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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Navigating Academia: Exploring Social Support and Experiences of Latina Ph.D.
Students

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Psychology

by

Brenda Rincon

June 2026

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I have an incredibly supportive village that has helped me grow and flourish not only as a researcher but as a person. You all have guided me, hyped me up, and challenged me when needed. Getting through grad school has been one of the most difficult and emotionally draining experiences I've ever had, but because of the support I received along the way and the lessons I learned, I don't think I would change much about it. Thank you for helping me become the first Doctora Rincon in my lineage.

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Dedication

To the Latinas who paved the way for future generations while enduring systemic oppression, neglect, and discrimination, you should never have had to carry those burdens. I hope this dissertation serves as one small step toward challenging the inequities that Latina PhD students continue to face within academia.

To those who are the first in their families to navigate the higher education system. You possess unique strengths, wisdom, and resilience that academia has too often failed to recognize. You deserve better.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Navigating Academia: Exploring Social Support and Experiences of Latina Ph.D.
Students

by

Brenda Rincon

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Psychology
University of California, Riverside, June 2026
Dr. Diamond Bravo, Chairperson

Despite a two-fold increase in doctoral attainment among Latinas in the U.S. over the past two decades, disparities in completion persist compared to other racial-ethnic groups. A lack of social support in academia contributes to isolation and intentions to drop out among Latina doctoral students, highlighting the need to better understand and address their experiences. Guided by Latina/o Critical Theory, Community Cultural Wealth, and Ecological Systems Theory, this dissertation examined how Latina PhD students in U.S. social science programs navigate relationships with mentors, advisors, and peers, focusing on support and conflict. It also explored their use of social media for support and their interactions with institutional resources.

This study addressed five research questions related to culturally responsive mentoring, advisor conflict navigation, peer support and conflict resolution, online social support, and institutional support. Using a multi-method design, Study A collected survey data from 214 Latina PhD students, and Study B conducted *plática*-style focus groups

with 40 first-generation Latina PhD students to examine the mechanisms and cultural factors shaping relationship dynamics in academia. Notably, participants reported limited use of social media and minimal institutional programming to support relationship-building, and thus, these areas were examined descriptively.

Findings highlight the complex, culturally embedded ways in which Latina PhD students navigate academic relationships. For mentoring, three themes emerged: adaptation and resources, relational mentoring, and critically conscious mentoring. Advisor conflict navigation was shaped by cultural dissonance, persistence, and resistance, and navigating whiteness and belonging. Peer support revealed five key forms, including academic mentoring, co-processing of racialized and inequality-based experiences, emotional support, companionship, and shared identity and understanding. Additionally, online emotional support was perceived as significantly higher than informational support. These findings offer insight into how Latina PhD students persist and navigate systems not designed with them in mind and contribute to the existing literature by demonstrating that relationship navigation is a dynamic, culturally grounded process shaped by social networks, cultural values, and hierarchical structures within academia.

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Navigating Academia: Exploring Social Support and Experiences of Latina Ph.D.

Students

The number of Latinas, individuals identifying as Latinx women, earning graduate degrees increased by 291% between 2000 and 2021 (Pew Research Center, 2023). While this is notable progress, a significant disparity persists in the number of Latinas attaining doctoral degrees compared to Black (14.1%), Asian (20.2%), and White (16.5%) women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). This is particularly important to consider because Latinas comprise 9.9% of doctoral degree recipients yet account for 17% of women in the United States (Pew Research Center, 2023). Latinas represent a growing and significant segment of the U.S. population, yet their doctoral graduation rates remain disproportionately low, highlighting a need to focus on retention and support strategies to ensure their representation and success in higher education aligns with their population size (Census, 2023). This requires examining systemic barriers within doctoral programs and identifying effective strategies to better support Latina women, ultimately reducing disparities in doctoral degree attainment.

This focus on the doctoral level is particularly important because the challenges Latinas face in these programs differ from those encountered in other types of degree attainment, requiring unique forms of support and resources to navigate the distinct demands of doctoral education (Gutierrez et al., 2022). Latinas excel in associate and bachelor's degree programs, second only to White women (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). However, they may experience unique challenges at the doctoral level. Their journey in these programs may differ greatly from those pursuing undergraduate or

master's degrees. Recognizing and addressing these unique challenges is key to ensuring that Latinas are well-represented and supported at all levels of higher education.

Social support plays a crucial role in graduate school persistence, stress management, mental health, researcher identity development, and sense of belonging (Schwoerer et al., 2021; Jackman et al., 2023; Mantai, 2019; Cornwall et al., 2019). Yet, little is known about the specific aspects of social support relationships that promote positive experiences in graduate school. In addition, the literature demonstrates that social support, in general, is beneficial for graduate students regarding their academic and psychological well-being (Charles et al., 2022; Estrada et al., 2019). However, there is limited research on the dynamics of social support within academia, particularly among doctoral students, professors, and peers. This includes communication styles, boundary navigation, conflict resolution, the interplay between providing and receiving support, as well as the utilization of social media for social support and areas for enhancement (Gomez & Cabrera, 2023; Gutierrez et al., 2022; Garcia & Henderson, 2015; Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020). Understanding these relationship dynamics becomes even more complex when considering gender differences in social support experiences.

Despite the essential role of social support in doctoral education, research shows that gender differences in mentor preferences and perceptions shape students' social support interactions and access (Noy & Ray, 2012). For instance, previous work finds that when asked to rank the qualities of an ideal mentor, women place greater importance on seeing their mentors as role models and advocates for their needs and interests than men (Rose, 2005). Researchers propose that if students perceive their advisor as

ineffective or unresponsive to their needs and preferences, it can negatively impact their engagement, leading to altered or strained interactions (McCain & Roksa, 2023). In accordance, a recent longitudinal study focusing on the development of negative relationships between students and their advisors found that all participants who reported negative relationships with their advisors identified as women (Breen et al., 2024). These studies suggest that students' varying support needs, combined with the types of support advisors are willing to offer, contribute to gendered differences in mentoring experiences.

In addition to gender, the intersection of gender and race/ethnicity further shapes students' social support experiences with advisors. Research highlights that these intersections influence the types of relationships students form and the quality of the support they receive. Students from marginalized racial and ethnic backgrounds, particularly ethnically marginalized women and men, may encounter unique challenges in finding mentors who understand and advocate for their needs. For instance, a qualitative study on the advisor-student relationship in doctoral education found that racially and ethnically minoritized men are more likely to have negative relationships with their advisors due to neglect (e.g., infrequent advisor meetings, little to no access to institutional resources through advisor relationships and advisors discouraging or impeding students from building social networks; Dinsmore & Roksa, 2023). The same study found that racially and ethnically minoritized women were more likely to be seen as subordinates as they had to negotiate to pursue a research path distinct from their advisors and received limited professional development support. Moreover, Latinas have been found to experience more conflict with their advisors and receive less support from

them in protecting their research time, thereby limiting their ability to complete their projects and program milestones than Black and Latinx men and White men and women (Miller & Roksa, 2020). These findings underscore the importance of considering both gender and ethnicity when examining the social support experiences of Latina doctoral students, as their experiences cannot be fully understood through a single lens of either gender or race/ethnicity alone.

The current study focuses on Latina graduate students, who may particularly benefit from social support due to their collectivist values (Anzaldúa, 1987; Castellanos, 2006). Despite the importance of social support for this group, there is a significant knowledge gap regarding the underlying mechanisms that make it protective. To address this gap, this study seeks to answer five main research questions:

- 1) What strategies and behaviors do mentors use to build meaningful connections with Latina Ph.D. students that are culturally responsive to their identities and experiences?
- 2) How does cultural identity shape Latina Ph.D. students' approaches to navigating and resolving conflicts with their advisors?
- 3) How do academic peers provide support to Latina Ph.D. students, and what strategies do Latinas use to resolve conflicts within peer relationships?
- 4) In what ways do Latina Ph.D. students engage with social media for emotional validation and academic support, and what factors influence the effectiveness of these interactions?

- 5) How do university programs and departmental initiatives help Latina Ph.D. students build and sustain effective relationships with mentors, advisors, and peers?

Theoretical Background

My dissertation utilizes three theoretical frameworks, Latina/o critical theory, community cultural wealth framework, and ecological systems theory, to develop a comprehensive understanding of the social support experiences of Latina graduate students in academia. Each framework uniquely contributes to my research, while its complementary elements create a cohesive foundation for exploring these experiences (See Figure 1 in Appendix A). In the following sections, I will discuss how each theory informs my dissertation and the specific role each plays in understanding Latina doctoral students' social support systems. Next, I will expand on how these three theories complement one another. Lastly, I will address a gap that these frameworks do not fully capture: the concept of *vicarious online social support*, a significant yet underexplored component in understanding social media social support.

Latina/o critical theory. Latina/o critical theory (LatCrit), a branch of critical race theory, focuses on the unique experiences of the Latinx community by examining the intersections of racism, classism, and sexism, as well as the impact of various forms of oppression on Latinx students in U.S. institutions (Delgado Bernal, 2002). My dissertation utilizes LatCrit to contextualize the social support experiences of Latina women graduate students. Latina women navigate academia not only as women in a patriarchal society or as Latinx individuals in a Eurocentric institution but as Latina

women facing multiple forms of oppression (Gutierrez et al., 2022). The study uses LatCrit as a foundation for understanding that the experiences of Latina women graduate students are shaped not only by their ethnic or gender identities but by the intersection of sex, gender, and various other factors, such as language, culture, immigrant generation, and college generation (Perez-Huber, 2009). These intersecting identities and factors contribute to unique experiences among Latina graduate students that other women and Latinx individuals may not face (Green, 1999; Perez-Huber, 2009). Despite experiencing various forms of oppression, Latinas also possess unique cultural strengths and resources that help them navigate academia (Puente & Zaragoza, 2022).

Community cultural wealth framework. The community cultural wealth (CCW) framework takes a strength-based approach to studying the experiences of individuals from marginalized communities (Yosso, 2005). Specifically, CCW centers on the diverse forms of cultural wealth that individuals, such as Latina doctoral students, can possess, highlighting the unique strengths and resources of marginalized communities. The framework focuses on six forms of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant. Aspirational capital encompasses an individual's ability to maintain hopes, dreams, and expectations despite facing barriers. Linguistic capital is the ability to communicate using different languages or styles of communication. Familial capital is the sense of community that is nurtured by family and shared cultural knowledge and history. Social capital includes social networks and community resources that provide support in navigating societal institutions. Navigational capital encompasses the skills, abilities, and benefits that come with

maneuvering through social institutions, including higher education. Lastly, resistant capital refers to the knowledge, skills, and empowerment that arise when challenging inequality and overcoming challenges.

Rather than focusing on a single form of capital, this study considers how multiple forms of capital may operate simultaneously within social relationships. In this context, social relationships are conceptualized as sources of social capital and spaces through which other forms of capital, including navigational, resistant, and linguistic capital, are developed and enacted. Through close, personal relationships, Latina PhD students may process experiences together, share strategies for navigating academic spaces, and engage in collective support and advocacy. This dissertation goes beyond examining how individual forms of capital are exemplified by PhD students and considers how cultural capital functions in interconnected ways within the social experiences of Latina PhD students.

Ecological systems theory. Ecological systems theory posits that an individual's experiences and development are influenced by interconnected systems that vary in proximity (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). These influences range from the microsystem, which includes daily interactions with individuals, to the broader chronosystem, encompassing historical events and major life changes, such as starting graduate school. Ecological systems theory outlines five bidirectional systems that both influence and are influenced by individuals. The microsystem involves direct interactions and immediate environments, encompassing social support sources such as teachers and peers within settings like schools. The mesosystem describes interactions between these

microsystems, illustrating how positive interactions in one setting (e.g., with a mentor) can enhance positivity in another (e.g., the home environment). Moving outward, the exosystem includes external structures that indirectly impact microsystems. For example, a peer's negative home life may influence their interactions with others outside their immediate circle. The macrosystem encompasses broader cultural norms and practices. For instance, within academia, publishing is highly valued as academic currency, shaping graduate students' priorities. Lastly, the chronosystem considers changes over time and the historical events that shape individuals' experiences. This theoretical framework guides my exploration of how the context within which Latina graduate students experience social support relationships may evolve over time and the need to consider the unique contexts in which Latina graduate students experience academia.

Emphasizing the microsystem, ecological systems theory highlights its role as the most immediate influence on individual adjustment (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). Therefore, my dissertation emphasizes the significance of Latina graduate students' ecosystems. Building on ecological systems theory's emphasis on proximal influences and interactions, my dissertation specifically examines the proximal sources of social support crucial to Latina graduate students, such as peers, mentors, and professors (Gutierrez et al., 2022). This approach aligns with the framework of ecological systems theory, which underscores the importance of immediate social contexts in shaping individual experiences and development within academia (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Theory integration. Each theory contributes uniquely to my dissertation, while their overlaps offer a more holistic perspective on the social support experiences of Latina graduate students, encompassing different aspects of related concepts. Specifically, Latinx critical theory (LatCrit) and the community cultural wealth (CCW) framework are complementary in their focus on resistance and resilience, given institutional and societal barriers. LatCrit allows me to identify the societal barriers and stressors that impact Latinas, while the CCW framework provides insight into the protective factors and mechanisms that can support Latinas as they navigate academic spaces.

