academic abilities.

As a group, participants illustrated a strong self-awareness of the ways in which their early academic experiences, influenced by cultural identities, exposed them to inequalities in education. Regardless of the type of interaction, positive or negative, early academic experiences influenced the ways in which participants internalized their identity as Latina students which subsequently impacted their trajectory toward and in the doctorate. The following section illuminates the connection between participants' early academic experiences and their identity as doctoral students.

Sub-theme: Doctoral Academic Identity Development.

This sub-theme illuminates two components of study participants' doctoral academic identity; namely, the decision to pursue the EdD and their subsequent choice in dissertation topic (Research Question 1). As a group, study participants practice resistance capital by exhibiting a hyper self-awareness of the inequalities in their respective environments and the ways in which they interpreted and responded to these situations. Personal experiences combined with cultural appreciation prompted study participants to use their positionality as Latinas in the EdD to challenge deficit-based world views imposed on the Latinx community. By expanding knowledge on the unique experiences of historically marginalized communities, study participants challenged inequality through the use of counter-narrative. The following section explores study participants motivations to pursue the EdD and outlines their dissertation topic. Dra. Anya describes her connection to her dissertation topic as follows:

> My topic was Latina special education teachers serving Latino special education students. I'm a special education teacher and I'm a Latina. You don't find very

> many Latina special education teachers. To be honest, I think it's a cultural thing. I wanted to conduct research on the benefits of Latinx special education students, and parents, having access to a Latinx special education teacher. Because in the special education world it's not just the academics. It's so much more than that, you know? It's a legal world. And sometimes the teacher is the person that helps the parents navigate that legal world. The parents sometimes don't even speak English, forget about understanding IEPs [Individualized Education Program] and all that, you know?

In this reflection, Anya illustrates the importance of cultural representation in academia, especially among doubly disadvantaged youth. Jack (2019) suggests there are two types of disadvantaged students, underrepresented students who have garnered the cultural capital needed to be successful in higher education, and the doubly disadvantaged who were not afforded with the same capital. In this context, Anya is describing a situation in which Latino special education students find themselves being doubly disadvantaged. For example, in the scenario provided above, Anya's students were members of two historically marginalized groups—Latinx and special education—and as a result of hidden curriculum— a system of unwritten rules and expectations—lack the capital needed to navigate complex educational systems. As such, Anya spends her time educating parents, in their native language, so that they can learn to understand and advocate for their children's needs. Anya describes working at a high school serving a mainly Latino community:

> These parents look up to me to explain the IEP. I'm like these are the services, and they're like 'lo que dices maestra' [Whatever you say teacher]. And I'm like no that's not how it's supposed to be [teachers telling parents what to do] so I'll explain the process to them, speaking to them in their language so they understand. I think to myself, this is high school. So, they've gone through elementary and middle school, without the support they've needed. So, I don't think it's important [representation and culturally relevant pedagogy]. I think it's crucial to their high school success, and the future success for the students, and their families, to have access to Latino special education teachers. It's the same thing, for [everyone] you know, families should have access to someone that speaks to them in their language and that understands their culture.

In this example, Anya is describing the role educators play in educating the family to begin to understand this complex system so that they can play an active role in the future success of their student. In order to provide diverse perspectives and approaches to pedagogy which can help challenge structures and policies that serve as barriers to degree attainment for all students, one must first find a position which affords the space to insert diverse perspectives (Flores, 2020; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012, 2015). Consequently, experience is central to the process.

As a result of personal experience, navigating U.S. K-12 education with an undiagnosed learning challenge, Iris made it her mission to help educators serve students better. When asked what propelled her to pursue the EdD, Dra. Iris responded with the following:

> In my district, I realized that science teachers were very anti-English learners. They didn't think it was their responsibility to teach language, and I'm like but it's your responsibility to support students to understand your content, and that process in and of itself requires language support… So, I developed a relationship with them [science teachers], and I started asking questions about how they teach science. And then I started experimenting in my own class, teaching science during my ELD [English Language Development] class and providing language support. I was developing strategies, using my own classroom environment, my own students, and when I realized that they were working, and they were all rooted in research. I was like, Okay, this does work. You can do this!

Iris goes on to say, "I was an English learner growing up, and it was important for me to make sure that those students had an opportunity to learn anything and everything that they wanted." Dra. Iris's doctoral research focused on supporting bilingual students in the sciences by working with teachers to understand methodologies for creating a safe and inclusive environment for diverse learners in a science classroom. She described her contributions toward shifting deficit perspectives as follows:

> My primary concern was that I wanted the teachers to understand that it was a moral imperative, that they had not just a legal obligation for the standards, but that if they really wanted to help their students to learn their subject matter, they had to connect with them. They had to create a space where those students felt comfortable asking questions. A space where students weren't afraid to speak up, where they could seek support in their primary language. Even if the teacher

> didn't speak the language they could help by having lots of visuals and really create a classroom space to support their students' learning.

Iris's example illuminates the importance of meeting the diverse needs of students, using culturally relevant developmental processes. Cross et al. (1989) advocate for a shift from behaviors, attitudes, and policies that undervalue cultural differences to a strengths-based approach which centers the students' needs and creates safe learning spaces. As part of the doctoral curriculum, Iris she enjoyed talking about equity, how educational systems function, how each part of the system is not always equitable, and what people can do to change and enhance the system no matter what their role in the system is. Central to this discussion is language.

Having experienced K-12 education in the U.S. and internationally provided Josefina with a unique perspective by which to conceptualize English language structures in academia. However, as a result of feeling ill-prepared to deal with educational policy—Proposition 227—enacted during her tenure as a teacher Josefina dedicated her career to being an English learner advocate. In response to 1996-97 data which identified 25% of California's K-12 students as being Limited English Proficient (LEP)—students who cannot understand English well enough to keep up in school—Proposition 227 was passed in California. Proposition 227 changed the way LEP students were taught in California. Specifically, it required California public schools to teach LEP predominantly in English. In most cases, this provision had the effect of eliminating bilingual classes. As a first-year bilingual teacher, Josefina vividly recalls the aftermath of Proposition 227:

> I discovered really, early on in education just how politicized it was. My first year [teaching] I was in a dual-immersion program teaching in a dual-immersion school when Prop. 227 passed banning bilingual education in California. I was there when they came and took all my Spanish books out of my classroom…No one was explaining this to me. I was in my first year of teaching, experiencing one of the most racist attacks on culture and identity in public education in

> California, and not really knowing what to do about it. So, I became a real expert in working with English learners, and I think, because of my experience of entering high school later. I really felt a connection with immigrant kids.

Josefina became known among her colleagues and district leaders as an advocate for long-term English Learners (LTEL). WestEd (2016) defines LTEL as English learner students who have been enrolled in a U.S. school for 6+ years and have not been reclassified as fluent English proficient. Josefina has dedicated her career to exposing inequities and injustices in education. She reflected on becoming aware of the extent of academic inequalities experienced by LTEL and described how she leveraged her teaching experience and classroom as a way to positively influence learning outcomes:

> I was asked to write this report about English learners and I was really heartbroken that kids were staying English learners for so long. I did a lot of research, and I was supporting some of the work that Lori Olson did on long-term English Learners. One of the early reports that were put out before long-term English Learners even had a name, before they were federally recognized. And I did so much research, and I couldn't find anything on how to support these kids that I started putting together my own strategies through content literacy training. And because I had successfully taught five-year olds to read I decided to start working on literacy intervention with middle and high school kids just trying to apply some of the strategies, but understanding that they weren't little kids, and that they had a lived experienced in this country, and I started really unpacking how school had failed them.

Similarly, to Iris, Josefina developed her own culturally relevant pedagogy to help center transformational work on the needs of diverse students. Guided by personal connection and moral imperative study participants exhibited resistance strategies which stem from an awareness and need to overcome barriers negatively impacting English learners. As such oppositional behavior is exhibited in study participants responses which include standing up to systems of oppression and privilege experienced by historically marginalized students.

There are two interpretations that can be made from the study participants' experiences. First, all participants communicated a strong personal connection between their decision to

pursue the EdD and subsequent choice of dissertation topic. The combination of the two interpretations highlights the concept that the doctoral experience is influenced by experiences outside—in this case leading up to—the doctoral program; cultural and early academic experiences in education. The narratives explored in this study provide a powerful lens by which to learn about the lived experiences of these nine Latinas who persisted to doctoral degree completion. The narratives portray each participant's previous experiences in academia as well as the shared and individual experiences that ultimately paved the way to degree completion. Adopting culturally appreciative lens was necessary to understand and shape their resolve as minorities in education. By doing so, the participants were resisting academia and embracing themselves throughout the doctoral program with heightened sense of purpose.

Emerging Theme Two: Aspirational Capital

This theme explores the ways in which study participants viewed their positionality as Latina EdD students, in the form of aspiration capital, to contribute to the advancement of the Latinx community. Aspirational capital refers to the capacity to maintain hopes and dreams despite challenges, disadvantages, and systemic inequality (Yosso, 2006). Throughout the study, participants repeatedly discussed demonstrated aspirational capital in two specific examples, which are identified as sub-themes, such as Latina Doctoral Students as Role Models. In response to the lack of Latina representation amongst doctoral degrees conferred, study participants spoke of the aspirations they had for themselves to persevere in the doctoral program to degree completion. Although each participant had their own reason for pursuing the EdD, they described the importance of being a role model in their community. Study participants shared stories about their identity as role models for the Latinx community saying, "Back then, when I was doing my research, I think it was less than two percent of us Latinas accounting for

doctorates nationwide," said Dra. Franca. As such it was their duty to persist to degree completion so that others could see them and know that it was possible. Participants in this study described themselves as role models for future doctoral students including students in their classrooms, family, and friends. For example, Dra. Sally said, "back then I just had one son, but now I have another son, and I have a niece. They're nineteen, fifteen, and fourteen years old, and you know I never thought that it would be important to my niece, or that it would help her, or even to my sister-in-law." Some even commented on how they became role models for people they did not know. "There's a lot of women with kids who have come up to me [since completing the degree] who say I saw you do this," said Dra. Josefina. In addition to seeing themselves as role models, study participants addressed the hopes they had for others to follow in their footsteps, such in the case of Advice for Future Doctoral Students sub-theme. As such participants offered advice for future EdD students in the form of words of wisdom, inspiration, validation, and best practices learned along the way. What follows are different interpretations of the participants' identity as a role model, the ways in which this identity contributed to participants' motivation to persist to degree completion and the advice they have for future EdD students.