Ecological systems theory and the CCW framework overlap in their emphasis on social interactions and supportive experiences. The CCW model leads me to view these social influences through the lens of cultural strengths, recognizing that Latinas may use nontraditional approaches to navigate challenging conversations and advocate for their social support needs. Meanwhile, ecological systems theory guides me in examining the sources of support that Latinas in academia most frequently interact with and discuss their academic experiences with. This theory also situates these social systems within a broader context, making it essential to consider the larger environment that shapes these interactions. Together, these three theories help me conceptualize the contexts within which Latinas navigate academia and their social relationships. They provide a comprehensive framework that highlights both the challenges Latinas face and the strengths they bring in navigating social relationships in academia.

Theoretical gap. The theoretical frameworks used in my dissertation primarily contextualize the direct social interactions Latina graduate students engage in and their influence on academic experiences. However, a significant theoretical gap lies in considering *vicarious social media support*. Vicarious social support refers to the indirect way individuals receive social support through indirect experiences, such as observing or resonating with shared experiences online. This form of support can validate one's feelings and foster emotional well-being even without two-way communication. For example, in online spaces, an influencer may share words of encouragement or describe how they received support during a challenging time. Graduate students consuming this content may feel validated and emotionally supported, even though the influencer is unaware of their response and has no direct interaction with the consumer. This unidirectional form of social support is not explicitly accounted for in the theoretical frameworks I am employing.

To address this gap, these frameworks can be adapted to include online environments and the vicarious social support experiences unique to social media. By expanding the focus beyond direct interactions to include observed supportive experiences, we can better capture how individuals benefit from social media's unidirectional support. This modification considers that emotional validation and support can come from witnessing affirming interactions or messages. Given the significant impact of social support on Latina graduate students' persistence in academia and overall well-being, it is essential to understand how vicarious social media social support influences Latina content consumers (Peltonen et al., 2017). Therefore, I aim to explore

how Latina graduate students experience and are affected by emotionally validating videos and online content and how these experiences shape their academic journeys. Below, I propose ways to refine the employed theoretical frameworks to incorporate vicarious social media support and better understand Latina graduate students' social support experiences within academia.

Theoretical expansion. In the theoretical conceptualizations of ecological systems theory, the community cultural wealth model, and Latinx critical theory (LatCrit), there was minimal consideration of online environments because these environments were limited in scope when these theories were developed. However, for graduate students today, online interaction and digital engagement play a much larger role in their daily experiences and have been found to significantly shape these experiences (Baines et al., 2022; Romero-Hall, 2017). Scholars are now beginning to explore how traditional guiding theories can be adapted to include the influence of these online spaces.

LatCrit has contributed significantly to the conceptualization of online environments. One way LatCrit has been used to conceptualize virtual spaces is to think of the online environment as a *virtual counter-space*. Counter-spaces are defined as environments where deficit-based narratives about people of color can be contested, and a supportive, positive racial climate can be fostered and sustained (Solórzano et al., 2000). Counter-spaces often emerge in response to hostile environments and experiences, serving as supportive spaces where students can receive the social support lacking elsewhere. A recent article by Gomez and Cabrera (2023) applied LatCrit to

conceptualize online environments as virtual interspaces for Latina graduate students.

This perspective highlights how digital spaces can function as essential sources of support and validation, fostering resilience and a sense of belonging in academic spaces where such support may be limited.

The community cultural wealth framework has not yet been extensively adapted to account for social media social support and the broader influence of online environments. Three primary forms of capital (i.e., linguistic, familial, and social) can be rethought to capture the unique role of social media in both direct social support interactions and vicarious online support. Currently, linguistic capital is understood in terms of language use and the ability to communicate in direct interactions. However, in online environments, there is a degree of distance where visual and physical cues are absent. This requires individuals to convey emotions and intentions through language alone, often employing specific strategies to ensure their message is clear and engages others. In online settings, people must learn to use language effectively to capture attention and foster connection. Communicating online can be a challenging task, but also a valuable skill and a unique form of linguistic capital. Therefore, linguistic capital can be expanded to include the ability to use communication skills in indirect interactions.

Similarly, social capital traditionally emphasizes direct, reciprocal interactions, yet online environments allow for impactful support through passive observation. In the context of social media, Latinas may draw on shared strategies, cultural knowledge, and emotional validation simply by observing others' experiences. These vicarious forms of support may offer emotional and motivational benefits without requiring direct

engagement. By expanding the framework to include passive observation as part of social capital, we can better capture the nuances of online social support.

Building on this expansion, social capital in online environments may function not only as a source of support but also as a mechanism for fostering other forms of capital. Within Community Cultural Wealth, forms of capital are conceptualized as overlapping and co-occurring. However, less attention has been given to how they are fostered through social interaction. In online spaces, both direct and vicarious forms of social support may facilitate the development of other forms of capital, such as navigational, aspirational, and resistant capital, as individuals validate their experiences and model approaches to effectively navigate academia. In this way, social support extends beyond mere overlap among forms of capital, functioning instead as a process that collectively fosters multiple forms of capital.

Finally, online social environments can also be considered in the conceptualization of resistant capital, as they often function as virtual counterspaces where Latinas can challenge systemic barriers, seek community, and access resources to help them navigate academic environments (Gomez & Cabrera, 2023). Recognizing online environments as part of resistant capital underscores their role in empowering students to resist marginalization, connect with others facing similar challenges, and gain information essential to their success in academia.

Similar to CCW, ecological systems theory has received little consideration regarding how it can be expanded to include online environments. Specifically, limited theoretical work has examined the impact of observing content within these virtual spaces

on individuals' overall academic experiences. Therefore, I propose the expansion of ecological systems theory's conceptualization of the microsystem. In ecological systems theory, the microsystem typically refers to tangible environments and individuals with whom a person interacts daily. Ecological systems theory posits that interactions with these environments and individuals involve *reciprocal relationships* with mutual influence. However, not all impactful environments need direct and reciprocal interactions. This can be seen in the context of social media, where individuals engage in various activities such as browsing content, watching videos for entertainment, and seeking information. While social media may share similarities with the traditional components of the microsystem (e.g., direct and frequent contact), it differs in that content consumption does not always require bidirectional interaction to impact an individual.

Social media content can significantly affect individuals without any reciprocal impact on the content creator. These one-directional interactions are unique in that they may occur frequently, even multiple times a day, and can evoke strong emotional responses in the viewer without requiring active engagement from the creator. To adapt ecological systems theory to encompass the unique characteristics of online environments, it is essential to recognize that not all relationships within the microsystem are bidirectional. Individuals can have vicarious experiences through social media that influence their emotional and psychological well-being.

Latina Doctoral Student Experiences

Latina women are relatively new to the Ph.D. landscape, with Martha Bernal becoming the first Latina to earn a doctorate in psychology just over six decades ago (Vasquez, 2003). While graduate education has diversified since 1962, many of the challenges Bernal faced continue to affect Latina doctoral students today. Despite the growing presence of Latinas in graduate programs, research shows they often experience tokenization, gendered and racial/ethnic discrimination, and marginalization within academic spaces (Puente & Zaragoza, 2022). These experiences are compounded by negative social interactions, isolation, and inadequate support, factors linked to increased stress, academic difficulties, and even dropout intentions (Gutierrez et al., 2022; Garcia & Henderson, 2015; Ramos & Torres-Fernandez, 2020; Santa-Ramirez, 2021).

A study by Gutierrez et al. (2022) that included in-depth interviews with five Latina graduate students further highlights the challenges Latina graduate students experience in academia. Specifically, participants reported feeling isolated, often being the only or one of the few Latinas in their programs. Many expressed a lack of faculty representation and support, leading to feelings of being misunderstood and, in some cases, to switching advisors. They also struggled with navigating academia's hidden curriculum and experienced stereotyping and discrimination. Additionally, cultural conflicts, such as being expected to prioritize academics over family or facing gendered expectations from their families, added to their stress. To cope, participants turned to social media and external mentorship for support, emphasizing the importance of culturally grounded networks when institutional support was lacking.

Given these persistent challenges, prior research has underscored the need for culturally responsive mentorship for Latina Ph.D. students. Phillips and DeLeon (2022) advocate for a framework known as the “4 R’s”: recognizing, revealing, rejecting, and replacing unjust behaviors. Their work suggests that mentors who actively engage with students’ lived experiences and cultural identities can create more supportive and inclusive environments. Latina students often seek mentorship that goes beyond academic guidance, valuing relationships grounded in empathy, advocacy, and respect. O’Meara, Knudsen, and Jones (2013) similarly argue that mentoring models must evolve alongside a more diverse student body. They highlight emotional competencies, such as communication, empathy, and conflict resolution, as essential to effective mentorship. Their findings suggest that successful mentors are socially and politically aware, supportive, and invested in the development of their mentees, which are qualities that are especially beneficial for students from historically excluded backgrounds. Tuman and Dolan (2024) further emphasize the value of culturally aware mentoring and “deep-level similarity,” which refers to mentees’ perception that their mentors share similar values, perspectives, or ways of thinking. These factors were found to be more influential on mentee outcomes than commonly examined variables such as ethnic or gender match, mentor rank, or mentee background. However, little is known about how these deeper connections form, underscoring the need for future research and training to help mentors build more meaningful, identity-affirming relationships.

Social Support and Academic Experiences

Social support is a critical factor in graduate student success, influencing persistence, mental health, and identity development. Research has consistently shown that social support helps foster a sense of belonging and reduces stress, both of which are essential for navigating the challenges of graduate school (Liu et al., 2022). Although the concept of social support is well-established in psychological and family stress frameworks (House, 1981; Cooke et al., 1988), its specific dynamics within academic settings remain underexplored. Social support in graduate school is multifaceted, often involving a complex network of peers, family members, mentors, advisors, and even online communities (Tompkins et al., 2016; Hernandez, 2015). According to Thoits (1995), social support can be categorized into four types: emotional (e.g., sharing experiences or providing comfort), instrumental (e.g., offering material assistance like textbooks or financial help), informational (e.g., guidance or advice), and appraisal support (e.g., feedback or affirmation). While certain individuals may commonly provide specific types of support, such as advisors offering informational support, family providing emotional support, and peers giving appraisal support, each support figure can play multiple roles depending on the student's needs and the provider's capacity to help (Tan et al., 2019).

For Latinx graduate students in particular, social support plays an even more central role. Studies show that Latinx students often credit their ability to navigate graduate school to having strong, layered networks of both formal and informal support (Philips et al., 2022). These networks provide culturally relevant guidance and affirmation that may be missing from traditional academic structures. More broadly,

research by Brad et al. (2023) highlights the transformative potential of graduate mentorship, though the impact depends heavily on the quality and type of mentor-mentee relationships. Notably, experiences with social support are not uniform. Women and graduate students from minoritized racial and ethnic backgrounds often report different mentoring experiences and expectations compared to their white male peers (Almond et al., 2020). These differences underscore the need to critically examine how social support is structured and delivered within academia, particularly for those from historically excluded backgrounds. As previously noted, the academic experiences of graduate students vary depending on context. Therefore, it is necessary to consider social support across various sources and mediums to better understand the support context in which students navigate academia. This study aims to address this gap by examining the complex network of social support among graduate students, including both direct and indirect interactions, as well as online and in-person social support experiences.

Mentor and advisor support. Very little research has qualitatively examined the social support and relational dynamics between advisors or mentors and Latina Ph.D. students. One notable exception is Garcia & Henderson (2015), who conducted qualitative interviews with four Latina PhD students, all first-generation college students, to explore their mentoring experiences. Findings indicated that many participants lacked access to meaningful mentoring relationships in their doctoral programs and described faculty interactions as limited to academic advising rather than to more holistic, supportive mentoring. Additionally, participants emphasized the importance of ethnically matched mentoring relationships. These mentors were perceived as better able to

understand students' culturally based experiences and provide support in navigating the intersection of family responsibilities and academic demands. However, participants also noted that strong relationships with non-culturally matched mentors could be effective when those mentors demonstrated cultural competence, responsiveness, and a willingness to build trusting and personal relationships. Moreover, participants described effective mentoring as open, accessible, and emotionally engaged, creating spaces where students felt validated and supported. Notably, mentors who provided encouragement, affirmed students' abilities, and invested in their growth were particularly influential in fostering self-confidence and promoting persistence in academia.

Peer support. Existing literature highlights the role of peer relationships in supporting doctoral students, with some work emphasizing the culturally grounded and relational nature of these dynamics among Latinx students. For example, Ramirez & Puente (2021) describe Latina peer relationships as a form of “academic sisterhood,” which is conceptualized as a political friendship that actively resists dominant academic norms rooted in individualism, competition, and exclusion. Through their testimonios, Ramirez & Puente described intentionally navigating academic spaces together, such as enrolling in the same courses, to avoid isolation and reduce the burden of representing Latinx perspectives alone. In this way, companionship functioned not only as social support but also as a form of resistance to racialized and gendered marginalization and inequality within academia. These peer relationships also challenged dominant norms in academia, positioning knowledge production as individualistic. Instead, participants described knowledge as co-constructed, engaging in collaborative practices such as

writing and working groups that emphasized collective success, efficiency, and mutual support. Rather than viewing peers as competitors, students framed one another's achievements as collective wins that contribute to broader representation and opportunity for future generations of Latinx scholars. These practices reflect cultural values of collectivism, community, and service, and highlight how peer relationships can operate in ways that are both academically and culturally sustaining.

Next, Ramirez & Puente (2021) suggest that, in addition to academic collaboration, peers provided critical emotional spaces for processing shared experiences of marginalization. Participants described engaging in vulnerability, checking in with one another, and collectively making sense of racialized and gendered microaggressions encountered in academic spaces. These interactions allowed students to transform experiences of stress and exclusion into opportunities for healing and support. This relational support also extended across time, as participants described engaging in "femtorship," or mentoring future generations by passing down guidance, resources, and community-oriented values.

Complementing this work, Newlands and colleagues (2025) highlight the broader value of peer support in doctoral programs, noting that peers provide shared understanding, flexible and informal support structures, and guidance across key milestones in doctoral training. Similarly, Flores & Patron (2013) emphasize the importance of cultural affinity, friendship, and institutional support in fostering *compañerismo*, or a sense of solidarity and mutual care among students. More general research on doctoral peer interactions (e.g., Lee et al., 2017) further demonstrates

that peers exchange a wide range of information, including administrative, professional, and personal support, highlighting the multifaceted role of peer relationships in graduate education. This literature suggests that peer support extends beyond instrumental or informational guidance and encompasses relational, cultural, and collective dimensions that are particularly salient for Latina Ph.D. students navigating academic environments.

Latinx Cultural Values and Social Relationship Dynamics

There are three Latinx cultural values that are particularly pertinent to the development, perceptions, and navigation of social relationships: *familismo*, *personalismo*, and *respeto* (Salgado et al., 1987; Cuellar et al., 1995; Gonzalez et al., 1998). *Familismo* emphasizes the value of social cohesion and harmony (Salgado et al., 1987); *personalismo* is characterized by close, personal relationships built on trust (Cuellar et al., 1995); and *respeto* centers on what is deemed appropriate in hierarchical relationships, as well as expectations for how people should behave and what is appropriate in group settings (Gonzalez et al., 1998). These values shape how social relationships are understood in terms of social expectations, the need for relationships, and what is considered appropriate within them. In academic contexts, *familismo* may contribute to a desire for family-like relationships (Flores & Patron, 2023); *personalismo* may shape expectations for close, trusting relationships (Luna et al., 2024); and *respeto* may influence what is considered appropriate in these relationships, particularly regarding boundaries and expectations within hierarchical dynamics (Escobedo et al., 2018). While there are areas where these values overlap, the following section will describe how each brings unique elements to the way social relationships are perceived,

expected, and navigated. Given the relational nature of social relationships, these values provide a framework for better understanding how Latina PhD students perceive, experience, and seek social support in academic contexts.

Familismo. *Familismo* is an important consideration in understanding Latina doctoral students' needs, as it is a core cultural value in many Latinx communities. *Familismo* includes familial obligations (providing emotional and material support), perceived family support (viewing family as a reliable and nurturing resource), and family as referents (using family to guide behaviors and decisions; Salgado et al., 1987). Lugo Steidel and Contreras (2003) expanded this concept to include protecting the family's reputation, practicing reciprocity, and prioritizing family over self. For many Latina graduate students, these values are not only deeply held but also influence how they experience and manage the demands of academia.

Although *familismo* is often associated with home life, scholars have shown how it extends into academic spaces. Latina graduate students frequently create academic families, networks of peers and mentors who provide the same emotional and practical support as biological family members. Flores and Patrón (2023) conceptualize this through *compañerismo*, a model of peer support built on solidarity, trust, and mutual uplift. Ramirez and Puente (2021) highlight the role of sisterhood as a protective and empowering force for Latinas navigating predominantly white academic institutions. Likewise, Lopez et al. (2021) show how Latina faculty intentionally create *comunidad*, spaces of cultural affirmation and collective care, through mentorship and shared

experiences. These models reflect how familism can be reimagined in academic contexts to create culturally sustaining support systems that help Latina students thrive.

Personalismo. *Personalismo* is a Latinx cultural value and construct that emphasizes warm, authentic, caring personal relationships in which both people feel they truly care about one another and focus on each other's well-being (Davis et al., 2019; Cuellar et al., 1995; Mogro et al., 2016). Additionally, *personalismo* emphasizes people and relationships over conflict or disagreements regarding timelines or personal benefit (Davis et al., 2019). Notably, prior literature indicates that relationships grounded in *personalismo* can be formed with both Latinx and non-Latinx individuals and are crucial for developing professional relationships with Latinx families (Luna et al., 2024). These trusting, personal relationships can be fostered through sharing personal experiences, physical contact such as hugging, small talk, building rapport, visiting a person's home, and sharing meals (Luna et al., 2024; Crowther & Brodsky, 2017; Gallardo, 2013). Much of the literature on *personalismo* has focused on its role in shaping stronger, more transparent doctor-patient relationships among Latinx families and in intervention and programming research aimed at Latinx families (Sankare et al., 2015; Juckett, 2013; Lopez-Class et al., 2011).

However, given the emphasis on *personalismo* in relationship-building with Latinx individuals, this cultural value may also be pertinent to the relationship dynamics of Latina PhD students. In PhD programs, where social relationships with advisors and peers are critical for navigating and thriving, *personalismo* may shape how Latina PhD students seek support, build trust, evaluate relationship quality, and set relationship

expectations, as some may expect relationships characterized by *personalismo* with their advisors and peers. Furthermore, a 2019 study that developed a *personalismo* scale for Latinx adults found that females were more likely to endorse *personalismo* than males (Davis 2019), suggesting relevance for Latina PhD students. Despite the relevance of *personalismo* to relationships in academia for Latina PhD students, no empirical research has examined its role in shaping culturally relevant mentoring practices, peer support, and conflict formation and navigation among Latinx or Latina PhD students.

Regarding culturally relevant peer support and mentoring strategies, prior work notes that *personalismo* in relationships can be beneficial for people who value it, as it can yield more personal and trusting relationships (Davis et al., 2019). For people who value *personalismo*, engaging in relationships that embody it can be culturally affirming and elicit positive emotions as they build trusting, personal, and secure connections. However, *personalismo* may also contribute to challenges when there is a mismatch between relationship expectations and professional relationship norms, as is seen in academia (Ramirez & Puente, 2021). As previously noted, *personalismo* emphasizes prioritizing relationships over timelines or personal benefit (Davis et al., 2019). In contrast, academia often prioritizes productivity and progress (Rodriguez-Montoya et al., 2023), which can create tension when students are expected to continue meeting deadlines and conducting research despite personal challenges. This prioritization of academic productivity over relationships may be seen as a violation of relationship expectations rooted in *personalismo*.

The mismatch between the push for productivity in academia and relationship expectations may also impact how conflict is experienced and interpreted. Prior work finds that people who value *personalismo* may struggle with uncertainty about how to navigate relationships with those who do not build relationships characterized by *personalismo*, and they may see them as uncaring, rude, or disingenuous, which can have implications for social outcomes for Latinx individuals (Davis et al., 2019). However, there is a lack of empirical evidence regarding the exact impact on social dynamics (Davis et al., 2019). Moreover, *personalismo* may also influence how others in academia view Latina PhD students. Prior work suggests that when individuals are unfamiliar with *personalismo*-based behaviors in professional settings, they may become uncomfortable with such interactions as they can appear intimate and personal, leading them to view these relationships as violating personal boundaries (Davis et al., 2019). Taken together, these findings suggest that mismatches in relational expectations may impact relationship quality.

Respeto. *Respeto* is a traditional Latinx value that emphasizes boundaries and respect for elders and authority figures (Gonzalez et al., 1998; Calzada et al., 2010). Notably, *respeto* can be demonstrated in various ways, such as addressing individuals formally (*usted*), refraining from interrupting, carrying out requests from authority figures, and accepting disciplinary actions without question (Bougere, 2014; Delgado-Gaitan, 1994; Calzada et al., 2020). Prior research on *respeto* in educational contexts has primarily focused on how it shapes the ways Latinx youth, adolescents, and families engage with teachers and peers in primary and secondary education (Calzada et al., 2010;

Escobedo et al., 2018; Knight et al., 2014; Soto et al., 2011). However, given that *respeto* is a culturally based value that can shape relationship navigation in both hierarchical and non-hierarchical contexts (Lopez et al., 2022), it is likely to remain relevant in higher education settings, where hierarchical relationships are part of the advisor-adviser dynamic, as well as non-hierarchical relationships among peers. Yet prior research has not considered the role *respeto* plays in the interactions between Latinx or Latina graduate students and their advisors and peers.

When considering the hierarchical dynamic between students and advisors in academia, where advisors are positioned as authority figures (Sverdlik, 2018), *respeto* may be particularly salient in shaping how conflict is navigated with them. Specifically, *respeto* may shape how Latinas navigate disagreement and conflict, including willingness to engage in direct opposition to their advisors or to disagree with them about decisions related to their research training, research program, or educational trajectory. Consistent with this perspective, prior research indicates that Latinx parents may hesitate to challenge teachers out of respect for their role as educators (Lopez et al., 2020). However, teachers can foster greater parental involvement in academic decisions by actively communicating with Latinx parents and reminding them that their opinions are welcome and valued in their children's educational decision-making (Lopez et al., 2020). This recommendation suggests that perceptions of challenges to authority, influenced by culturally based values, can shift when authority figures indicate that such challenges or differences of opinion are welcome. These findings suggest that similar strategies may be useful in advisor-advisee relationships to remind Latina PhD students

that they have a say and autonomy in how they want to be trained as future colleagues and encourage advocacy for desired professional or academic experiences.

As previously noted, research has also examined how *respeto* shapes nonhierarchical relationship dynamics. Specifically, *respeto* has been found to influence interactions among Latinx youth, adolescents, and peers, such that individuals may expect peers to engage in collaborative decision-making when working together, rather than having one person take initiative (Calzada, 2010). These expectations reflect cultural values about what is considered appropriate in social settings (Calzada et al., 2010) and may extend to Latina PhD students' expectations for social interactions in academia. In this context, cultural values and expectations rooted in *respeto* may influence how Latina PhD students expect others to engage in collaborative work and the types of conflicts that Latina PhD students have with peers when these expectations are not met.

Social Support and Social Media

Based on prior theoretical and empirical research on Latina graduate student experiences, we know that Latinas are increasingly turning to online spaces to seek social support. However, less is known about the social support interactions Latinas have via social media. For example, we need to fully understand what supportive and challenging online interactions consist of and whether these interactions must be direct or if they can also include indirect, vicarious experiences. Such vicarious experiences might involve students viewing a post, reading a positive message, or watching a content creator's video and feeling emotionally supported without engaging directly. Prior work shows that Latina graduate students often use social media platforms as virtual counterspaces. These

spaces allow them to challenge the deficit perspectives of people of color and cultivate environments where they can receive the support and guidance they may lack in other areas of their social support networks (Solorzano et al., 2000; Gomez & Cabrera, 2023). Despite this, we know little about how these social support interactions (e.g., going to lunch) and vicarious experiences (e.g., observing a friend receive support from an advisor) can be effectively leveraged to better support Latina graduate students.

Prior research on graduate student experiences with social media suggests promising possibilities. For instance, students who connected with their advisors through social media were more likely to engage in discussions about both their educational journeys and personal challenges, suggesting that social media could be a valuable tool for strengthening advisor-student relationships (Dong et al., 2021). Similarly, graduate students who followed social media accounts associated with their academic programs reported a stronger sense of belonging to their school community and discovered more networking opportunities, both locally and nationally (Romero-Hall, 2017).

While limited work has focused specifically on Latina graduate students, several studies highlight how social media can support diverse student populations. First-generation, low-income college students who disclosed their first-generation college identity online were better able to access social support, provided their interactions were supportive or neutral. In contrast, stigmatizing responses to such disclosures hindered access to social support (Pyle et al., 2023). Additionally, Black and Latinx young adults were more likely to disclose marginalized identities, such as sexual orientation, to individuals with similar racial and ethnic backgrounds via social media (Pyle et al.,

2023). This underscores the importance of considering race and ethnicity in examining social support-seeking behaviors and interactions (Pyle et al., 2023). Given these findings, it is necessary to better understand how social media can serve as a vital tool for students to access support that they might not receive at their institution. Latina graduate students are already utilizing social media as counterspaces, but further exploration is needed to understand how these spaces can be leveraged to maximize the social support they offer. My dissertation aims to address these gaps, offering new insights into how online environments can be harnessed to support Latina graduate students more effectively.

The Present Dissertation

In this dissertation, I sought to identify the specific mechanisms through which cultural values shape relationship navigation in academia, as well as how hierarchical dynamics influence conflict navigation and the formation of support networks among Latina PhD students.

Prior research suggests that culturally relevant mentoring approaches are important for Latina PhD students and that cultural background influences how Latinas navigate academia and their relationships within it (Garcia & Henderson, 2015). However, less is known about what specifically makes these relationships culturally responsive, including the relational processes and interactions through which culture becomes meaningful in academic contexts. This dissertation addresses this gap by examining the specific cultural values and dynamics that shape culturally relevant relationship-building and conflict navigation.

Furthermore, while advisor-student relationships are known to be central to doctoral experiences, limited research has examined how conflict within these relationships is navigated, particularly among Latina PhD students and within the context of cultural values and power dynamics. This dissertation contributes to this area by examining how Latina PhD students approach, manage, and respond to conflict within both peer and advisor relationships.