Sub-theme: Latina Doctoral Students as Role Models

This sub-theme illustrates how study participants found a sense of purpose in being a role model for the Latinx community (Research Question 1). Characteristics associated with sense of purpose include a heightened sense of duty, responsibility, and meaning (González, 2007). In this study, study participants spoke about their sense of purpose as it related to doctoral degree attainment. When asked about their motivation to persist to degree completion participant responses were altruistic. For example, Dra. Franca and Dra. Izel both identified students in their

classroom as motivation to persist to doctoral degree completion. Dra. Franca says, “My kids [middle school class] were counting on me to make this happen, because it was a collective victory.” Dra. Izel talked about the importance of representation and the difference between ego and empowering others to see themselves as future doctoral students. She says, “I think the students feel a great sense of pride that they have a Latina professor who has a doctorate. It opens their world of possibilities.” Dra. Sally felt a responsibility to those who paved the way for her saying, “I do think that there is that sense of responsibility, like, I couldn't let down all the people that worked hard for us to get into a university that we were not always welcomed into.” Consequently, the following section further explores study participant identities as role models and how this identity influenced the collegiate experience.

Dra. Franca identified her middle school students as playing a role in her decision to pursue and persist in the EdD. She says her middle school students rode the doctoral journey alongside her. Dra. Franca describes the moment she found out she was accepted to her doctoral program:

> My students were there when I got the call saying I had gotten accepted…I had the program director on speaker, and she told me, ‘I’m calling to congratulate you. You were chosen to be a part of the program.’ I was so excited, and the kids let out a big cheer, they were so happy, and they were hugging me, and you know, because my classroom is like that. We're like family. I think they shaped my resolve during the program… they were definitely a part of that resolve. They strengthened it for sure. As their role model and teacher, you're the one that they look to for guidance and support and for them to see your journey they know they can do it to…I would tell my students there's nothing special about me other than the fact that I'm very persistent and stubborn. But if I can do it. You can too! If you really want to you can definitely do it.

Similarly, Dra. Izel describes her students as motivation to persist to degree completion. For Izel, representation is key. As a result of the lack of Latina representation among faculty in higher education, Izel feels a sense of duty to normalize academic advancement among the Latinx community. She says her motivation is the ability to be in a space in which she can influence and

impact the perspective of other people about Latinos. She stated:

> Representation and having that doctorate degree is so important. In my classes on my syllabus and everything else, I always put Dr. Izel, and my students call me Dr. Izel, and I tell them 'I'm not asking you to call me Dr. Izel, because I have some ego complex, or something like that. I am asking for this because there are so few of us that have this. I may be your only professor in all of your academic tenure, who is Latina and who is a doctor. To me, that's so sad, but that's the reality.' But the beautiful part of it is, I think the students feel a great sense of pride that they have a Latina professor who has a doctorate. It opens their world of possibilities like … Oh! If she can do that! That's like normal, like… Oh! Then I could do it, too, because there's Dr. Izel, that's just like a regular job, and it's just regular to get a doctorate degree. As I write letters of recommendation for my students I feel a sense of pride

Along these lines, Sally reflected on the notion that since completing her EdD she has become a role model for people she did not even realize were paying attention. She reflects on the importance and responsibility of representation saying:

> My sister-in-law has mentioned it to me saying how watching me helped her move forward in different aspects in her life. And I thought, Wow! Like that's really powerful that you can inspire others. That you may not even know that you were going to do that. And I think that's important, you know, especially if you come from a community where you don't have those role models, or they're not as valued as others are. I think that's really important, you know, to recognize that, and to keep going. I know it's tough because it's like your responsible for a whole community. But I do think that there is that sense of responsibility like I couldn't let down all the people that worked hard for us to get into a university that we were not always welcome into.

Josefina also discussed being a role model for her daughters and other women with children. She says, "I had some type of notion that a lot of people were watching, and that was a big propeller, definitely. My two daughters were watching, and that was big… I've also made sure to encourage a lot of people as well, I've told plenty of staff members 'Have you thought about doing this? You have a lot to contribute." Serving as a role model, provided participants with a sense of purpose to persist to doctoral degree completion. Werner and Smith (1992) stated sense of purpose is significant because it produces healthy outcomes despite hardship. Despite the challenges of systemic racism experienced early on in life, Latina interviewees articulated and

validated their continued presence in the academy through their sense of purpose, which included upward mobility for the Latinx community. Thus, sharing such aspirations for future doctoral candidates becomes an expectation.

Sub-theme: Advice for Future Doctoral Students.

This sub-theme portrays the aspirations study participants have for the advancement of the Latinx community and is presented in the form of advice for future doctoral students (Research Question 1). As a result of navigating the EdD, many as first-generation students or as one of the few Latinas in academic spaces, study participants hoped future generations could benefit from their experience. For example, Dra. Anya encouraged future doctoral students to "lean on your support, your school support, your work support. Just find support systems wherever you can, because you will need them." Sally also discussed the importance of mentorship saying, "whether it's within the program or outside of the program, take advantage of the faculty. Find a mentor." Sally describes a mentor as "somebody who has more knowledge than you or somebody who can support you when you need that support." Specifically, Dra. Valeria described the doctoral process as a significant commitment:

> What I tell folks is, One: it's a commitment. So be ready for that commitment. Be ready to make this process part of your life. I would say it is like you're nurturing a baby, and you have to continue to nurture it, non-stop. You're gonna have moments where you're gonna be, like, 'Why am I doing this to myself? [Or] Whose idea was this, you know? But look back and think about the reason why you started, and why you wanted to. The principles [of why you started] are what keeps you grounded. Revisit those [principles] because that's going to help you be like, okay. Now, I know why I'm doing this. It may seem impossible but it's not.

Furthermore, when asked what advice she has for future doctoral students Josefina stated specifically:

> You have to do it! I think that the minute you start thinking that this is something you want to do. That's not something you should quiet in yourself. Our field needs more voices, and in particular in education. To hear our experiences is really critical for all these other girls that are sitting in school, for all these female

> teachers that are out there trying to be instructional leaders, for all the female principals that are looking to see that it can be done. I think it matters.

Taking a deep breath, she added:

> Ah, never, never forget why you're there and recognize that you're there for a reason, and that your voice matters. Always reach out for help. Try to build relationships wherever you can. Think with the end in mind. I think that was the big one for me. I went to a mixer my very first year [in the EdD], and one of the other students who was in her third year, said to me 'know what you want to study, even if it's big picture, and every assignment you do choose something related to it [what you want to study] because it will help you build the foundation of research, for when you get to the phase of writing the dissertation. And keep an annotated list of notes.' So, every time I read an article that was related [to my topic] I put the author, the publication year, the title, pretty much everything that would go in a citation, and then key points. She was absolutely right. It [following her advice] made writing the dissertation so much easier, because by the time I got to that point I had all my notes in one place.

In this section, study participants simultaneously provided future doctoral students with advice and validation. Collectively, participants shared a similar thread; namely, that degree attainment is possible especially when you have support, sense of purpose and tools to help overcome challenges. These themes are further explored throughout the remainder of the chapter.

Emerging Theme Three: Social Capital

This theme explores the ways in which study participants leveraged their social capital to cultivate a sense of inclusion, belonging, and community during their doctoral studies (Research Question 2). Social capital can be understood as networks of people within the community who can provide resources and support. A shared experience among participants was the social capital received from one, and in some cases, several persons throughout their doctoral program. Support garnered from various networks was instrumental in helping study participants navigate the EdD, better understand their experience in the doctoral program, meaningfully connect with peers, unveil pertinent information, and expand professional opportunities. Together, study

participants shared the experience of receiving the support needed to persist to degree completion.

Study participants acknowledged leveraging two distinct types of social capital to navigate the EdD: programmatic networks—interactions with people affiliated with the doctoral program—and external community networks—interactions with people not affiliated with the doctoral program, both of which are identified as sub-themes, such as Programmatic Support: Cohort, Faculty and Dissertation Chair Interactions. These sub-themes highlight the various social capital derived from interactions with different networks. For example, Dra. Iris talks about shared resources among cohort members including a Google drive. She says, “we would type in information that we found critical: page numbers, quotes, reactions, significances.” In addition to academic resources, camaraderie derived as a result of non-academic socialization. Testimonia recalled bonding with cohort members over physical activity. With regard to meaningful faculty interactions, Josefina describes the importance of representation among faculty saying, “I think my second year is when I really felt seen when we got this new faculty member, a Latina!” Sub-theme Community Support: Family, Friends, and Colleagues, illuminates the vital role external community members—people outside of the program— play in aiding doctoral students sense of inclusion, belonging, and community during the doctoral program. Josefina, a mother of two young children identified her family unit as a comprehensive support system which included her husband, in-laws, and parents. Franca acknowledged her friends, one of which also holds a doctorate, as significant source of support and Sally identified her school principal as a key supporter. Altogether, study participant responses presented in the following section support the notion that doctoral students sense of inclusion, belonging, and community is influenced by factors in and outside of the degree program. What follows are

different interpretations of the ways in which participants received support needed to foster the participants' sense of inclusion, belonging, and community during their doctoral studies.