Additionally, while Community Cultural Wealth emphasizes the importance of social capital and acknowledges that different forms of capital can overlap, limited work has examined the mechanisms through which social capital contributes to the development and activation of other forms of capital. It remains unclear how social relationships foster or constrain the development of navigational, aspirational, and resistant capital among Latina PhD students. This dissertation contributes to this area by examining how social relationships function as sites where these forms of capital are fostered, exchanged, and utilized within academic spaces. Therefore my dissertation was guided by 5 research questions:

RQ1: What strategies or behaviors do mentors use to foster meaningful, culturally responsive connections with Latina Ph.D. students?

RQ2: How does cultural identity shape the navigation of conflict with advisors?

RQ3: How do peers support Latina PhD students, and how are peer conflicts resolved?

RQ4: How do Latina Ph.D. students utilize social media for support, and what factors influence its effectiveness?

RQ5: How do university programs and departments support Latina Ph.D. students in building effective relationships?

Methodology

Participants

Survey participants (Study A) were recruited using snowball sampling via social media platforms and email announcements. From the 214 Latinas ($M_{age} = 29.87$, $SD = 6.06$) in Study A, a subsample of 40 participants ($M_{age} = 29.58$, $SD = 5.52$) who consented to future contact were selected to participate in qualitative focus groups (Study B). Information and other relevant data from Study A were used to inform and contextualize the findings of Study B.

Participant inclusion criteria included being currently enrolled or having recently been enrolled in a Ph.D. program in the United States. Recently enrolled in a Ph.D. program was defined as having graduated from a Ph.D. program within the last two years. Alternatively, individuals were eligible if they attended at least one quarter/semester of a Ph.D. program but were recently (within the last two years) dismissed or voluntarily left without obtaining a doctoral degree. Additionally, the individuals had to identify as Latina, Hispanic, or Chicana. The recruitment advertisement specified that participants could be of any racial background if they identified as Latina, Hispanic, or Chicana and were at least 18 years of age. Similarly, individuals were eligible to participate in the study if they identified as a woman at the time of participation, regardless of sex assigned at birth. Most participants in Study A reported having at least one parent born outside of the United States (81.8%), and most participants were born in

the United States (80.4%). Over half of participants (67.8%) indicated they were the first in their family to attend college in the United States, and most (84.1%) were the first in their family to attend graduate school in the United States.

Moreover, individuals invited to participate in the focus groups self-identified as first-generation college students or indicated that their parents did not have a college degree and were enrolled in a social science PhD program (e.g., psychology, education, sociology, family and human development, public health). The decision to focus on participants in social science fields was informed by the survey sample, which was predominantly enrolled in social science fields, and documented differences in gender representation between STEM and social science fields, with women more highly represented in the social sciences. Therefore, focusing on Latinas in social science fields helped ensure that focus group participants were situated within more comparable academic contexts.

Focus group assignments were determined by expected graduation year and participant availability, so that those graduating in the same or consecutive academic years were grouped together (e.g., 2026 and 2027 graduates). Participants who had already graduated were grouped together regardless of graduation year (i.e., 2023, 2024, and 2025 graduates). Most focus group participants had at least one immigrant parent (85%) and were born in the United States (85%).

Procedure

Copies of all procedures and recruitment material are included in Appendices A-C. Participants in Study A were recruited using snowball sampling via social media (i.e.,

Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn) and email announcements. Eligible participants included self-identifying Latinas enrolled in a Ph.D. program at the time of data collection, recent graduates (within 2 years of data collection), and Latinas who voluntarily left their Ph.D. program within the last 2 years without attaining a doctoral degree. Participants for Study B were recruited from Study A via an email invitation outlining key information (e.g., the consent form link, focus group structure, duration, and compensation). If participants consented to participate in Study B, they were emailed a scheduling poll. Once there were at least 3 participants available at the same time and graduating within consecutive academic years, they were sent a Google Calendar invitation and an email confirming the Zoom focus group details. Study B included 12 focus groups, each lasting 51 to 81 minutes and comprising 3 to 4 participants, for a total of 40 participants. To incentivize participation from this hard-to-reach population, Latinas who participated in Study B received a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Once all participants entered the Zoom room with their displayed pseudonyms, participants were read the first portion of the [focus group script](#), which included introductions, ground rules, and instructions (see Appendix B). Next, video and audio recording began, and Latinas were asked questions about their experiences with social support while in graduate school. I facilitated all focus groups, and an undergraduate or postbaccalaureate research assistant took notes during the session. Notably, research assistants were previously trained in taking notes on nonverbal cues and were given a note-taking guide as a reminder of what to highlight. Training involved 4 rounds of note-taking during both live and prerecorded practice focus groups, guided by a note-taking

guide. The notes were primarily used to contextualize the transcripts and emphasized nonverbal communication approaches, while the transcripts were used for coding. The research assistant noted participants' nonverbal cues, such as hesitations before speaking, avoiding eye contact, expressions of emotion (e.g., crying or smiling), and other gestures. These visual cues helped better contextualize and understand participants' experiences and transcripts, which were used during the coding process. To conclude the focus group, the script's closing remarks were read. After reading the closing remarks portion of the focus group script, participants were given the opportunity to exchange their contact information with fellow group members. This enabled participants to continue fostering the relationships or connections established during the session. Several participants shared their contact information with one another, and most thanked me for creating a space for Latina PhD students to be in community with one another and thanked fellow participants for their willingness to be vulnerable and open during the session.

Abductive Research Approach

This dissertation study employed abductive reasoning, integrating both deductive and inductive approaches in its design and data analysis. Specifically, I employed an interactive abductive approach, progressing sequentially from deductive to inductive reasoning and back to deductive reasoning. This methodological framework facilitated the integration of existing theoretical foundations with emergent insights from the data, enhancing the depth and richness of the analysis. Deductive approaches were used to narrow and frame the research questions concerning the social relationships of Latina doctoral students in academia.

In contrast, inductive approaches were used to keep focus group questions broad, preventing them from becoming too specific or leading participants to discuss only experiences hypothesized to be important. In the initial phase of data analysis, an inductive approach was employed to uncover emergent themes and patterns. Subsequently, the deductive phase was revisited to assess how these identified themes aligned with or diverged from existing theoretical frameworks and empirical findings (see discussion section). Using an iterative abductive research approach allowed me to both validate existing hypotheses and uncover new insights into lesser-known aspects of these relationships, especially in areas where theories on the experiences of Latina doctoral students are limited.

Deductive phase. The deductive phase of the study, which involved using existing theories to shape initial hypotheses and research questions, was guided by LatCrit, the Community Cultural Wealth (CCW) framework, and ecological systems theory. I framed my research questions based on LatCrit's understanding that Latina graduate students face unique challenges in academia due to intersecting marginalized identities. The CCW framework highlighted the unique assets Latina doctoral students bring to academia through various forms of capital (i.e., aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistant). Ecological systems theory directed my focus to the microsystem, prompting an examination of Latinas' daily social interactions within academia. Additionally, the study was influenced by the limited research on Latina graduate students, which emphasizes limited access to social support within academia

and its impact on Latinas' graduate school experiences and retention (Garcia & Henderson, 2015; Holloway-Friesen, 2019).

During data analysis, a deductive approach was used after an inductive one to position the study's findings within existing empirical work and theoretical literature. By applying deductive reasoning after the inductive exploration of emergent themes and patterns, the study aimed to demonstrate how the findings align with, challenge, or expand upon existing knowledge in the field. Utilizing a deductive approach to data analysis after an inductive approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of the data, ensuring that the study's conclusions were grounded in both the participants' lived experiences and the broader empirical and theoretical literature.

Inductive phase. An inductive approach was employed during two stages of the study. First, during the development of focus group questions and probes, and second, during data analysis. In the question generation phase, this approach fostered unbiased, open-ended questions, avoiding leading participants and allowing them to freely express anything relevant to their social support experiences and relationships within academia. Deliberately developing broad questions allowed for the inclusion of various aspects of social support experiences and relationships, facilitating a comprehensive exploration. Specifically, to achieve a more holistic understanding, questions focused on both social support challenges and positive experiences. This approach is motivated by the recognition that individuals are experts of their own experiences. Framing questions in a manner that doesn't constrain participants' responses to preconceived hypotheses allowed

for insight into a broader spectrum of experiences while acknowledging the limitations of existing literature in fully capturing diverse perspectives.

In alignment with the previously described inductive approach, conflict was intentionally left undefined in focus group questions. This allowed participants to define conflict based on their own experiences rather than predefined notions. Given that little work with Latina Ph.D. students has explored the forms of conflict that occur between Latina Ph.D. students and their peers or advisors, leaving the term open to interpretation enabled participants to define what conflict meant to them within the unique context of academic relationships. This approach was intended to allow participants' experiences to guide the identification of conflict-related themes.

Starting with an inductive approach during the data analysis phase enabled me to center participants' experiences in the study. This approach prioritized capturing the nuances and complexities of their experiences without forcing them into preconceived frameworks or theoretical models. Given that existing theories often fail to holistically account for the unique experiences of Latina doctoral students, an inductive approach enabled a more authentic and inclusive exploration of their lived experiences. By allowing themes and patterns to emerge organically from the data, I was more confident that the analysis remained true to the participants' diverse and individualized experiences. To accomplish this, initially, codes were developed solely from recurring patterns in participant responses, followed by the creation of themes guided by the data. Once the research assistants and I confirmed that the codes and themes accurately represented participants' narratives, I compared the findings with the existing literature. This

sequential process maintained focus on participants' experiences before contextualizing the findings within prior research.

Measures

Demographics and contextual factors. Several demographic and contextual factors were collected to better understand the context in which students are navigating their graduate programs. Demographic factors include college student generation, generation in the United States, maternal educational attainment, and paternal educational attainment. Additionally, participants were asked whether their current doctoral program was their first, and demographic information about their advisors was collected to identify advisor-advisee gender and cultural matches.

Survey. The survey assesses advisor relationships using seven subscales from the Relational Maintenance Behaviors Questionnaire (Stafford et al., 2000). These subscales include measures of social support catalysts and deterrents, such as protégé openness, advisor openness, protégé conflict management, and advisor conflict management. Career advancement and psychosocial support subscales are included to quantify the types of support participants receive from their advisors, while the mediated communication subscale assesses access and frequency of advisor interactions. Additionally, participants reported their satisfaction with advisor support and noted specific ways they receive career and psychosocial support.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of support within academia, participants reported their perceptions of researcher community support and access to mentors beyond their advisors. They also indicated whether their advisor meets the

definition of a mentor. The survey defined a mentor as “a faculty member who provides you with career and/or emotional support beyond what you would receive in the classroom. Mentoring generally involves a level of engagement beyond simply approving courses, etc.”

Online social support was evaluated using two subscales from the Online Social Support Scale (Nick et al., 2018; i.e., esteem/emotional online support and informational online support). These subscales were selected based on prior literature indicating their relevance to Latina doctoral students (Gomez & Cabrera, 2023). A sample item from the esteem/emotional online support scale ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .70$, range = 1 - 4.8) is “People encourage me when I’m online,” and a sample item from the informational online support scale ($M = 2.84$, $SD = .69$, range = 1 - 4.4) is “Online, people would tell me where to find help if I needed it.” Response options were on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = never to 5 = a lot. Therefore, higher scores indicated greater perceived support. Both esteem/emotional ($\alpha = .88$) and informational online support ($\alpha = .78$) showed acceptable reliability. Open-ended questions further explored students’ perceptions of online versus in-person support and their reasons for seeking support online.

Focus group questions. Focus group questions on five primary topics were used to contextualize and examine Latina graduate students’ experiences with social support during graduate school. The topics include students’ perspectives on how mentors foster connections, the positive and negative dynamics of relationships with advisors and peers, perceived social media support and online interactions, and experiences with institutional

support. The specific questions and probes for each overarching question are in Appendix C.

Analysis plan

Thematic analysis. Upon completion of data collection, qualitative data analysis was guided by LatCrit as I centered the voices and experiences of Latina graduate students. Thematic analysis was employed to identify thematic patterns among Latina graduate students. Thematic analysis focuses on data interpretation and allows for the systematic identification of shared experiences among Latina graduate students (Braun & Clarke, 2012). To analyze the qualitative data, four research assistants and I followed Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step approach to thematic analysis. More specifically, I carried out all of the following steps, while research assistants assisted with the steps specified below. First, we familiarized ourselves with the data in several ways. Specifically, I rewatched all the focus group videos before attempting to transcribe them, so I could simply listen to the students' experiences without trying to identify themes or analyze their responses in any way. Next, research assistants and I transcribed the focus group audio recordings. After transcribing the data, we read each transcript at least twice to further familiarize ourselves with the Latina graduate students' experiences. I also listened to the focus group audio recordings while reviewing the transcripts.