Sub-theme: Programmatic Support: Cohort, Faculty, and Dissertation Chair Interactions

This sub-theme explores the various forms of social capital available to students from within the doctoral program, which aided doctoral students sense of inclusion, belonging, and community (Research Question 2). As such, study participants reflected on interactions with cohort members, faculty, and dissertation chairs. Iris detailed the academic resources and collective sense of accountability toward one another. Meanwhile, Sally and Testimonia described cohort socialization activities that took place outside of the classroom. Iris, Esperanza, and Testimonia spoke of faculty interactions, specifically with faculty of color, that helped them make sense of their doctoral experience. Josefina and Izel elaborated on the ways in which their dissertation chair aided in the development of their academic identity. More concretely, the following section describes meaningful interactions with people connected to the doctoral program that influenced study participants sense of inclusion, belonging, and community as doctoral students.

Iris' cohort developed a shared sense of community and accountability surrounding academics. The cohort had a shared Google Drive and everyone would contribute reading notes to a master spreadsheet. She described the use of the Google Drive as follows:

> Whenever we had readings we would create a spreadsheet. Each of us would fill out a line on the spreadsheet, and we would type in information that we found critical; page numbers, quotes, reactions, significance. And when it came time to study for the comprehensive exam every single thing we had read was in the spreadsheet. So, we had material to study from.

Iris's example of information sharing process is one example of social capital in action. For instance, in the acts of collectively contributing to and maintaining shared resource platforms

cohort members were aiding in the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and interpretations that, if experienced individually, cohort members might not have gained access to otherwise. Additionally, this process lessens the burden on individual students to complete each and every assigned reading, especially when dealing with competing priorities—priorities outside of the program—such as a work deadline or personal commitment, which conflict with student priorities. Iris shared, “thanks to this document, we all passed the qualifying exam.”

Sally recalls interacting with cohort members in academic and social settings. From group work to dinner breaks. She said, “Thursday night’s we would take a class break for dinner, so we'd all head over to the food court and have dinner together.” Dra. Testimonia said, “I have really fond memories [with the cohort] we did a mud run together, we would get together for events. I'm still friends with some of them today. For sure, the biggest support system was probably my cohort.” In addition to cohort interactions that aided study participants sense of belonging, study participants reflected on interactions with faculty. Iris described the interaction with a guest lecturer as follows:

> He's like ‘Your voice matters, and you are a valued piece of this community, and you need to be here. If you ever need anything. Come, see me.’ I went to see him, and he gave me this wonderful book about women in the academy. He did things like offer to be on my dissertation committee and connect me to other people in academia. He introduced me to a researcher at the Civil Rights Project, who opened my eyes about life with an EdD. She [the researcher at the Civil Rights Project] said ‘you don't have to be a traditional professor that teaches classes. You could be a clinical professor like me. I do research all day. That's my job. I don't teach classes. I do research here for the Civil Rights Project, and if you're interested you can also go that route’. It was nice to know that there were people who were willing to share their network and help me explore my path going forward…I felt like they took a collective responsibility for supporting me.

Acceptance, validation, and support from faculty is a vital component aiding students’ ability to transform feelings of self–doubt into a sense of belonging, thus allowing them to persist and develop a passion for education (Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018;

Rodríguez et al., 2016; Terenzini et al., 1994). Dra. Valeria shared an example at the tail end of her doctoral process, in which faculty stood up on her behalf. She described the experience as follows:

> That makes me think of [the final steps of] my dissertation. When they have to finalize and approve everything. In my dissertation I don't have my pronouns, as she/he. Instead I use very gender-neutral pronouns. And that was an issue. Someone said this is not grammatically correct. We can't publish this. Well, my chairs fought for me to keep them [gender neutral pronouns], to me was like Hell Yeah!. That was a battle that I didn't have to fight.

In this same vein, Esperanza recalled an interaction with a Chicana professor who helped her make sense of her doctoral experience. During her doctoral studies, Esperanza had been struggling with a non-Latina faculty member regarding her choice in dissertation topic. Esperanza recalled an instance in which she told the non- Latina faculty member that she planned to write a policy study as part of her dissertation. Instead, the non-Latina faculty member told her to "write about student problems." Esperanza was dismayed by this response. She responded with, "I'm not gonna write a dissertation that depicts Latinos as being deficient in some way, or as not achieving something." Esperanza believed that the challenges Latinos were facing were systematic and as such she wanted to focus her research on systemic issues. During this time Esperanza's EdD program hired a brand-new Chicana professor. Bothered by this discussion, Esperanza confided in the new professor saying:

> I'm not going to do that. I'm not going to look at problems the way they do. I don't want a predetermined outcome that says that kids are deficient. I'm not going to create a little program for the brown kids to give them extra support and segregate them and tell them how wonderful they are, and then they'll graduate. I'm not here for that. I'm here for real change. She [Chicana professor] said to me 'the reason you are struggling is because of where you are in your leadership journey. You've worked at the systems level, and we don't. You don't think about programs, you think about policy. What I'm trying to do is get your classmates to think like you.' This interaction changed everything, because now she and I were on the same page. I had been struggling in her class. And now she and I

> understood why I was struggling with certain things. She even told me, 'well, we're learning this together now.'

This one interaction with a Chicana professor restored Esperanza's faith in herself and what she was advocating for. Esperanza realized that the reason she had been struggling in her doctoral program was because she "was not getting what she needed." She was frustrated by the curriculum, the professors, and the program leadership. Not only did this experience affect Esperanza's trajectory in the program, it also affected the Chicana professors teaching pedagogy. Esperanza said: "later, the Chicana faculty came to me and said she changed the content [of her class] and the way she delivers it." This story illustrates the idea that learning is a shared experience between students and educators and that educators have just as much to learn from students as students have to learn from educators.

In addition to general faculty support, Josefina described the sense of inclusion she felt as a result of having a Latino dissertation chair. As a Latina, Josefina recalled the first time she had ever felt represented in education was when she connected with her dissertation chair. She said, "I've always been the only one in the room. The only Latina in the room. I've experienced that. When I met my dissertation chair, it was the first time a Latino or Latina had ever been my teacher in this country." Similarly, Izel also had a Latina dissertation chair and detailed the support in the form of encouragement, allyship mentorship, and sponsorship she received from her dissertation chair. She said, "my dissertation chair was super supportive. The entire time I was in the doctoral program she nominated me for a whole bunch of things. She's always inviting me to conferences. She had me be a guest lecturer in our classes. She was just very welcoming. And because of her. I just felt very included."

Sub-theme: Community Support: Family, Friends, and Colleagues

This sub-theme illuminates the various forms of social capital available to students outside of the doctoral program, which aided doctoral students sense of inclusion, belonging, and community (Research Question 2). Study participants reflected on interactions with family, friends, and colleagues as aiding in their ability and decision to persist to degree completion. Josefina described the ways in which her family made it possible for her to balance being a full-time mother and doctoral student. Conversely, Franca shared that her resolve came from interactions with friends, who understood better the demands of being a doctoral student. Meanwhile, Sally acknowledge her principal for helping her balance being a full-time employee and full-time student. The following section further describes meaningful interactions with people outside of the doctoral program that influenced study participants sense of inclusion, belonging, and community as doctoral students.

Josefina had a supportive homelife which included her husband, mother-in-law, and her parents. At the start of the doctoral process, Josefina was married with two children. Her oldest in middle school and the youngest in preschool. When talking about her husband Josefina said, “he was very supportive, really supportive. He took care of the kids every Wednesday and they deemed it spaghetti night. On the weekends I had to be away [attending class] he had routines with the kids.” Josefina also drew support from her children. She said, “at one point I almost quit, and I was talking to my best friend, a Latina as well, and I was like this is too hard. It's so hard on the kids. And then my older daughter, who was fifteen at the time she came to me, said, ‘I heard you saying that it's too hard, and you might quit, she said. But, mommy, if you don't do this. How do you ever expect us to?”

When asked about the support structures she had in place upon entering the EdD program, Dra. Franca shared, “I have a very small circle of close friends,” three in particular that she's known for over thirty years played a crucial role in “lending their ear” whenever she needed it. Whether she was having a breakdown, “crying over something I didn't understand, or feeling dumb… And very lonely.” Franca new she could turn to her friends; one of these three friends had completed her doctorate several years earlier and could understand the nuances and challenges associated with pursuing a terminal degree.

When asked what support structures she had in place upon entering the doctoral program, Sally identified her principal as a key supporter and professional sponsor for her. Reminiscing about her former principal Sally said, “I think she saw a lot of leadership potential in me.” In addition to providing moral support the principal also looked out for Sally personally and professionally. A year into the EdD, Sally accepted an out of classroom position. Instead of working directly with students, Sally would now be coaching teachers. This afforded Sally with more room in her schedule to dedicate to the doctorate. Sally says, “I wouldn't have taken that position unless she [her former principal] had recommended it to me.”

Emerging Theme Four: Navigational Capital

This theme explores the ways in which study participants leveraged navigational capital when confronted with culturally and racially charged challenges, that if handled differently, may have affected their ability to persevere to degree completion. Navigational capital refers to the skills utilized to maneuver complex systems (Yosso, 2005). Participants exhibited navigational capital when confronted with three specific scenarios, which are identified as sub-themes, such as Dealing with Discrimination. Study participants described instances in which they experienced discriminatory practices at the hands of both cohort members and faculty members.

Iris and Franca detailed experiences with cohort members which challenged their sense of belonging as doctoral students. Comparatively, Franca and Esperanza provided examples of interactions with program faculty members whose prejudicial ideals manifested in class discussions, such as in Responding to Impostor Syndrome sub-theme. Study participants reflected on situations in which they experienced and responded to feeling as though they did not belong in the EdD. Esperanza's response to impostor syndrome was to leverage social capital derived from professional development organizations outside of the doctorate. Sally responded with self-confidence and Izel talked about the power of a complete strangers post on social media. In the Unprecedented Times sub-theme participants discussed the challenges associated with navigating an EdD during a global pandemic. In response to the global COVID-19 pandemic in which a mandatory stay-at-home order—beginning March 19, 2020; ending January 25, 2021—forced educational institutions to pivot from offering traditional education paradigms, in-person to fully remote, study participants acknowledged their ability to cultivate inclusion, belonging, and community during their doctoral studies was significantly impacted by the Pandemic. Esperanza and Franca shared similar sentiments regarding the disruption of cohort bonding. Franca said virtual learning "ate away at the spirit, collective spirit, you know, in the cohort." Additionally, Franca used words such as drowning, floundering, dying, isolated, alone, and disillusioned to describe her experience pursuing the EdD during the COVID-19 pandemic. What follows are different interpretations of how navigational capital was used by study participants in order to overcome challenges encountered during their doctoral journey.

Sub-theme: Dealing with Discrimination

Throughout the data collection, study participants were transparent about their experiences dealing with discrimination. The most common forms of discrimination identified by

participants were biases and microaggressions. Merriam-Webster (n.d.a) defines biases as "a personal and often unreasoned judgment for or against one side in a dispute." For the purposes of this paper, microaggression is defined as a "comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group such as a racial minority" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.b). Participants reflected on experiences in which biases and microaggressions in the doctoral program shaped their experience as Latina doctoral students. Participants described interactions with cohort members and program faculty which left them feeling isolated, excluded, treated as less than, or neglected. Dra. Franca described the effects of discrimination as "death by a thousand paper cuts."

At the beginning of the program, Dra. Iris says not everyone felt responsible for creating and engaging in safe open dialogue with one another. She recalls the cohorts first conversation surrounding Critical Race Theory "some of them were just like, what is this? You know they didn't necessarily recognize that to an extent we're all responsible for engaging in a way that makes everyone feel valued and comfortable." Iris describes microaggressions in the form of name erasure. She says, "and so like even my name. Not everyone could say it, and they would say 'do you have a nickname?" This example, illustrates, that early academic experiences often reappear during the doctorate. Similar to Testimonia's K-12 experience with name erasure, Iris experienced feeling culturally undervalued when asked for a nickname.

As a result of constantly struggling to engage in meaningful dialogue with fellow cohort members and being met with "white supremacist underpinnings in academia," Franca became, as she put it, "Discouraged, you know, with having conversations with anyone that was not of color in the cohort. Which is unfortunate, because we kind of hope that wouldn't be the case. But it was the case, and so I ended up just hanging out with the people of color. We just hung out with

each other, and the White folks were in their own group." Dra. Franca shared that her fellow cohort members, specifically other Latinas, served as support during these experiences with discrimination. Dra. Franca reminisced, "there were about five of us who would just support one another, and so that was very helpful to me. It helped me survive."

Microaggressions not only came from cohort members, but also manifested in conversations with faculty. For example, Dra. Franca shared the first interaction with a White professor who was handing out paperwork to the cohort and forgot who she had already handed paperwork to. Franca described the interaction with her faculty member as follows: "When she first met us we were all sitting in a row, and she was like 'Oh!...I get so lost. There're so many, umm, dark-haired women in this cohort'. Meanwhile I'm thinking to myself, 'did she just say that out loud?'" Franca went on to share that there was another professor who, "constantly spelled the names of students of color incorrectly," but always spelled the names of Caucasian students correctly. Dra. Franca shared that microaggressions like these happened constantly, and because they were coming from the "top" it felt as though it was embedded in the fabric of the program. She describes these microaggressions as "death by a thousand paper cuts." This caused feelings of disillusionment which impacted her sense of inclusion and belonging as a doctoral student.

Esperanza recalled several instances in which she and fellow cohort members experienced microaggressions at the hands of their faculty. She says the most prevalent experience was being told that they, doctoral students were "only there because the faculty made it so." Esperanza said, "we were made to feel as though we were less than." Comments like this fueled the fire inside of Esperanza she would say to herself, "I know why I'm here. I earned my spot. I could have gone to other places but I chose to be here." In other instances, faculty

disparaged prominent Hispanic figures, people who had a hand in creating the very institution where her doctoral program was housed. Recounting this experience, which brought Esperanza to tears, she said: “I had a lot of emotion about it.” This was particularly difficult for Esperanza as her faculty knew that she was working on a project, at the request of the Dean and Chancellor, to honor this prominent figure, posthumously. As someone who had spent time “exploring her own identity,” Esperanza was able to recognize discriminatory practices. She went on to say, “there were several of these little moments.” On a separate occasion, Esperanza overheard a faculty member tell another cohort member “that he was not good enough.” Esperanza turned to him and said, “you know why she said that? She doesn’t believe you're going to be the next Superintendent. But you can be!”

Subtheme: Responding to Impostor Syndrome

Study participants described how they experienced and responded to Impostor Syndrome throughout their doctoral program. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.c), Imposter Syndrome is defined as “a psychological condition that is characterized by persistent doubt concerning one's abilities or accomplishments accompanied by the fear of being exposed as a fraud despite evidence of one's ongoing success.” Imposter Syndrome has been linked to several factors, one of which is lack of representation (Stone et al., 2018). Although everyone is subject to feelings of self-doubt, research suggests underrepresented communities lack the ability to model behaviors when there are so few members of their community in positions to be emulated. This is evident in study participants’ responses when asked to reflect on faculty demographics and their effects on study participants’ sense of inclusion. When asked to describe her faculty Esperanza said the senior faculty were “all white women and they were all friends.” She described the dynamics between faculty and students as being “problematic.” Similarly, Dra. Franca and Dra. Testimonia

acknowledged the lack of representation among core doctoral program faculty members. Those who were people of color were often guest-teachers who were brought in to talk briefly about race related topics. Dra. Franca shared: “We had these guest professors come in and teach like shorter versions on important topics. Courses that should have been full term. These were the only classes taught by people of color.” Lack of representation among core faculty members along with limited exposure to culturally relevant experiences made it difficult for some study participants to feel included and valued in their doctoral program. “It was discouraging. We were like, ‘Okay, we get the message. You accepted us into the program. But do you really have the desire to really talk things through and really get down to the nitty gritty,” said Dra. Franca.

Study participant responses to Impostor Syndrome were a foundational feature in how the participants experienced the doctoral program. Overcoming adversity in education, being admitted into the doctoral program, participation in class discussions, and group projects helped remind the participants of the capital they brought to academia. In this context, participants described two means of overcoming Impostor Syndrome: (1) self-confidence and (2) external validation. Through personal reflection and validation from others, participants became aware that their presence provided valuable contributions to the doctoral program. As such participants leveraged themselves and their networks to combat Impostor Syndrome in order to persist to degree completion. Sally recanted her first experience with impostor syndrome as a doctoral student.

> I had moments where I was like. How am in this room? I'm not the smartest person here. I doubted I could finish. I wanted to go talk to the director of the program in these times. I wanted to ask ‘Why did you select me? Can you please tell me what you saw in me because I’m not seeing it right now.

When asked how she responded to Impostor Syndrome Sally said “it took me a while to build up that confidence. At some point I thought to myself I'm here and I'm doing it, and I decided to let my work speak for itself.

Izel drew support from social media. Prior to joining the EdD program she joined a Facebook group called Latinas Pursuing Doctoral Degrees. This group played a pivotal role in Izel’s decision to persist in the EdD. She recalls battling Impostor Syndrome the night before her first day of class saying: “I already talked myself out of doing it, and it was like four in the morning I couldn't go to sleep. My heart was racing. I'm like Oh, my gosh! I would have to call the people in the program and tell them that I’m not going to do it.” Izel scrolled through Facebook until she stumbled upon a post that read,

> Some of you will be starting programs, and you're going to hear a voice and that voice is a lying voice. This voice will tell you not to pursue it. Do not listen to that voice. You are supposed to be in that program. You need to do this. I said ‘Oh, my God! Like seriously, I was that close to not doing it, and having that community, that space, having another Latina, validating me, saying you can do this. Not only can you do this, but you should do this, and you need to do this. In fact, you have to do this for all of us.

During her doctoral program, Esperanza recalls people talking at length about imposter syndrome, and while she understood what it was she says she did not respond to it in the same ways they did. When she felt as though she was “struggling professionally” or did not know what to do, Esperanza would turn to her extensive network of friends and colleagues for advice and guidance. She recalls conversations amongst women in her professional networks talking about doing something for the first time, such as … “someone saying ‘I've never done this before,’ and someone else saying ‘I know what to do. Let's talk.’”

During her career in politics, Esperanza joined a Hispanic organization focused on political equality. This organization helped solidify her leadership presence as a Latina, as an educator and in the political community. Esperanza took part in the organization's Leadership

Institute, a nine-month program consisting of five 3-4-day intense training sessions which include academic seminars, personal assessments, group work, group presentations, lobbying, advocacy, field trips, networking receptions, and conference attendance. In between sessions, participants were assigned both individual and group research projects. Esperanza refers to this program and its alumni as more than a network. She describes it as "a community of twelve-hundred Latinas from government and corporate sectors". This community normalized the presence of Latinas in leadership, something that continued to warrant off feelings of impostor syndrome.

When Esperanza began to struggle during the dissertation stage, she turned to her network. She sought counsel from faculty at other institutions, universities all over the country to help advise her. In essence she recreated the community she developed in politics to help her finish the EdD. Esperanza believes "leadership is communal" and she says, "I probably subconsciously organize myself that way. I had all of my friends and I'd call them and say 'do you know so and so, at so and so university' and they'd be like 'Yea! Let me connect you.'" Because of this extensive network of Latinos in leadership, Esperanza never felt like she did not belong.