Once we had familiarized ourselves with the data, we proceeded to step two and generated initial codes for each focus group based on my research questions. In doing so, we coded the segments of responses based on the question that they pertained to (e.g., research question 1, research question 2) and created subcodes that help answer each

question. For instance, for question 1, “What strategies or behaviors do mentors use to foster meaningful, culturally responsive connections with Latina Ph.D. students?”, I created subcodes that identified approaches to connecting with Latina PhD students, such as check-ins, introducing students to peers, and discussing political issues. I employed consensus coding, in which the research assistants and I compared codes, discussed differences in interpretation, and worked collectively to reach agreement on code selection. Rather than using a more traditional coding process in which I developed the full coding scheme and trained research assistants to apply predetermined codes, research assistants were first encouraged to develop their own definitions and subcode names as they read through the transcripts. These codes were then compared with the codes I had developed independently. Through this process, we combined overlapping codes, discussed areas of difference, and refined the definitions of the final subcodes. This consensus coding approach was used to leverage the unique perspectives, interpretive lenses, and forms of cultural wealth that each research assistant brought to the project, alongside the perspectives and cultural wealth that I brought as the primary researcher. This approach is theoretically consistent with the community cultural wealth model, as it recognizes that knowledge production is strengthened by drawing on multiple forms of experiential, cultural, and relational knowledge. By approaching code generation in this way, the analysis was not solely dependent on my individual interpretation of the data. Instead, consensus coding created space for multiple researchers to identify patterns, question interpretations, and collectively ground the findings in the data. This process strengthened the credibility of the analysis by reducing reliance on a single perspective

and supporting a more nuanced understanding of Latina Ph.D. students' experiences.

Upon generating codes and subcodes for the research questions, I proceeded to the third step: theme identification. During theme identification, I examined all the codes and subcodes generated to identify thematic patterns.

During step 3, I also began the triangulation process to ensure the study's validity, credibility, and reliability. Specifically, I identified themes and codes present across focus groups, as well as themes consistent with the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, for data and theory triangulation. I also employed consensus coding, in which the research assistants and I compared codes, discussed differences in interpretation, and worked collectively to reach agreement on code selection. Rather than using a more traditional coding process in which I developed the full coding scheme and trained research assistants to apply predetermined codes, research assistants were first encouraged to develop their own definitions and subcode names as they read through the transcripts. These codes were then compared with the codes I had developed independently. Through this process, we combined overlapping codes, discussed areas of difference, and refined the definitions of the final subcodes.

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generation in this way, the analysis was not solely dependent on my individual interpretation of the data. Instead, consensus coding created space for multiple researchers to identify patterns, question interpretations, and collectively ground the findings in the data. This process strengthened the credibility of the analysis by reducing reliance on a single perspective and supporting a more nuanced understanding of Latina Ph.D. students' experiences. This also aided with step 4 of the thematic analysis process by helping to identify themes and codes that required further revision.

During the fourth step, the themes were reviewed to identify themes and codes requiring revision. At this time, I reevaluated the themes to determine whether they were indeed themes or merely codes. I also determined whether any codes could be collapsed or whether any were too broad and could be split into multiple, more representative themes.

Next, I created clear names and definitions for each theme to ensure they accurately reflect the experiences of most participants in the study. In defining and naming themes, I was able to better understand how social support shaped the experiences of Latina graduate students and how these themes align with recent research. The final stage involved reporting the study findings, which are presented in the results section of this dissertation. I outlined the themes, their definitions, and examples of statements coded to each theme.

Positionality

Because thematic analysis involves interpreting, grouping, and synthesizing data through the researcher's lens, positionality plays a critical role in shaping analytic

decisions. Acknowledging positionality is also an important component of reflexivity and the examination of potential biases. Therefore, at the beginning of data collection, the research assistants and I reflected on our lived experiences and identities and wrote positionality statements. Below, I include the resulting positionality statements to provide transparency into how our lived experiences may have informed our interpretations and understanding of the data.

Brenda. Following Braun and Clarke's emphasis on reflexivity in qualitative research, I want to acknowledge my positionality as a first-generation college student, daughter of Mexican immigrants, English-language learner, and Latina doctoral candidate. While many of these identities overlap with those of my participants, our experiences are not defined by any one identity but by the ways multiple aspects of who we are intersect and interact.

I also recognize that my position in the doctoral process shapes how I view and interpret the experiences shared in this study. I'm near the end of my program, a milestone only about half of those who start a Ph.D. ever reach. Unlike some participants, I didn't complete a master's degree before beginning my Ph.D., nor did I switch programs. However, my path has not been linear; I took longer to complete certain milestones, such as my qualifying exam and dissertation proposal, and as a result, I am set to finish three quarters later than the expected time to completion.

Starting my doctoral program during the pandemic also influenced how I formed and maintained relationships in academia, often through virtual spaces. Additionally, as

someone who is not a parent, I can only imagine the unique challenges faced by those navigating academia while raising children.

All of these experiences shape how I understand and relate to participants' stories. While I share many identities (e.g., Latina, first-generation college student, woman, PhD student), I also recognize the many within-group differences that exist among people with similar identities, and I remain mindful of how my own perspective both connects with and differs from those of the women whose experiences I aim to amplify in this dissertation.

Adriana (Post-bachelorette research assistant). As a research assistant in the Cultural Resiliency and Motivation (CRM) Lab at UC Riverside, I acknowledge that my background and lived experiences shape how I engage with research on cultural identity, mentorship, and motivation. I graduated from UC Riverside with a B.A. in Psychology and a minor in Law & Society in 2024. I currently volunteer with the lab while preparing to take the LSAT and apply to law school, where I plan to pursue a career in immigration law.

Identify as a Mexican, first-generation immigrant, the first in my family to graduate from both high school and college, an undocumented individual, and a person with bilateral hearing loss and ADHD. English was not my first language, and learning it in elementary school deeply affected my early educational experiences and my understanding of the challenges that came with it. They later became extremely beneficial as I saw how it contributed to my linguistic capital. These intersecting identities have influenced my perception of resilience, accessibility, and belonging in educational and

professional spaces. They influence how I interpret data and approach participants' stories in every study, whether that be those navigating academia while balancing cultural, familial, and systemic expectations.

Having experienced similar barriers to those described by many participants in the research I've worked with, I remain mindful of my own experiences and how that may shape my interpretation and actively engage in reflective conversations with the research team to ensure objectivity and respect throughout the research process. With this awareness, I remain empathetic and committed to representing participants' voices authentically to continue contributing to work that uplifts and accurately reflects the diverse experiences of those contributing to our research.

Crystal (Undergraduate research assistant). As an aspiring first-generation physician and a second-generation Mexican-American woman, English learner, raised in a community surrounded by Mexican culture, and part of a family of predominantly Spanish-only speakers, it is important for me to acknowledge how my upbringing and identities may affect my perspective, relatability, and position regarding aspects of the research. I understand and I am aware of the difficulties in navigating a mentorship relationship and approaching advisors; however, I cannot relate to the rigor and specificity of a graduate program.

Additionally, as a current undergraduate Bioengineering major and Spanish minor, I am unable to apply similar knowledge to that of the participants. Yet, my various identities provide me with an empathetic understanding of the cultural and emotional aspects that are experienced by Latina students. I can acknowledge as a research assistant

who does not directly understand the experiences of the participants, I am an outsider when it comes to various aspects of their realities.

Jennifer (Post-bachelorette research assistant). As a first-generation college graduate and daughter of Mexican immigrants, I acknowledge the immense privilege of obtaining my bachelor's in a Hispanic-serving institution. Attending a Hispanic-serving institution has allowed me access to identities similar to myself and has enabled me to find social support. As an aspiring Social Psychology Ph.D student, I've also witnessed the systematic inequalities in the U.S education system in terms of my first-generation, Latina identity. As a McNair Scholar, I've gained access to the hidden curriculum of academia, easing some of these barriers. Nonetheless, my identity continues to shape my experiences, giving me insight into a certain extent the systemic challenges faced by Latina graduate students. By acknowledging the influence my background has on my outlook, I remain committed to authentically communicating the experiences of Latina graduate students, objectively, removing any biases I hold. To mitigate, I draw on a collaborative approach with the team.

Vanessa (Post-bachelorette research assistant). As a first-generation Mexican-American college graduate of UC Riverside, I share an understanding of the difficulties, responsibilities, and cultural factors that impact the student experience of a Latina woman studying in higher education. Social and academic support has been crucial to my own academic and professional journey and I have had the opportunity to experience perspectives as a mentor, mentee, and facilitator of a mentorship program, which has contributed to my awareness and understanding of unique student needs and barriers.

Being the first in my family to pursue university education, I heavily relied on mentor, faculty, and peer guidance to navigate the unfamiliarity of academic spaces. I am an only daughter living with a Spanish speaking family and partake in family care responsibility while pursuing education. I am a Research Assistant in two psychology labs that participate in community-engaged research and work with Latine populations, both of which contribute to my understanding of the need for an empathetic, collaborative, and culturally sensitive research approach in my interactions with our community members.

However, I acknowledge that as only having studied at the undergraduate level, I lack first-hand experience with the nuances and challenges of graduate level educational programs. I am also aware of the privileges I hold with being middle-income, having financial support from my family to obtain my education status, and being a U.S. born citizen that lessen my barriers in comparison to others of my community.

Results and Discussion

RQ1 Results: Culturally responsive mentoring practices

Latina PhD students described how mentors have utilized culturally responsive mentoring practices to build close, personal relationships with them (See Table 1). Notably, participants described approaches used by both gender and nongender matched mentors as well as culturally and nonculturally matched mentors.

1.1 Adaptation and resources

This theme focuses on how mentors foster meaningful, culturally responsive connections with Latina PhD students by tailoring their mentoring approaches to their mentees' unique needs. Latina PhD students commonly reported mentors fostering a

sense of connection beyond traditional academic means by engaging in relationships unique to their own experiences and providing them with what they needed as they navigated academia, making the relationship as close and as personally tailored as possible. In order to do so, mentors commonly considered the impact of cultural identity on how Latina PhD students prefer to communicate, engage in relationships, and the resources they need to navigate their personal and academic responsibilities.

1.1.1 Adaptive mentoring. Participants reported that mentors adapted their mentoring styles and communication approaches to better meet the unique needs of students based on their backgrounds and current circumstances, which contributed to participants feeling that their mentors saw them as people and that they had a more personal connection with their mentors.

I get a very just warm and present person when we interact and when we're in meetings, but I do notice that there is even a difference with the other doctoral students that she's advising. But I went in talking to, you know, my professor, and she had asked, like, what is it that you need from a relationship that will make this as successful for you? And I really like that, like the personable piece that the relationship piece, seeing the other person, not just as my advisor, but seeing them as a human being too, and I would hope for the same. And so I think she really tries to highlight what each student needs in a relationship. (P82)

The quote highlights the desire for *personalismo* in relationships with mentors and how the mentor, in this case, was willing to adjust their approaches to mentorship in order to meet the needs of the student.

1.1.2 Instrumental support. Participants described mentors providing them with tangible support such as financial assistance, research funding, and access to resources (e.g., laptops). This form of support was culturally responsive to the needs of Latina PhD

students, as mentors recognized the financial responsibilities that some Latinas had with their families.

In our program, summer funding is not guaranteed. So I had applied for a summer fellowship at my school, didn't get it. I was kind of nervous, because I need money... I'm also helping support my family and things like that, even at this level. And so she was like, okay, I'll just, give you the funds for the summer out of, my own startup... she's just been very kind of receptive in that way, where she understands that financial issues is something that is very serious to me, and being able to support myself and my family, like I contribute a lot and support my family financially. So she knows that those are things that are important to me. (P107)

By providing instrumental support to a student with financial obligations to their family, the mentor was able to support not only the student but also the community that supports them, and to strengthen the sense of personal relationship between the mentor and student.

1.2 Relational mentoring

This theme encompasses the ways mentors built relationships with Latina PhD students that were more personal and consistent with the Latinx cultural value of *personalismo*. Mentors were commonly described as having a more relational dynamic, where both students and mentors could share aspects of their personal lives, blurring the lines between the personal and the academic and fostering a more holistic perspective on students' experiences.

1.2.1 Humanizing interactions. Latina PhD students described how mentors engaged with them in a way that made them feel seen as human, rather than just an academic. Mentors fostered *personalismo* in their relationships by checking in on

students' well-being, following up on information students disclosed during check-ins, and providing emotional validation.

Our mentorship, our budding relationship, really started because of how she started all of our meetings from when I was just a student of hers, then when I transitioned to being an advisee of hers. She instilled in me this really great practice of intentionally asking at the beginning of every meeting, how are you doing, and asking follow-up questions to conversations that we had in the past. (P157)

This quote demonstrated how humanizing interactions signaled to participants that their mentors cared about them and their relationship, which helped students feel seen by and connected to their mentors.

1.2.2 Mentors sharing personal experiences. Participants recalled mentors sharing personal experiences within and outside of academia to increase transparency and relatability. Mentors commonly drew on aspects of their shared identities (e.g., culture, gender, first-generation college student, immigrant) and experiences to foster relationships consistent with *personalismo*.

An example of something that he did that really made me feel comfortable and strengthen the mentorship/mentee connection was when I was kind of struggling with some mental health issues, and it was causing big delays, like I couldn't get anything done. He actually shared with me that there was a period of time when he was in undergrad that he had to take a leave for the same thing. And I was like, wow, this professor shared that with me, like... he understood what I was going through at that time, and that made me feel like, wow, I can really ask questions. I don't have to feel weird or stupid or whatever. So that made a big difference. And so even though he couldn't understand everything about me as a Latina PhD student, there were certain elements that I think we had in common, where he was willing to share his own experiences that helped me feel like this is a really good mentorship experience. (P163)

This quote illustrates how mentors' sharing of personal experiences helps students feel more comfortable and personally connected to their mentors.