When other areas of the doctoral program became difficult to manage, the relationship between the supporter and the doctoral student became even more significant. These relationships and interactions affirmed the participant belonged in the program and improved the participants' sense of belonging and desire to persist. All of the participants were supported by someone interested in their tenure as doctoral students. Some supporters held formal roles within the doctoral program while others held no formal leadership role within the program. Regardless, these interactions were significant enough to properly guide the doctoral student to degree

completion. However, being supported in these ways was not always enough to remedy feelings of isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, it should be noted that while the relationship with the supporters were helpful in navigating some parts of the program, other parts of the program, the participant had to navigate on their own.

Sub-theme: Unprecedented Times: The COVID-19 Pandemic

This sub-theme explores the ways in which the global COVID-19 pandemic influenced study participants ability to cultivate inclusion, belonging, and community during their doctoral studies (Research Question 2). Unprecedented experiences called for unprecedented responses and reactions. For example, as a result of California-wide mandatory quarantine protocols put in place during the pandemic, the dynamics and infrastructures of education systems were temporarily changed to virtual and digital formats (Vindrola-Padros et al., 2020). Study participants acknowledged being critically impacted in their doctoral experiences due to the pandemic. For example, Esperanza described virtual learning as an impediment on the cohort's ability to develop community. She says, "I think it robbed us of being closer." Dra. Franca recalled the timing of the pandemic saying, "the pandemic hit about midway through our program, and then we were separated, and we had to do everything through Zoom, including our recruitment and our research." In some cases, study participants described having to learn new ways to navigate the EdD. The following section further explores the navigational capital study participants utilized to persist to degree completion.

Esperanza says the pandemic played a significant role in affecting the cohort's ability to build community amongst each other. She said, "Just when we were getting close. Then we have to survive so it wasn't the same. We had a class like this [Zoom], but it wasn't the same." Esperanza recalls pre-pandemic interactions with cohort members before, during and after class

and once instruction transitioned to virtual learning, she felt as though people would just come to Zoom to learn and then leave, with no interaction with one another. In an effort to maintain a sense of community, Esperanza and a group of cohort members created text threads to stay connected with each other. She said going through the doctoral process was "very stressful and going through it during a pandemic was brutal." In addition to the challenges associated with being a doctoral student, these professionals had to adapt their methods of learning. Including learning how to navigate virtual platforms.

Dra. Franca described this period of her program as being "very isolating," going from seeing each other on campus, twice a week, to not seeing each other until graduation. She shared that this experience "ate away at the collective spirit in the cohort." In addition to causing a strain on cohort cohesion, the Pandemic also affected relationships with faculty. Franca shared that her advisor was absent for a crucial portion of her program due to dealing with personal matters associated with the pandemic. She said, "my adviser, bless his heart, had a lot of unfortunate things happen to him and as a result he was MIA [Missing in Action], for most of my final four to six months of my program. I had to be alone, like alone, doing my stuff, and kind of just a shot in the dark here and there, and everywhere, and submitting drafts and hoping for the best." Throughout the interview, Dra. Franca used words such as drowning, floundering, dying, isolated, alone, and disillusioned to describe her experience pursuing the EdD during the COVID-19 pandemic. When asked to elaborate on scenarios which prompted these feelings, Dra. Franca shared one of the significant challenges she faced during her doctoral studies was research participant recruitment. Due to the pandemic, all of her outreach was done via Social Media and all of her interviews needed to be scheduled via Zoom. Given the vulnerable population she was working with, former foster youth, many were reluctant to participate.

Reluctancy was heightened by this rather non-traditional outreach and interviewing platforms. Initially, her study was supposed to include 20 participants. However, Dra. Franca said, “I was lucky if I got anyone to call me back or respond to anything and because it was in the middle of the pandemic, I couldn't go in person and plead my case to anybody.” As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic study participants, who were actively engaging in research, acknowledged that they encountered additional challenges in which they had to adapt their practices in order to persist to degree completion.

Chapter Summary

This chapter reported the findings from an analysis of interview data gathered from nine Latinas who have completed a cohort-based Doctor of Education (EdD) in educational leadership in Southern California. The lived experiences of Latinas pursuing the EdD were described throughout all stages of the data collection process. The responses from one-on-one interviews were transcribed and reviewed to gain a deeper understanding of experiences of these individuals. Each study participant presented unique experiences, but one consistent response regarding identity and community was present throughout the interviews. The central idea is that the Latina doctoral experience is influenced by factors inside and outside of the doctoral program. The findings illustrated that EdD programs in educational leadership and Latinas, specifically in these Southern California institutions, are not a monolithic group. Although there were shared experiences among the nine study participants, spanning three different institutions, participants differed in the ways they interpreted and reacted to their experience pursuing the EdD, thus making their educational journey somewhat unique from one another. Interwoven in each of these stories are complex interpersonal dynamics that impact the lens from which participants navigated the EdD and subsequently cultivated a sense of inclusion, belonging, and

community during their doctoral journey. The varied and shared experiences of study participants highlighted that traditional persistence models fail to acknowledge experiences leading up to and outside of the program as playing a significant role in a student's ability to persist to degree completion.

Chapter Five: Discussion

In this final chapter, I will review the statement of the problem, study goals, the theoretical framework, research questions, and the methodology of the study. Findings from the study are revisited in conjunction with the literature review. The chapter concludes with implications, future consideration, limitations, and a conclusion.

Overview of the Statement of the Problem and Study Goals

As a result of the lack of Latina leadership in academia, institutional policies and practices affecting Latinx students are often created with little to no Latinx input (Lindsey et al., 2018; Santiago, 2012). This decision-making process leads to a significant gap in higher education policy and practice regarding the needs of college students, in the postsecondary pipeline, who identify as Hispanic (Ballysingh, et al. 2017; Lindsey et al., 2018). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of Latinas' overall educational journeys while pursuing the Doctor of Education (EdD) in educational leadership degree. As such, nine Latinas who have completed a cohort-based EdD in Southern California participated in in-depth interviews about their experiences navigating the EdD.

Conceptual Framework

Cultural proficiency and community-cultural wealth theory formed the conceptual framework and provided a way to navigate and interpret this study. The framework focused the participants as experts on their experience. As such, this study consciously and intentionally, centered the Latina student experience and voice as a means of integrating minority narratives into academic literature affecting Latinx students (Lindsey et al., 2018; Soles et al., 2020; Yosso, 2013, 2005; Welborn, 2019). Previous research depicts Latinas pursuing the EdD as adult learners with multiple intersecting identities such as mother, partner, daughter, employee, friend,

and student (Achor & Morales, 1990; Arocho, 2017; González, 2006a; Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2017; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). The findings of this study corroborate these identities and also illuminate other identities that contribute to study participants experience as Latinas in the EdD.

The Research questions

To reiterate, the study addressed the following research questions and sub-questions: What are the experiences of Latina students during their Doctor of Education (EdD) program?

1. How do Latina EdD students experience their doctoral program?
2. How do Latina EdD students make sense of and cultivate inclusion, belonging, and community during their doctoral studies?

The Methodology

The design of the study utilized phenomenological inquiry because it was the most appropriate design to give voice to this population's experience in the doctoral program. Inquiry consisted of conducting interviews which facilitated the content of the study and, in turn, the content was interpreted through the dual conceptual-framework lens. Based on the recruitment message, study participants self-identified as Latina (See Appendix B and C). Participants were selected first by using purposeful homogeneous followed by snowball recruitment to meet the intended number of study participants. Nine Latinas who had completed a blended cohort-based Doctor of Education (EdD) at one of three predetermined public universities in Southern California participated in the study. Participants engaged in one-on-one, semi-structured interviews over the course of three months. The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed by the researcher. I engaged in hand-note taking during the interview and reflective memo-writing after each interview. In order to identify emerging themes, in vivo coding was manually

performed. Additionally, pattern coding was also manually performed as a way to identify patterns within the themes.

Summary of Research Findings: Emerging Themes and Connections to Main Questions

The findings of this study generated four themes. Theme One—Resistance Capital, the knowledge and skill that develop from having "oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). This theme highlighted early academic experiences that propelled participants to pursue the EdD, as well as the ways in which these early experiences influenced the development of their doctoral academic identity. Study participants talked about an early awareness of inequalities experienced by marginalized communities in academia and the ways they used their positionality as doctoral students to challenge inequality.

Theme Two—Aspirational Capital, "the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even in the face of barriers," (p. 77) focuses on participants sense of purpose, hopes and dreams for the academic advancement of the Latinx community. Study participants, some of whom were first-generation college students, were among the few Latinas to advance, let alone complete the EdD, expressed a personal responsibility to persist so that others could see that it was possible. Participants identified as role models for the Latinx community which included family, friends, and strangers. This sense of purpose and hope for a better future also manifested in the form of advice for future doctoral students.

Theme Three—Social Capital signifies networks of people that enable access to information, knowledge, or resources (Bourdieu, 1972; Yosso, 2005). This theme describes how study participants leveraged available networks to gain access to resources and supports needed to persist to degree completion. Participants spoke of meaningful interactions within and outside of the doctoral program which they deemed as influencing their sense of inclusion, belonging,

and community as doctoral students. Interactions took place in academic settings as well as non-academic social gatherings. Resources included study guides and access to larger networks. Support included accountability, validation, and representation.

Theme Four—Navigational Capital relates to the skills study participants acquired or developed in order to maneuver through the doctoral degree program (Yosso, 2005). Participants describe the challenges they experienced as Latina doctoral students and the ways in which these participants navigated these challenges. Discrimination, impostor syndrome, and the COVID-19 pandemic were among the most prevalent challenges discussed by study participants. In an effort to cope with these challenges, participants described strategies they used such as self-isolation, self-confidence and leveraging social capital.

The following section of Chapter Five connects research findings to the main research questions this study set out to answer.

Research Question 1

How do Latina EdD students experience their doctoral program? The findings illustrated that EdD programs in Southern California and Latinas are not a monolith. Although there were shared experiences among the nine participants, spanning three different institutions, each participant differed in the ways they interpreted and reacted to their experience pursuing the EdD, thus making their experiences somewhat unique from one another.

Previous research illuminates the nuances associated with being a Doctor of Education (EdD) student. For example, EdD students tend to be older—adult learner—, have full-time jobs, be at different life cycles, have different needs, motivations, commitments, and experiences than traditional PhD students (Kowalik, 1989; Pauley et al., 1999; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012; Tran et al., 2016;

Valverde & Rodriguez, 2002; West et al., 2011). Study participants confirmed much of what the literature says about EdD students. For example, prior to enrolling in the EdD all participants had experience working in educational settings and all, but one participant worked full-time while pursuing the EdD. Additionally, as a group, study participants described actively negotiating multiple shared and individual intersectionalities while pursuing the EdD (Lehan et al., 2021; Offerman, 2011; Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; West et al., 2011). Shared identities including female, Latina, advocate, educator, student, and role model. Individual identities included mother, single-mother, immigrant, and LGBTQ+.

Using the lens of community-cultural wealth, the findings associated with Research Question One suggest the Latina EdD experience is influenced by factors leading up to, within, and outside of the doctoral program. Prior research exploring Latinas and the EdD primarily focused on the active environment that is the EdD (Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; Spaulding & Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2012). However, findings from this study indicate early academic experiences heavily influenced how study participants experience the EdD. These early academic experiences often included discrimination in the form of biases and microaggressions, something that many of the participants also experienced during their doctoral program.

Additionally, findings indicate Latinas do not need to sacrifice their cultural identity in order to persist to degree completion. Early persistence theorists attributed persistence to a student’s ability to integrate or assimilate to fit the institution's academic culture (González & Morrison, 2016; Ramirez, 2017; Rendón et al, 2000; Tierney, 1992; Tinto, 1975). This theory gained traction, and continues to serve as the foundation for many reforms, due largely in part to traditional students' ability to integrate seamlessly and assimilate willingly into the academic culture in order to persist (Astin, 1970, 1975, 1985; Bean 1980, Bean & Metzner, 1985; Spady,

1970; Tinto 1975, 1993). This approach, grounded in deficit thinking, encourages students to abandon their cultural backgrounds to fit into an academic campus mold (González & Morrison, 2016; Ramirez, 2017; Tierney, 1992). This method of thinking fails to acknowledge how one's culture and individuality can be an asset in one's journey toward degree attainment. As such, scholars have implored research to conduct critical scholarship which explores educational access, persistence models, and completion methods that eliminate the need for Latinx students to decide between being their authentic selves and attaining degree completion (NCES, 2021a, 2021c; Offerman, 2011; Ramirez, 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017; Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2014; West et al., 2011). Findings from this study indicate that cultural identity and academic identity can coexist together. Doctoral research identifies academic identity as the process in which a doctoral student progresses from student, absorber of knowledge to scholar, producer of knowledge (Gardner, 2009; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). Participants in this study articulated how they harnessed their early academic experiences and leveraged their cultural identity in the development of their doctoral academic identity. For example, for many participants, their Latina identity as a doctoral student was tied to their research topic, and their research topic was often tied to addressing an injustice in the education system that they witnessed, and, in most cases, experienced themselves. This was a significant component of how study participants experienced the EdD and is in contrast to early persistence literature.

Findings also illustrate study participants sense of duty to the Latinx community and a conscious, and sometimes unconscious, awareness that others are watching. Participants explained that the responsibility to persist was on them. Since there are limited Latinas with EdDs it was up to study participants to be a role model for their children, biological and not, for their family, and for the Latinx community. Study participants expressed bearing the weight of

this duty as both a challenge and source of motivation to persist to degree completion. In addition to carrying the burden of being “the only Latina in the room,” participants also detailed the burden of dealing with discrimination and impostor syndrome. People who suffer from imposter syndrome are often worried about being outed as being less capable than they seem to be. Study participants hold identities that have been underserved and underrepresented, and as such have internalized biases their whole life about what they are and are not capable of doing. Research suggests there is a direct correlation between the identities that feel imposter syndrome the most acutely and those that experience the most microaggressions (Bastian, 2019). Microaggressions, such as being asked “Do you have a nickname?”, or being treated as inferior for being bilingual and speaking English with an accent, can contribute to growing impostor tendencies. These biases implicitly, and explicitly, create false and reinforce deficit beliefs that underrepresented populations have sub-par abilities. The internalization of those biases can make a person from an underrepresented identity think that they need to fit in, and not say or do anything to get noticed, in order to get by. However, as doctoral students, study participants did the opposite, instead of hiding, they leaned into their differences and treated them as assets. Participants either did this on their own through positive self-talk, or by harnessing the power of their network to help build them up.

Undoubtedly, some study participants were critically impacted in their doctoral experiences due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. During the pandemic, the dynamics and infrastructures of education systems were temporarily changed to virtual and digital formats, shaping research results (Vindrola-Padros et al., 2020). Unprecedented experiences called for unprecedented responses and reactions. Thus, the pandemic spurred several challenges for study participants pursuing in-person EdD programs in Southern California. Challenges included

increased feelings of isolation, decreased access to resources, much of which can be attributed to having to learn new ways to learn and conduct research. Research indicates doctoral students experience graduate school in two distinct stages; namely, coursework and dissertation writing (West et al., 2011). These researchers also contend that a key distinction between these two phases is that the former is described as a shared experience involving high levels of structured peer and faculty interaction in the classroom. Conversely, the dissertation stage is described as a solitary unstructured writing process (West et al., 2011). Research on the challenges associated with doctoral completion identifies the dissertation stage as one of the most significant challenges affecting persistence (Rockinson–Szapkiw et al., 2017). Studies suggest doctoral attrition in the All-But-Dissertation (ABD) stage is exacerbated by students' feelings of social isolation caused by the transition from group coursework to individual dissertation writing (West et al., 2011). Study participants who experienced the dissertation stage during the COVID-19 pandemic shared that the pandemic exacerbated feelings of isolation. However, for these study participants, whose doctoral programs were interrupted by the pandemic, the greatest challenges included conducting research—recruiting participants for a virtual study and conducting a virtual study—and gaining access to faculty, all of whom were also dealing with and adapting to the COVID-19 pandemic difficulties.

Research Question 2

How do Latina EdD students make sense of and cultivate inclusion, belonging, and community during their doctoral studies? Existing literature contends students increased sense of belonging positively correlates with Latina doctoral persistence levels (Abrica & Rivas, 2017; Dorn & Papalewis, 1997; Garcia, 2013; Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Griffin et al., 2012; Rodríguez et al., 2016; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). For purposes of this study, sense of belonging refers to

feelings of connectedness (O'Meara et al., 2017). Jack (2019) takes this idea one step forward and implores educators to focus on fostering inclusion. Student success literature identifies institutional agents, faculty, counselors, and peers as primary drivers of inclusive academic, programmatic, and institutional culture (Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Tovar, 2015). Institutional agents use their own social capital to develop structures contributing to the success and empowerment of historically marginalized students, contributing to the development of culturally relevant support structures, enhanced student experiences, and positive educational outcomes, which empower minority students to actively participate in and complete the academic process (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018; Stanton–Salazar, 2011). Using the lens of community-cultural wealth, the findings from this study corroborate the importance and value of institutional agents exchanging social capital with minoritized student's as aiding in the student's overall sense of belonging, validation, development, and success. Social capital included mentorship, advocacy, and an invitation to participate in conversations that may lead to enhanced persistence and completion support systems (Flores, 2020; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2012, 2015).

However, in the absence of supportive institutional agents such as cohort members, program faculty, and or dissertation chair, participants looked elsewhere for support. In this study participants identified informal agents such as family members, colleagues, and professional development organizations as critical agents fostering inclusion, belonging, and community during their doctoral studies. Participants spoke of their children biological, and non-biological, as contributing to their resolve. For example, Josefina described an instance in which her fifteen-year old daughter overheard her telling a friend that she was going to quit the EdD because it was too hard. Josefina's daughter said, "I heard you saying that it's too hard, and you

might quit. But, mommy, if you don't do this. How do you ever expect us to?" Study participants who were also mothers during their doctoral studies highlighted the value of having a supportive family structure in place to help around the house, cook meals, shuttle the kids to practice or even babysit, made a significant impact on participants ability to complete the EdD. This finding contributes to the idea that the doctoral experience, as well as persistence, is influenced by factors in and outside of the degree program.

Dealing with discrimination at the hands of cohort members and faculty, as well as responding to personal feelings of impostor syndrome influenced participants sense of inclusion, belonging, and community within the EdD. Research suggests impostor syndrome is similar to, and in some cases, intensified by being "the only Latina in the room" (Bastian, 2019). Latinas are not only underrepresented in formal education attainment, they are also underrepresented in faculty positions in higher education. Data from the Digest of Education Statistics (2021) show of the 836,597 faculty employed by U.S. institutions of higher education in 2020, only 22,461 (or .026%) were Latina. As such, it is understandable that when Latina students do not see people who look like them, or who hold their same identities in academia, the feeling of not fitting is magnified.

Implications for Social Justice

The shifting of student racial demographics in education is a positive sign; however, the underrepresentation of Latinas in leadership roles indicates there is still room for institutions to grow. As long as there is a disparity in degree attainment among Latinas at the doctoral level, there is a continued need to research this population to increase our understanding. Knowledge and understanding of Latina experiences in doctoral programs may aid educational leaders in efforts to meet Latina doctoral students' needs, provide culturally proficient academic

experiences, and increase retention and degree completion rates for Latina doctoral students (Ivankova & Stick, 2007).