1.2.3 Mi casa es tu casa (My home is your home). Participants shared that mentors went beyond traditional forms of academic support by engaging in acts of hospitality and welcoming students into their homes. These behaviors are consistent with culturally responsive practices that focus on creating close, trusting relationships and fostering a sense of community and cohesion.

Don't have family around, didn't have a car at the time and so my advisor, who I had applied to work with in the program, was really kind, really sweet, like reaching out, asking if I needed supplies and then if I wanted to come stay with her. She was like, I did my program down here. I know what it's like to kind of be by yourself and like, kind of create, and so we were talking back and forth, but I ended up evacuating with her and her family to her parents' house and living with her for like, 10 days, almost two weeks. (P17)

This quote highlights how the mentor reflected culturally responsive care by recognizing that the student was navigating a situation alone in an unfamiliar environment, aligning with the values of familism and helping foster a sense of safety, care, and protection for the student when they were away from their support system.

1.3 Critically conscious mentoring

This theme highlights how mentors engaged in culturally responsive mentoring by identifying, challenging, acknowledging, and providing space for students to process systemic inequalities and culturally relevant experiences. In doing so, mentors equipped students with guidance on how to advocate for themselves when faced with inequality, uplifted student voices, affirmed their lived experiences, and created counter spaces for students to engage in critically conscious dialogue and build culturally-affirming support networks.

1.3.1 Affirming cultural value in academia. Participants recalled mentors

affirming the legitimacy and value of culturally based perspectives in academic spaces.

She validated my scholarship. Like I wasn't intending on... doing a certain methodology, but she validated my experience.... And was like, no, actually, your experience is really important, and it should be centered in the research... she was allowing me to see the research and really focusing on prioritizing Chicana, feminist methodology, epistemology, like, she... validate that type of research and those methods. (P22)

This quote demonstrates how a mentor engaged in culturally responsive practices

by validating a student's lived experiences. The mentor encouraged the student to incorporate their critical perspective into their research, thereby supporting the use of culturally responsive methodologies.

1.3.2 Navigating academia with a marginalized identity. Participants described

their mentors' engaging in conversations that acknowledged the obstacles in navigating academia as individuals with marginalized identities, and discussed systemic barriers, problematic experiences, and strategies for addressing inequitable treatment in academia.

And she told me... I've learned that people will ask me to do trivial things just because I can, like to translate something, to do extra work, just because I'm the only one who can, but I'm a researcher first, and I want you to start thinking of your identity that way too. So it's more than just the academic advising. It's more than the dissertation. It's also conversations about like, how to navigate spaces that aren't made for us, and how to be respectful of your own title, too... I wouldn't get those conversations from everyone. So I felt like the communication was really genuine and really just like, really targeted, and a one-on-one relationship. (P9)

This quote demonstrates how mentors are fostering culturally responsive

connections by sharing their own experiences navigating academia and building critical consciousness among students, preparing them to effectively tackle inequalities. While participants appreciated having similar conversations, not all students found these interactions empowering.

She's like, you're not only a woman, but you're also a woman of color, so you always have to protect yourself, and you always have to do this and not let other people take advantage of you. And so she tries really hard to be proactive and supportive, which I appreciate, but at the same time, it's just like, kind of weird that she even brings it up in the first place... I was not thinking about that. And then now you planted it into my brain, and now I'm thinking about it, and now I feel bad, and now I'm reminded of my position in society. (P174)

This quote demonstrates that while conversations about navigating academia as a marginalized person are appreciated, they can also reinforce awareness of societal hierarchies.

1.3.3 Sociopolitical responsiveness. Latina PhD students noted that mentors created spaces for students to discuss and process sociopolitical issues and their personal and community impact.

I mean, there's one faculty that I can remember of when this new administration was voted in, and everybody felt very distressed. I mean, he literally took us out and, like, took to offer community and talk about or say nothing and wallow together, and that was actually really nice. (P64)

This example demonstrates how mentors showed cultural responsiveness by acknowledging the broader impact of sociopolitical contexts on students' experiences and by providing emotional support during difficult times.

1.3.4 Inequality advocacy. Participants shared how mentors intervened to advocate for and support students facing inequality in academic and professional settings. This included advocating for students and encouraging them to prioritize their well-being and set healthy boundaries. As mentors advocate on behalf of students, they also help students identify ways to advocate for themselves moving forward, fostering a sense of protection and trust.

I shared I had been offered a job that requires me to move to another state, and I was about to tell this job that I would start in three weeks, like January 1st, and she's like, Well, what about healthy boundaries? Like, don't you think you owe

yourself some healthy boundaries, especially as a first gen student, and I was like, wait, you're right...this is something that I've been working on... learning boundaries... people pleasing... it feels weird to even think that we can negotiate things... so having that advice, I was like, Oh my gosh. This gives me so much more peace of mind to know that I don't have to just say yes to a timeline that this job has for me. Like, I have rights too. I get to say what works for me. I have agency, and I feel like I had forgotten that. I'm not just a student, I'm a human, and I'm also first gen, and I need this break to, like, recharge and reconnect. (P75)
This quote highlights how mentors encouraging students to set boundaries and

prioritize well-being can promote students' view of themselves as deserving of agency, grace, and protection in academic and professional spaces.

1.3.5 Identity-based community building. Latina PhD students reported that mentors highlighted the importance of community among Latinx students in academia and fostered connections by facilitating introductions and creating opportunities for interactions both inside and outside academic spaces.

My advisor, he's very proudly Latino, so I would say for sure my cultural identity influences these strategies, because he encourages it a lot. He's always talking about how we thrive off of community and that we have each other's back all the time... And I do feel very comfortable fostering community with our Latino lab, with our Latino advisor... He's always sharing current readings, poems, sayings, books that show the importance of fostering community. (P173)

This example illustrates how mentors who highlight the importance of community building among Latinx students in academia help students feel more comfortable engaging in and forming these spaces, thereby affirming identity-based networks.

RQ1 Discussion: Culturally responsive mentoring practices

Adaptation and resources. Latina PhD students described mentors fostering meaningful relationships by adapting to their individual needs and providing tangible resources. These approaches go beyond traditional academic guidance. Rather than adhering strictly to standardized expectations or timelines, mentors listened to students'

needs and adjusted or provided resources to support Latina PhD students' success. While this responsiveness may not immediately appear as culturally responsive mentoring, it aligns with culturally grounded relational values and awareness of hierarchical structural in ways that are particularly meaningful for Latina doctoral students.

One way to understand this theme is through the cultural value of *personalismo*, which emphasizes relationships characterized by *confianza* (trust), care, and personal connection (Mogro et al., 2016; Cuellar et al., 1995). When mentors adapt to students' needs or provide resources that support their well-being, they signal an investment in the student as a whole person rather than solely a producer of academic currency. In this way, adapting and providing resources can both emerge from relationships already grounded in *personalismo* and serve as mechanisms that further cultivate it. These practices may foster a sense of *confianza* and closeness by demonstrating that students' well-being is prioritized alongside their academic progress, thereby reinforcing culturally affirming relationship dynamics (Davis et al., 2019). Importantly, these practices stand in contrast to dominant academic norms that often prioritize productivity, independence, and adherence to rigid timelines over personal connections (Ramirez & Puente, 2021).

These mentoring practices have implications for how power is distributed within advisor-advisee relationships. Academia is structured by hierarchical relationships in which advisors hold significant authority over students' progress and opportunities (Sverdlik, 2018). However, by listening to students' needs and adapting expectations or providing resources, mentors may counter these hierarchical dynamics. These approaches can create space for students to have greater agency in shaping their academic

experiences, which may be particularly affirming for Latina PhD students navigating multiple marginalized identities (Green, 1999; Perez-Huber, 2009). In this context, adapting and providing resources can be understood as approaches that redistribute aspects of decision-making and indicate responsiveness within a rigid power structure.

This theme can also be interpreted through the lens of ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), as mentors' responsiveness tended to reflect awareness of the broader contexts shaping students' experiences. For example, when mentors provided resources, such as financial support, in response to students' family responsibilities, they acknowledged that students are embedded in multiple interacting systems beyond academia. These interactions illustrate connections between students' microsystems (e.g., family, advisor relationships) and the mesosystem, where experiences in one context directly shape needs in another (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). By recognizing and responding to these interconnected systems, mentors moved beyond viewing students as individuals who function in isolation and instead engaged with them as whole people navigating complex social and cultural contexts.

Adapting to student needs and providing tangible support functions as forms of culturally responsive mentoring by centering students' needs, acknowledging the structural conditions that shape the experiences of Latina PhD students, and fostering relational dynamics that align with culturally grounded values. Although these practices do not dismantle existing hierarchies, they represent meaningful shifts toward more humanizing and responsive forms of mentorship that support Latina PhD students' navigation of academia.

Relational mentoring. Latina PhD students described mentors fostering close, personal relationships through relational mentoring approaches, including humanizing interactions, sharing personal experiences, and inviting students into their homes. These practices move beyond traditional, task-oriented, and academia-oriented approaches to advising by emphasizing building connections that center students as whole people (Garcia & Henderson, 2015). Through these practices, mentors created relationships that aligned with the Latinx cultural value of *personalismo*, which emphasizes trust (*confianza*), care, and personal connection (Cuellar et al., 1995). By engaging with students in ways that acknowledged their well-being and humanity, mentors fostered relationships where students felt seen and valued beyond their roles as PhD students.

These findings are consistent with prior literature on *personalismo*, which highlights the importance of relationships characterized by closeness and trust in shaping meaningful interactions across contexts, including within Latinx families, educational settings, and healthcare relationships (Sankare et al., 2015; Juckett, 2013). In the context of doctoral education, relational mentoring practices such as humanizing interactions and experience-sharing function as mechanisms through which *personalismo* can be enacted. For example, when mentors shared their own experiences, especially those that resonated with aspects of students' identities or challenges, they created opportunities for connection and mutual understanding. Thereby reinforcing culturally affirming relationship dynamics that are often absent in more traditional academic mentoring models by building rapport and fostering a sense of closeness (Davis et al., 2019).

In addition to *personalismo*, aspects of this theme also reflect the cultural value of *familismo*, which centers group harmony and may contribute to a desire for family like relationships (Flores & Patron, 2023). Participants described these practices as embodying a “*mi casa es tu casa*” (my home is your home) approach, thereby extending the mentoring relationship beyond institutional boundaries and contributing to the development of supportive, family-like networks. For students who were geographically distant from their families, these interactions were especially meaningful, as they helped create a sense of home and collective care within academic environments that can otherwise feel isolating (Ramirez & Puente, 2021).

Importantly, participants’ experiences also suggest that relational mentoring practices congruent with *personalismo* and *familismo* do not require cultural or demographic matching between mentors and students. Several participants described mentors who were not Latinx, often including white male advisors, engaging in these relational practices in ways that fostered strong, supportive connections. In these cases, mentors built rapport by identifying shared experiences, such as being first-generation college students, and by openly discussing their own challenges in navigating academia. These findings align with prior work suggesting that culturally responsive relationships can be cultivated across differences when mentors engage in practices that prioritize connection, understanding, and responsiveness to students’ lived experiences (Garcia & Henderson, 2015).

At the same time, the ability to engage in relational mentoring appears to be a skill that is not consistently taught or institutionally supported within academia. As

participants noted, developing relationships that are both humanizing and professionally appropriate requires intentional effort and is not always modeled within traditional academic training. This may help explain why such practices, while highly valued by students, are not uniformly present across mentoring relationships. The common absence of these approaches within dominant academic norms, which often emphasize productivity, independence, and professional distance (Rodriguez-Montoya et al., 2023), further highlights the significance of relational mentoring as a culturally responsive practice.

Lastly, relational mentoring practices, particularly those involving the sharing of personal experiences, may also function as a form of support that builds students' navigational capital (Yosso, 2005). By sharing their own experiences navigating graduate school and related challenges, mentors provided students with insight into how to move through academic systems that were not designed with them in mind. These exchanges reflect a more bidirectional mentoring dynamic, in which mentors not only guide students academically and understand student experiences but also offer transparency into their own realities of navigating institutional structures. In doing so, relational mentoring supports Latina PhD students not only in building meaningful relationships but also in developing the knowledge and strategies needed to persist and thrive within academia.

Critically conscious mentoring. The final major theme describing how mentors foster culturally responsive connections with Latina PhD students was critically conscious mentoring. This theme captured how mentors engaged in culturally responsive practices by identifying, acknowledging, and challenging systemic inequalities, while

also creating space for students to process culturally relevant experiences. Within this theme, five practices were described, affirming cultural values in academia, engaging in conversations about navigating academia with a marginalized identity, creating space for sociopolitical discussions, advocating against inequality, and fostering community among individuals with shared identities.

Participants primarily described these mentoring practices as culturally affirming and closely connected to their identities. However, not all participants experienced these sentiments. Rather, this theme reflects a more complex dynamic in which critically conscious mentoring could both support the development of cultural capital and, at times, unintentionally reinforce awareness of marginalization. These findings align with prior literature on culturally responsive mentoring, which highlights that Latina PhD students often desire these forms of mentorship (e.g., Garcia & Henderson, 2015) and emphasizes the importance of mentors engaging in critically conscious practices, such as recognizing, revealing, rejecting, and replacing unjust behaviors to create more equitable and culturally responsive environments (Philips & DeLeon, 2022). Meanwhile, the findings in this dissertation extend this literature by demonstrating the nuanced and sometimes contradictory impacts of these interactions among Latina PhD students.