Using feedback loop as an analytical framework, it is imperative minority students complete the Ed.D. so they may position themselves in campus roles which afford them the opportunity to offer such things as mentorship, serve as role models, and provide diverse perspectives, approaches to pedagogy which challenge structures, and policies serving as barriers to degree attainment (Flores, 2020; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012, Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). Utilizing the cultural proficiency lens to address the doctoral achievement gap, it is essential we include the voice of Latinx womxn who have completed, withdrawn, and or been terminated from the EdD (Flores, 2020; Pauley et al., 1999). While these participants may not have a formal leadership or decision-making role within the EdD, their counter-narrative may aid educational leaders in their efforts to ensure optimal matriculation rates of Latinas, and all students by extension (Castro et al., 2011; Lindsay et al., 2018).

Implications and Recommendations for Institutional Leaders

This study's findings can be used to assist in creating equitable learning spaces, in both K-12 and higher education, that foster a sense of belonging. The implications that emerged from findings, presented using community-cultural wealth lens, describe how the doctoral experience was influenced by factors in and outside of the degree program. Utilizing the lens of cultural proficiency there are several practical recommendations that can be implemented. The first recommendation for institutional leaders would be to acknowledge that for many of these Latina study participants, culturally-charged, academic experiences early in their education, significantly influenced their journey toward and throughout the EdD program. As such, institutional leaders should find ways to encourage information sharing, as well as collaboration

opportunities between PreK-12 and higher education professionals to support Latina students. One way for educators to collaborate is through the implementation of blended cohort models which infuses PreK-12 and higher education concepts into one program. This has the benefit of expanding the understanding of academic professionals across the entire education continuum. Thus, helping Prek-12 educators understand their ability to either negatively or positively influence the trajectory of their students, is dependent on the ways they support their students. Furthermore, study participants acknowledged knowing the difference between feeling valued in academia versus academic institutions merely signaling diversity as a valued quality. This was evident in study participants discussions around the lack of faculty of color, the lack of extensive cultural and racial discussions. Recommendations for institutions include taking an inventory of faculty demographics and hiring practices. Additionally, an introspective look at current course offerings including topics, syllabi and reading material may warrant a conscious and intentional overhaul in which culturally relevant literature and pedagogy are integrated into the curriculum. This newly aligned curriculum and pedagogy would encourage faculty and students to explore and reflect on diverse journeys. Such practice may not only validate the student's pre-doctoral experience but may also help open space for dialogue, among faculty and students with diverse backgrounds.

The third recommendation for institutional leaders would be to create and cultivate learning spaces that place value on nontraditional forms of collaboration, education, and information sharing. In this study, participants acknowledged the value of the support they received from internal – cohorts, faculty, and chairs; and, or external support systems – family friends, and colleagues. However, not each study participant was offered or afforded the same level of support. As such, providing increased opportunities for students to be mentored by

faculty, to co-present, co-author, or attend conferences together could contribute to an increased sense of inclusion, belonging and community during their doctoral studies. Additionally, many of the participants in this study were first-generation. As such most of their external support systems lacked intimate knowledge of the demands associated with being an adult learner, full-time student, and employee. Providing opportunities for external support systems to be involved throughout the doctoral journey may provide a better understanding of the demands placed on their student. This may result in an increased awareness and opportunity for support. Recommendations include inviting external support systems to participate in portions of the new student orientation, mini-lectures, milestone celebrations such as qualifying, proposal and dissertation defenses.

The fourth recommendation for institutional leaders would be to offer training opportunities for faculty and students, based on cultural appreciation and sense of belonging. These types of training, drawing from cultural proficiency, should focus on creating foundational knowledge, providing historical context, addressing systems of inequality, and positioning individuals as empowerment agents. The four tools of cultural proficiency provide a framework for approaching sustainable and transformational change. Training should be incorporated into the program's culture, a standard that should be set by the leadership and instituted at every level of the organization (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016).

The fifth recommendation would be to create formal mentoring programs between Latina students in the same program but from different cohorts within the program. Creating formal mentor programs that are evaluated and have a genuine investment from the institution will help create a sense of belonging and provide Latina students with the opportunity to build connections within and among each other. These formal connections can offer support in navigating the

doctorate. These mentoring programs can span multiple cohorts, creating opportunities to explore other dynamics, and easily connect to new networks. Participants described feeling isolated as one of the challenges they had to overcome to advance in their doctoral journey. Having a mentor or a network of peers who share similar identities is a step in removing the barrier of isolation. Institutions could also seek to create alumni mentoring programs. This could increase the connections and breadth of experiences that could be shared among Latina students pursuing the EdD and Latinas who have successfully navigated the EdD. This experience could help increase alumni's sense of community. Additionally, institutions could also seek to create cross-institution mentoring opportunities. This practice could provide Latinas with insight into other institutions' organizational culture and practices.

Recommendations for Future Research

Further research in the area of early academic interactions and experiences for Latina doctoral students is needed for a better understanding of how different support structures and experiences affect matriculation rates of Latinas pursuing the EdD. Strategies and resources used by Latinas to navigate the EdD program successfully should provide support based on specific needs and experiences of the Latina student. Follow-up studies have the potential to illuminate how centering community-cultural wealth within the EdD program might lead to culturally proficient educators and degree programs. Research involving the cross-reference of Latina students' early academic experiences, and doctoral experiences would garner a broader view into how early educators can be more individualized in supporting Latinas throughout the K-12 system.

Another area of interest to be considered for future research would be a qualitative study

that compares the experiences of program completers and non-completers—those who have withdrawn or been terminated—would address a significant gap in existing literature, most of which analyzes the two phenomena separately and independently of one another (Castro et al., 2011; Clewell, 1987; Gold, 2005; González, 2006a; Jairam & Kahl, 2012; Rockinson-Szapkiw, 2019; Rockinson-Szapkiw et al., 2014; Valverde & Rodriguez, 2002; Watford et al., 2006). A side-by-side comparison of the Latinas' experience of those who have, or not, completed the EdD might yield greater insight into the Latina experience in higher education. For example, most higher education programs do not capture exit survey data for students who withdraw or are terminated from their degree program. Therefore, including the narratives of those who do not persist to doctoral degree completion may yield insight into the cultural knowledge that might otherwise be lost due to non-completion (Flores, 2020; Pauley et al., 1999).

Conclusion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the lived experiences of Latinas who have completed a Doctor of Education (EdD) at one of three predetermined public universities in Southern California. The stories and experiences of these nine Latinas have provided an opportunity to understand how the intersectionality of gender and race has a significant impact on persistence. Study participants detailed the meaning they assigned to inequitable early academic experiences associated with their Latina identity, and the ways in which they used their academic identity and positionality as doctoral students to challenge oppressive practices affecting the Latinx community. Despite unique challenges associated with their Latina identity, participants continued to persist by tapping into resistance characteristics, harnessing aspirational capital, and leveraging social and navigational capital. In addition to institutional support, participants utilized their community networks to help cultivate inclusion,

sense of belonging, and community during their doctoral studies. These experiences overall led them to successful academic outcomes as all participants, at the time of this study, had completed the EdD.

As findings in this study indicated, Latinas are strategically using their doctoral degrees to affect social change on behalf of communities that have been historically marginalized throughout the education continuum. It is essential that policy makers, higher educational institutions, and educators create and transform policy that will allow education for all students regardless of race, gender, sexuality, and/or legal status. Therefore, the recommendations provided serve as a pathway for educational leaders to begin to transform current educational settings into a more equitable space where students can thrive.

California State University
SAN MARCOS

Appendix A: Consent Form to Participate in Research

Invitation to Participate

My name is Amanda Corona, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Joint Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership at UC San Diego and CSU San Marcos. I am conducting a study about the experiences of Latinas in doctoral programs. This study aims to capture information about the overall experience of Latina who have pursued an EdD in Educational Leadership in Southern California. This is important because Latinas are described as the least likely to pursue and persist in doctoral programs. You are invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as Latina who has pursued an EdD in Educational Leadership in Southern California.

Key Information About this Research Study

The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether to be a part of this study. Information that is more detailed is listed later on in this form. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Latinas who have graduated from three predetermined EdD programs located in Southern California. You will be asked to complete a brief questionnaire to confirm eligibility to participate. You will then be invited to participate in a 90-minute one-on-one interview and asked to provide supplemental documentation for review such as a resume. We expect that you will be in this research study for a total of 1.5 hours. The primary risk of participation is time, based on your ability to make yourself available for a 90-minute interview. The main benefit is that your participation may contribute to the research in this field.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Latinas who have graduated from three predetermined EdD programs located in Southern California.

Number of Participants

If you agree to participate, you will be one of nine participants who will be participating in this research.

Procedures for this Study

If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following:

- Read, sign and return this consent form, to the researcher via email at xxxx@cougars.csusm.edu. Upon receipt of the signed consent form the researcher will contact you within 5 days to schedule a 90-minute interview.
- Interview: Interview will be scheduled at least two weeks in advance. The 90-minute interview will consist of you responding to approximately ten questions. Interviews may be conducted virtually or in-person. All interviews will be audio- and video-recorded. Participants will be allowed to review the interview transcripts for accuracy.

- Document Collection: You will be asked to provide a current resume/CV or a link to your LinkedIn or company profile. This information will be used by the researcher to gain insight about your pre and post-EdD professional trajectory.

Risks and Inconveniences

There are minimal risks in participating in the research. They include:

- Participants may be uncomfortable answering the survey or interview questions.
- The time participants spend for participating in the study might be considered inconvenience.
- There might be a risk of possible loss of confidentiality.
- Fear/anxiety related to contracting COVID-19 during face to face interviews.

Safeguards

To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken:

- If a strong emotional reaction is evoked during the interview processes you can ask the primary investigator to turn off the audio-recorder and take a moment to recuperate or refuse to answer any question. If necessary you may request to stop or withdraw from the research study all together without any adverse consequences. Participants may be directed to a counseling or social support services.
    - o California Mental Health Crisis Hotline: Dial 988
    - o California Mental Health Resources: https://focus.senate.ca.gov/mentalhealth/suicide
- Interviews will be conducted in a location and format agreed upon by the interviewer and interviewee.
- Documents and recordings will be kept within a password-protected computer.
- Virtual interview option will be made available to participants.

Confidentiality

Your responses will be kept confidential. The primary investigator is working alone, thus limiting others from having access to data. Pseudonyms will be used to hide your identity as well as that of your institution of study.

The results if this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name and other personal information will not be used. Documents and recordings will be kept within a password-protected computer with the primary investigator only having access to the documents.. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or may leave the study at any time. Leaving the study will not result in any penalty.

Benefits of Taking Part in the Study

There are no direct benefits to participation in this study, however, your participation will help add to the academic literature surrounding the educational journey of Latina doctoral students, a population that has been described as marginalized in doctoral programs.

Payment or Incentive
You will receive payment for taking part in this study. The primary investigator understands the time commitment behind your participation in the research. You will receive compensation in the form of a $25-gift card at the end of the interview.

Contact Information
If you have questions about the study, please call me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or e-mail me at xxxx@cougars.csusm.edu. Or you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Manuel Vargas at xxxx@csusm.edu. You will be given a copy of this form for your records. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at irb@csusm.edu or (760) 750-4029.

Participant's Consent
By signing below, you are giving consent to participate in the study. Please check the option that applies to you before signing:

☐ I give permission for my interview to be audio and video taped.
☐ I do not give permission for my interview to be audio and video taped.

Name of the Participant: _____

Signature of the Participant: _____

Date:_____

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SAN MARCOS

Appendix B: Participant Recruitment Direct Message Via Social Media

My name is Amanda J. Corona, and I am a doctoral candidate in educational leadership at UCSD/CSUSM. I am conducting a study about the experiences of Latinas and the EdD. You are invited to participate in this study because you have been identified as Latina who has completed an EdD in educational leadership in Southern California.

The time commitment is a one-time 90-minute interview. You will be asked to provide supporting documentation such as a current resume/CV. You will be given a $25.00 gift card for participating in the study. Participation is voluntary, should you choose not to participate, you can simply disregard the email or forward it to someone who does fit the criteria. If you would like to participate please respond to this message indicating your interest and I will provide you with screening questions to confirm your eligibility.

Respectfully,

Amanda J. Corona, MA

California State University
SAN MARCOS

Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Via Email

My name is Amanda J. Corona, and I am a graduate student in the Joint Doctoral Program (JDP) in educational leadership with UC San Diego (UCSD) and Cal State San Marcos (CSUSM). The goal of this email is to recruit participants for my dissertation research. I am conducting a qualitative study designed to explore experiences of Latinas who have completed or have withdrawn or have been terminated from an Ed.D. program in educational leadership. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of Latinas' overall journeys while pursuing the doctoral degree.

You are being contacted because you have been identified as Latina who has completed an EdD in educational leadership in Southern California. I would like to ask you to participate in a 90-minute, semi-structured, interview consisting of 10 questions. You may choose to have the interview at a location and time most convenient for you. During the interviews you will be asked to describe your experiences in the EdD and describe any structures that helped or hindered degree completion. With your permission, the interview will be video- and audio-taped and later transcribed.

Your confidentiality will be protected throughout this process. Pseudonyms will be used to minimize the risk of identification. Participants will be allowed to review the interview transcripts for accuracy once it is completed.

To participate, you must identify as Latina, and have previously enrolled in a cohort based EdD program in Educational Leadership in Southern California. If you meet the study-research criteria outlined above and would like to participate, please respond via email to the following screening questions:

1. **I identify as Latina: Yes/No**

Latina is defined as a female who identifies as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana/x, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Hispanic, Latina/x, or other Spanish origin. Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's ancestors before their arrival in the United States.

2. **I have previously enrolled in a cohort based doctoral program EdD in Educational Leadership. Yes/No**

Cohort: A group of students who start, progress and typically complete a program of study together.
EdD in Educational Leadership: A program which infuses PreK-12 and higher education concepts into one program of study.

a. Name of institution:

3. **Your full name:**
4. **Your preferred email:**
5. **Your preferred phone number:**

If you are selected as a final participant, an informed consent will be emailed. You will then have up to 5 days to return the signed informed consent. Individuals selected to participate will be emailed a consent form, receive details about the study, and set up a date for the interview. Consider this recruitment message as the first step to identify interested female Latina doctoral students for the intended study. Please feel free to contact me directly at xxxx@cougars.csusm.edu with any questions you may have.

Respectfully,

Amanda J. Corona, MA

California State University
SAN MARCOS

Appendix D: Telephone Script with Potential Subjects

Good morning {or afternoon}!

My name is Amanda J. Corona, and I am a graduate student in the Joint Doctoral Program (JDP) in educational leadership with UC San Diego (UCSD) and Cal State San Marcos (CSUSM).

I am conducting a qualitative study designed to explore experiences of Latinas who have completed or have withdrawn or been terminated from a cohort-based EdD program in educational leadership. The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of Latinas' overall journeys while pursuing the doctoral degree.

You are being contacted because you have been identified as Latina who has completed an EdD in educational leadership in Southern California. I would like to ask you to participate in a 90-minute, semi-structured, interview consisting of 10 questions. You may choose to have the interview at a location and time most convenient for you.

During the interview you will be asked to describe your experiences in the EdD and describe any structures that helped or hindered degree completion. With your permission, the interview will be video- and audio-taped and later transcribed.

To participate, you must identify as Latina, and have previously enrolled in a cohort based EdD program in educational leadership in Southern California. Do you meet these criteria?

If so, would be interested in participating?

If yes: Great, next I will provide you with consent form.
If no: Thank you for your time. Might you be able to recommend someone else from your cohort who fits the criteria?

Thank you for your time!

California State University
SAN MARCOS

Appendix E: Semi Structured Interview Guide

1. Tell me about yourself. How would you describe yourself? Where did you grow up? How does this all relate to your identity as a Latina?

2. Tell me about your experiences in education and what impacted your decision to pursue a doctoral degree.

3. What attracted you to the EdD in Educational Leadership and why?

4. Tell me about any support structures you had in place upon entering the program? Work, family, community, social?

5. Thinking back to your time in the doctoral program, can you tell me about the makeup of your cohort (Ex. total number, how many people of color, how many were Latino/a, how many did you interact with and how?)
    a. Can you tell me about interactions with cohort members that shaped your sense of community or belonging as a doctoral student? What was the interaction and how did it shape your experience?

6. Thinking back to your time in the doctoral program, can you tell me about the makeup of your program's faculty or staff (Ex. total number, how many people of color, how many were Latino/a, how many did you interact with and how?)
    a. Can you tell me about interactions with faculty or staff that shaped your sense of community or belonging as a doctoral student? What was the interaction and how did it shape your experience?

7. Thinking back to your time in the doctoral program, can you tell me about interactions with people outside of the program that shaped your sense of community or belonging as a doctoral student?
    a. What was the interaction and how did it shape your experience?

8. In what ways, if at all, did the doctoral program hinder you in pursuit of the degree? Any examples of specific interactions or events?

9. As a former Latina doctoral student, what advice do you have for other Latina students seeking to pursue an EdD in Educational Leadership?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share that might help me understand your experience as a Latina in the EdD?

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Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Welcome and thank you for your participation. My name is Amanda Corona and I will be your interviewer. This interview is meant to explore your experience as a doctoral student.

Introduction to the interview:
The purpose of this study is to explore the doctoral experiences of Latina students in the EdD. The location of the study and all participants will be made anonymous in the writing of the report. All data collected, including this interview, will be kept in a password protected file and password protected computer. This interview will take approximately 90 minutes. You will have an opportunity to review all the information gathered during this interview to help ensure that information has been noted correctly.

Next, I will review the consent form that you agreed to and signed [review consent form].
[Turn on and test recording device]

General Information
I need to start with confirming your eligibility. [Interviewee information sheet]

Interview
I would now like to begin the interview about your experience as a Latina in the EdD.
[Proceed with interview questions]

Closure

I want to thank you for participating in this interview. This interview will be transcribed and saved on my password-protected computer. At this time, I would like to request the following supporting documents: resume/CV or a link to their LinkedIn or company profile.
Lastly, I would like to provide you with a $25 gift card as a token of my appreciation for your participation in this study. [In person interview: hand the participant a gift card. Virtual interview: send them the gift card via email] Again, I am deeply grateful for your time, participating in this study and most importantly, sharing your story.

[Turn off recording device].

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Appendix G: Interview Information Sheet

Date of Interview

Time of Interview:

Location of Interview:

Name of Interviewer:

Name of Interviewee:

Do you identify as Latina: Yes/No
Latina is defined as a female who identifies as Mexican, Mexican American, Chicana/x, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Hispanic, Latina/x, or other Spanish origin. Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's ancestors before their arrival in the United States.

Have you previously enrolled in a cohort based doctoral program EdD in Educational Leadership. Yes/No
Cohort: A group of students who start, progress and typically complete a program of study together.
EdD in Educational Leadership: A program which infuses PreK-12 and higher education concepts into one program of study.

Name of institution:

What is your current doctoral status?

- Completed the EdD:
  - Date of dissertation defense:
- Withdrawn (on-leave with or without intention to return) ○ Date of withdrawal:
- Terminated from the program (with or without intention to return)
  ○ Date of termination:

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