One of the most salient examples of this duality emerged in the code for navigating academia with a marginalized identity. For many participants, these conversations were beneficial, as they contributed to the development of resistant and navigational capital within Community Cultural Wealth as mentors provided insight into structural barriers, shared strategies for navigating hierarchical academic systems, and

offered guidance grounded in lived experience (Yosso, 2005). These interactions helped students anticipate challenges and develop tools to navigate inequitable environments more effectively.

As previously noted, these same conversations had unintended negative effects for others. Being reminded of their marginalized positionality and the structural barriers faced by Latina PhD students sometimes reinforced the threat of the hierarchies they were trying to resist, contributing to heightened awareness of limitation rather than empowerment. In these cases, critically conscious mentoring did not necessarily foster resistant or navigational capital, as the threat of systemic inequities sometimes outweighed the potential lessons that could be learned from others' experiences navigating these hierarchical structures. This suggests that awareness alone may not be sufficient. Although critically conscious mentoring occurs at the microsystem level, these interactions are embedded within academic systems characterized by hierarchy and inequality (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), which may influence whether such conversations are experienced as empowering or reinforcing marginalization. Therefore, the way these conversations are framed and supported is critical in determining whether they are experienced as empowering or discouraging.

Notably, this theme was also the one most strongly aligned with Latina/o Critical Theory, as mentors explicitly centered and engaged with issues of race, culture, and intersectionality within academic contexts (Delgado Bernal, 2002). These mentoring practices reflect an awareness of how multiple systems of oppression shape students' experiences and demonstrate an effort to create space for students to critically engage

with these dynamics. At the same time, these findings highlight the importance of balancing critical awareness with affirmation, support, and actionable guidance.

Additionally, critically conscious mentoring fostered *familismo* within academic spaces, as mentors created environments characterized by care, connection, and collective support (Lopez et al., 2021; Salgado et al., 1987). In doing so, these practices challenged the individualistic norms of academia and provided culturally affirming spaces that supported both academic and personal development. These mentoring relationships also appeared to help mitigate imposter syndrome, as mentors validated students' experiences and affirmed their sense of belonging in academic spaces.

RQ2 Results: Cultural identity impact on conflict navigation with advisors

Latina PhD students described multiple ways their cultural identities shaped how they navigated conflicts with their advisors, as well as the reasons they avoided confrontation despite being negatively affected by it (See Table 2). One participant described the impact of identity on conflict navigation as “*a process of kind of giving and taking and respecting, like our own lived experiences and knowledge*” (P137), thereby noting that navigating conflict is a process rather than a response to an interaction where identities and lived experiences inform the ways in which people approach these interactions. Participants noted how their identity influenced their beliefs about others' perceptions of them, their motivations during graduate school, and aspects of Latinx cultural values that do not align with what is traditionally emphasized and valued in academia. Three themes, encompassing seven codes, emerged, capturing the unique ways

in which Latinx cultural identity shaped Latina PhD students' approaches to navigating conflict and their willingness to address it.

2.1 Cultural dissonance between Latinx values and academia

Participants commonly described a mismatch between the individualistic, Eurocentric values prevalent in academia and those embedded in their own Latinx identities. They noted that common approaches to navigating conflict in academia contradicted the values instilled in them and their upbringing, thereby affecting their approaches to conflict and their willingness to address it.

2.1.1 *Respeto*. *Respeto* is the cultural value of viewing elders and authority figures as deserving of respect. Advisors being positioned as authoritative figures in academia contributed to difficulties in challenging individuals in these positions, as it could be considered going against their cultural values.

I hold back a lot on her. I don't hold back on other things. So I'll go, and I'll address things about the program, or I'll address things about my other classes, or any other professors I've had, but with her specifically, like, that's hard for me, and maybe it is part of like, cultural values, like, of having respect, right? Like, of *respeto* and like, just also like, yeah, just not wanting to be disrespectful to her. But it's hard. (P92)

This quote highlights how positioning advisors as authority figures uniquely contributes to Latina PhD students' reluctance to challenge them in conflicts.

2.1.2 *Personalismo*. The Latinx cultural emphasis on building *confianza* (trust) and developing close, personal relationships. Latina PhD students commonly described interactions with advisors as very professional and impersonal, thereby making Latina PhD students feel they had to be more filtered in their interactions.

I am going to send her an email, and I'm going to kindly request, like, girl please just meet with me one time before the quarter ends.... It's the nature of, like, how she communicates... it's purely academic or professional... it's just kind of like it's been the way that she's trained. She feels like she's successful because of that training. (P32)

This quote demonstrates the mismatch between the value of *personalismo* and the norms of academic relationships, thereby contributing to more filtered interactions.

Notably, when Latina PhD students sought to be more transparent with their advisors about their experiences with other faculty, this conflicted with the more formal relationships students were expected to maintain.

Personal in a friendly coworker way... it didn't really translate into this, more open relationship... I guess there was some conflict, and like, the level of details I could share with her, like the level of transparency about other faculty... I guess navigating that conflict of being more polite. (P32)

This example further illustrates how attempts to be transparent in academia conflict with expectations of impersonal relationships, and the extent of the conflict that arises when these norms are challenged. Importantly, when advisors and students built close personal relationships, students reported feeling much more comfortable being direct in the face of conflict and, as a result, managing it more effectively.

“I'm pretty direct when it comes to my needs, wants... because of the relationship that we had built, where we're open, and we felt comfortable with each other. I didn't see a problem telling her.” (P9)

In contrast to the previous quotes, this example highlights how embracing *personalismo* with their advisors enabled participants to communicate directly with their advisors and navigate conflicts more effectively.

2.1.3 *Familismo*. *Familismo* is a value in Latinx culture that prioritizes group harmony and collective cohesion over individual needs. Participants commonly described avoiding conflict confrontation to maintain group harmony, despite this being less commonly considered in Eurocentric environments.

Being from a background that's very collectivistic, like Latino culture, very collectivistic, trying to maintain the peace, harmony, and order... instead of... in these individualistic societies, like in the US.. Being super individualistic... speaking one's mind is healthy... Even if there's, it's some conflict, that will happen. (P48)

This quote demonstrates how group cohesion is used as a rationale for avoiding conflict confrontation. Notably, this emphasis on collective cohesion also contributed to Latina PhD students speaking up for their peers when witnessing peer-advisor conflicts.

My advisor made a comment to another student that was a little insensitive... she [the student] also felt uncomfortable and like kind of speaking up.. I can't just say nothing...finding places where it would make sense to kind of speak up and say something. And that was usually in the case of it helping to make the system more inclusive, or, you know, help someone else that I saw was struggling, that didn't feel like they really had any resources to speak up for themselves (P54)

This quote demonstrates how Latina PhD students engaged in conflicts that did not directly involve them to promote group cohesion. Participants advocated for their peers during conflicts with advisors and provided support despite potential personal repercussions.

2.2 Resistance and persistence in academia

Latina doctoral students commonly described how their approaches to navigating conflict with advisors were shaped by a need to persist in academia. Participants reflected on the personal and familial sacrifices that enabled them to be in these spaces, which in turn influenced their willingness to risk confronting conflict. As a result, participants

described approaching conflict cautiously as they did not want to risk intensifying tensions in relationships that are instrumental to persistence in doctoral programs.

2.2.1 Responsibility and sacrifice. Participants described a sense of responsibility to persist in academia and guilt related to personal and familial sacrifices made to pursue doctoral education. Latinas reflected on having already given up so much to be in their programs, which made it more difficult to navigate conflicts with advisors. Considering that advisors served as gatekeepers to academic persistence, participants hesitated to engage in conflict to avoid jeopardizing these relationships or introducing tension.

You can't leave your program and, as someone who sacrificed so much to, like, move across the country, that's a big ask, and it felt like, I don't know, in our culture, that's like, giving up, you know, like, you shouldn't give up on things like that. So it was, like, really challenging. (P28)

In this quote, the participant described how cultural responsibilities to persist, combined with a sense of sacrifice, contributed to difficulties in navigating conflict with advisors, as doing so could risk their ability to remain in their program, even as these relationships became increasingly challenging and riddled with tension.

2.2.2 Anti-marianismo. *Anti-marianismo* is considered the resistance of culturally based gender norms that frame women as dependent on men. Because of resistance to this gender norm, Latina PhD students were more likely to feel they needed to persist in their graduate programs, as education was framed as a pathway to independence from men.

Education has always been an important conversation, of, like, as a woman, you have to be educated because you don't want to rely on a man. Like my parents...

something they talked about all the time, about, like *tú te tienes que valer tú sola y tú misma* (you have to fend for yourself). (P28)

Therefore, when participants' conflicts with advisors concerned progress and involved factors that could stunt it, they were more willing to engage in direct conflict navigation to have their needs met.

He wouldn't give me feedback. And I felt very small... it felt like he didn't want to invest time in me. And it was for my dissertation... There's one day where I was like, I need to talk to him, because, like, I cannot not have feedback. (P28)

This quote highlights how, despite experiencing negative emotions related to advisor neglect, participants remained motivated to persist and make progress towards their milestones. As a result, participants engaged in more direct conflict navigation with the advisor and worked through having difficult conversations to ensure academic progress.

2.3 Navigating whiteness and belonging in academia

This theme encompasses how Latina PhD students' approaches to navigating conflict with advisors were shaped by a limited sense of belonging in Eurocentric academic spaces and by concerns about being perceived as a stereotypical Latina. Latinas described being highly filtered and strategic in their approaches to navigating conflict with advisors, aiming to control how they would be perceived.

2.3.1 Stereotype awareness. Participants described being aware of racial/ethnic stereotypes about Latinas and white professional standards, which impacted how they presented themselves in academic spaces and relationships. Because of this awareness, participants were more strategic and filtered in their communication during conflicts to avoid reinforcing stereotypes about how Latinas engage in conflict. As a result, some

participants delayed conflict-related conversations until they determined how to approach them in a way that would not align with stereotypical portrayals of Latinas.

The concern with having the conflict was my tone. And you kind of think about, the stereotypes that come with that, like the Latina woman with, the fiery, arrogant, whatever tone, and so being very maybe, like over correcting that overall, with all of my supervisors, with all of my experiences, being very aware of my tone in general, and so being aware of that fear with this conflict. (P2)

This quote demonstrates that not only did awareness of stereotypes shape how they navigated conflicts with advisors in a more filtered way, but they also described fearing being stereotyped as they navigated these conflicts. Notably, having advisors who were Latinas made it more comfortable for Latina PhD students to express themselves more directly and with less fear when navigating conflict.

"I still was over correcting in that conflict, but I felt less worried about it... [not] afraid of being direct... there isn't the same jeopardy of having to do that." (P2)

This quote notes how a Latina PhD student felt while navigating a conflict with their Latina advisor. Despite the participant still filtering themselves in the interactions, they felt more comfortable being direct and were less concerned about stereotype-based judgment while navigating the conflict.

2.3.2 Imposter phenomenon. Students reported feeling as though they did not belong or deserve to be in academia, which impacted how they navigated conflict with advisors. These feelings reduced confidence during times of conflict, led to hesitation in speaking up and in developing a plan for confrontation, which tended to delay conflict navigation.

Fear of having that conflict with my doubt of being able to even be in this program in the first place, you know, like, do I have the ability to even bring up

an issue, because should I even be here in the first place kind of thoughts.....really aware of my tone. Really, like, I pause in between every single word to make sure I'm trying to find the right one, but then I worry about how that makes me look, and so, I feel like my conflict resolution seems a little bit less sure of myself, because I think I overcorrected in trying to become humble and aware of other people, and aware of how I project to other people. (P2)

This quote demonstrates that the participant filtered their communication due to the uncertainty of belonging in academia. This led the participant to carefully structure their conflict communication to portray them as humble while avoiding overstepping or speaking up for themselves in ways that could be perceived as undeserving.

RQ2 Discussion: Cultural identity impact on conflict navigation with advisors

Latina PhD students described various approaches to navigating conflicts with advisors, providing insights into how cultural and intersecting identities shape the navigation of these experiences. Three primary themes emerged, highlighting how cultural identity influenced whether and how participants chose to engage with advisors during conflict. These themes reflect tensions between Latinx cultural values and dominant academic norms, the role of culturally rooted motivations in shaping how participants navigate conflict, and the influence of predominantly white academic spaces on how participants approach these interactions.

These findings suggest that Latina PhD students navigate conflicts with advisors in ways informed by their cultural upbringing, values, and expectations for relational engagement, rather than solely by academic norms. Additionally, these approaches are shaped by structural factors, such as the centrality of whiteness in academic spaces and the additional weight participants carry as individuals with intersecting marginalized identities (Ramirez & Puente, 2021). Notably, participants' approaches to navigating

conflict evolved over time and were influenced by their experiences in their programs and by prior interactions with advisors and mentors.

Cultural dissonance between Latinx values and academia. Latina PhD students described how their approaches to navigating conflict with advisors were shaped by Latinx cultural values such as *personalismo*, *familismo* and *respeto*, which countered traditional academic norms and at times made them less likely to engage in conflict. However, when *personalismo* was central to the advisor-advisee relationship, participants were able to engage in conflict more transparently and directly, often resulting in more positive conflict-related outcomes. As expected based on the prior literature (Rodriguez-Montoya et al., 2013; Ramirez & Puente, 2021), findings highlight a mismatch between Latinx cultural values and dominant norms within academia, as well as the conditions under which these values may either constrain or facilitate conflict navigation.

The cultural values of *respeto* and *familismo* were particularly influential in shaping participants' willingness to engage in conflict-related conversations with advisors. *Respeto* was reflected in participants' hesitancy to be overly assertive, as they did not want to appear disrespectful toward advisors who have positions of authority within hierarchical academic structures. When combined with cultural expectations to respect elders and authority figures (Calzada et al., 2010), this created a form of cultural dissonance, where engaging in conflict could feel misaligned with participants' values. As a result, participants who centered *respeto* reported being less likely to initiate conflict-related conversations, even in situations where they experienced inequities. This

aligns with prior work showing that Latinx individuals may be less likely to challenge authority figures in institutional settings (Lopez et al., 2020).

Similarly, familismo influenced conflict navigation in ways that emphasized group cohesion and harmony. For some participants, this resulted in avoiding conflict in order to maintain peace within the advisor-advisee relationship or broader lab environment. However, familismo also operated in more complex ways. While some participants avoided conflict to preserve relationships, others described feeling motivated to speak up on behalf of their peers. In these cases, participants engaged in conflict as a means of protecting the well-being of others within their academic community and familismo functioned as a promoter of collective advocacy.

Additionally, conflict navigation was often a process that went beyond the advisor-advisee dyad. Specifically, participants described first consulting with peers, who served as trusted spaces for processing and support, before engaging with advisors. This reflects the use of social and navigational capital within Community Cultural Wealth, as students drew on their communities to determine how to approach conflict in ways that maintained relational harmony while still advocating for themselves. In this way, familismo functioned not only as a constraint, but also as a cultural strength that supported strategic and relational approaches to conflict navigation.

The presence or absence of personalismo within advisor-advisee relationships further shaped how conflict was navigated. When advisors cultivated relationships grounded in personalismo, where students felt seen and valued as individuals, participants described being more comfortable engaging in open and direct conversations

about conflict. In these contexts, conflict was often addressed earlier and with less emotional strain, as trust and relational closeness facilitated more transparent communication. In contrast, when personalismo was absent, participants described filtering their communication, delaying confrontation, and expending cognitive and emotional energy to determine how to address conflict without appearing disrespectful. These patterns were further exacerbated by hierarchical power dynamics, as the risks associated with challenging authority figures were heightened in the absence of close and personal relationships.

These findings suggest that the impact of cultural values on conflict engagement depends on how they interact with relationship dynamics and institutional norms. While values such as respeto and familismo can sometimes constrain direct conflict engagement, they also provide a framework for relationally grounded and strategic approaches to navigating conflict. Moreover, when advisor-advisee relationships align with these cultural values, conflict navigation may become more transparent, collaborative, and conducive to student thriving rather than survival in academia.

Resistance and persistence in academia. Latina PhD students described how culturally rooted motivations for persisting in academia shaped their approaches to navigating conflict with advisors. Specifically, participants emphasized the role of responsibility and sacrifice in their academic journeys, which influenced how they responded to conflict. Having already given up significant time, proximity to family, and other opportunities to pursue their doctoral degrees, participants described conflict as risky, as negative outcomes could threaten their progress in their programs. As a result,

many were careful to avoid “burning bridges” with advisors and instead turned to their social support networks, such as peers with more experience, to better understand how to navigate conflict in ways that would be productive and minimize risk.

These motivations could also lead to more direct engagement in conflict, particularly when issues were perceived as threatening to academic progress. For example, when participants experienced delays in feedback on milestone-related materials or other barriers that could affect their trajectory, they described being more willing to communicate directly with their advisors to ensure they could continue making progress in their programs. These patterns suggest that persistence-driven motivations shaped whether participants engaged in conflict and when they chose to do so.

This theme also reflects the intersectional nature of participants’ experiences, aligning with Latina/o Critical Theory. Participants described navigating multiple, overlapping identities, including gender, ethnicity, and family background, that informed their sense of responsibility and commitment to completing their degrees. For many, this included feelings of obligation tied to family sacrifice and, in some cases, immigrant backgrounds, where pursuing higher education represented both personal and collective advancement. These intersecting identities contributed to a heightened sense of accountability and shaped how participants approached conflict, balancing self-advocacy with the perceived need to maintain stability within their academic environments.

Additionally, participants described motivations to persist in academia as a form of resistance to gendered expectations within some Latinx communities. In this way, pursuing a PhD and remaining in academic spaces functioned as a challenge to norms

that position women as dependent or limit their access to higher education and professional advancement. These dynamics reflect the use of resistant capital within Community Cultural Wealth, as participants navigated and challenged both institutional barriers within academia and broader societal expectations.

Lastly, participants' strategies for navigating conflict demonstrated the use of navigational and social capital, as they sought guidance from others and made strategic decisions about when and how to engage with advisors. Therefore, these findings suggest that conflict navigation is shaped by culturally grounded motivations for persistence, with decisions informed by the conflict itself and broader considerations of risk, responsibility, and long-term goals.

Navigating whiteness and belonging in academia. The final culturally relevant aspect of conflict navigation with advisors involved navigating whiteness and belonging in academic spaces. This theme included stereotype awareness and perceptions of belonging, including experiences of imposter syndrome. Together, these dynamics shaped how participants perceived themselves and how they believed others perceived them, ultimately influencing their willingness to engage in conflict with advisors.

Participants described heightened awareness of stereotypes associated with their identities, which often led them to filter their interactions with advisors. Some participants expressed concern about being perceived through stereotypes such as the “arrogant” or “fiery” Latina. As a result, they modified how they spoke, dressed, and expressed themselves to align more closely with dominant academic norms. These patterns reflect the broader centrality of whiteness in academia, where expectations for

professionalism are often rooted in white cultural standards (Ramirez & Puente, 2021; Gutierrez et al., 2022). In response, participants engaged in self-monitoring and behavioral adjustments to avoid negative stereotyping, which sometimes limited their ability to engage openly in conflict-related conversations.

Similarly, participants described experiences of imposter syndrome that shaped their sense of belonging within academic spaces. Specifically, several participants reported feeling as though they did not fully belong in academia due to their identities as Latina, first-generation, or historically underrepresented students. These perceptions contributed to hesitancy in speaking up during moments of conflict, as participants questioned whether they had the right to challenge advisors or advocate for their needs. In some cases, this resulted in accepting unfavorable conditions or delaying engagement in conflict, as participants prioritized maintaining their position within academic spaces.

Ultimately, both stereotype awareness and imposter-related experiences contributed to more filtered and delayed interactions with advisors. Participants described taking additional time to carefully consider how to approach conflict in ways that would maintain a particular perception, often resulting in less direct communication and delayed engagement with issues. This theme suggests that navigating conflict requires not only addressing the issue itself but also managing identity-based perceptions within academic environments.

From a community cultural wealth and Latina/o critical theory perspective, these findings highlight how the centrality of whiteness in academia can make it more difficult for Latina PhD students to recognize the cultural capital they bring to these spaces. In

response, they may be prompted to adjust their behavior to align with dominant norms. Notably, this does not mean that these Latina PhD students are not actively bringing in their cultural capital to their navigation of relationships in academia in different ways; instead, they may be going unacknowledged when considering navigating conflict with advisors (Puente & Zaragoza, 2022). This dynamic reflects broader structural inequalities and aligns with Latina/o Critical Theory, which emphasizes how racialized and gendered power structures shape experiences within institutional contexts (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Perez-Huber, 2009). This suggests that conflict navigation is not solely an interpersonal or dyadic process between the advisor and advisee but, as ecological systems theory suggests, is also influenced by systemic factors that shape students' perceptions of risk, belonging, and legitimacy within academia (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

RQ3 Results: Peer support and peer conflict resolution

While Latina Ph.D. students described challenges with their advisors, they also emphasized the supportive role of their peers (See Table 3). One participant noted, “These women of color, especially during the time that we were going through coursework together, became so integral to my survival.” (P157) Similar sentiments were expressed by four additional participants. Nearly half of participants described supportive experiences with peers who shared similar identities (Latinas, people of color, first-generation college students). Five themes emerged from the analysis of peer support, encompassing 16 codes.

3.1 Academic peer mentoring

Academic peer mentoring was the most commonly described form of support provided by peers and encompasses codes related to academic and research navigation guidance. Peers supported participants in managing academic responsibilities, navigating professional development opportunities, and providing research-related support.

3.1.1 Accountability groups and check-ins. Peers supported Latina PhD students by organizing and participating in writing groups, scheduling mirrored work sessions (working on different tasks in a shared space), and regularly checking in on academic and research progress.

“We started implementing weekly memos, or bi-weekly memos, for our dissertation. We started doing that in the summer, and every two weeks, we give each other updates on each of our dissertations and what next steps are.” (P7)

These efforts helped participants maintain accountability and encourage consistent progress in academic and research-based pursuits.

3.1.2 Networking. Participants described their peers helping with networking by making introductions or connecting each other with faculty, peers, and others in academic or professional settings.

She knows so many people... like, if we go to conferences, that's like, let's go meet this professor, let's go meet this faculty member, whether or not she knows them already, she's just so confident in herself, so she's the one that's like helping me get a broader network, especially of Latina people in our field. (P111)

Peers helped Latina PhD students expand their professional networks and meet potential allies in their field.

3.1.3 Navigational guidance. Participants described peers providing guidance on navigating common academic experiences and processes, such as classroom dynamics,

milestones, conflicts, and professional interactions. This form of support focused on navigating explicit experiences in academia and does not include navigating unspoken norms such as the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum is included in a subsequent code.

So I found peers to be helpful, because my advisor is not right, just like, yeah, yeah, whatever... and so I just went to them and was like, hey, what did y'all do? How did you handle this? What did you say? What did you do? Who did you go to, and then that way, I was able to craft a communication that I knew was going to get a response, because I already had a template or a model. (P22)

In this example, the participant was able to navigate a conflict more successfully because of the advice and guidance offered to them by their peers.

3.1.4 Feedback. Latina PhD students described peers providing feedback on their research papers, assignments, or projects.

"I was telling her that I had a hard time with one of my chapters. And I was like, I don't know if it's reading well, I just need someone to look over it. And I sent it to her, and she gave me really good feedback." (P7)

As illustrated in this quote and echoed by other participants, peer feedback often helped Latina PhD students refine their work and served as a first review before submitting materials to their advisor.

3.1.5 Exposing the hidden curriculum. Peers supporting Latina PhD students by exposing the unspoken norms and expectations within academia (the hidden curriculum) and sharing their own experiences navigating these implicit dynamics, making the implicit and unspoken explicit.

“You've been through things that I'm now going through, and you can sort of tell me... these secrets.” (P9)

This example demonstrates how peers provide access to implicit knowledge about navigating academia by sharing “secrets” that are not formally communicated in academic settings but that contribute to successful navigation of these spaces.

3.1.6 Opportunity Sharing. Peers shared academic and professional opportunities, including conferences, fellowships, awards, and grants, thereby facilitating access to professional development opportunities and academic resources.

“They were more than willing to share like anything, um, scholarships, fellowships that they think I'd be good for, not gatekeeping them.” (P68)

Beyond simply sharing opportunities peers themselves were engaged in or had previously pursued, participants described peers intentionally seeking and sharing opportunities relevant to others' interests and goals.

3.2 Co-processing racialized and inequality-based experiences

This theme captures how peers support Latina PhD students by co-processing racial and inequality-based experiences in academia. Participants described sharing and working through experiences of discrimination, microaggressions, and exclusion collectively. Together, peers and participants are actively experiencing pain and vulnerability regarding racialized experiences and going beyond co-processing to actively challenge inequalities in Eurocentric academic spaces.

3.2.1 Racial trauma bonding. Latina PhD students described sharing and co-processing microaggressions, discrimination, and experiences involving racially charged language or actions with peers of color and allies.

All in my PhD program who are POC trauma bonded over some of the similar experiences that we had with being in certain spaces and the kind of language that was used, or the kind of comments that we had to look at each other and be like, did someone just say that? (P53)

This quote highlights how peers not only shared and experienced similar racialized situations in academia but also witnessed and processed these experiences together in real time. During these instances, peers served as sources of validation and support as participants made sense of these interactions.

3.2.2 Collective resistance. Participants described banding together with peers to challenge dominant norms in academia that center on whiteness. Peers and participants did so by engaging in activism, questioning white professional standards, and introducing race-conscious discussions in the classroom to challenge dominant narratives.

I was thankful enough to have friends that were really speaking up. Like, the friends that we had were like, oh my gosh, we're gonna do it. One of them was like, we should do a walkout. They were just... full of... this activism, and then they're like, we have to do something about this. (P28)

This quote highlights peers demonstrating collective resistance by uniting to challenge and disrupt inequality in academia.

3.3 Emotional support

Emotional support was commonly described by Latina PhD students as a form of support offered by their peers. Peers served as sources of validation and as individuals with whom they could process the stressors of graduate school and personal experiences.

This theme does not include emotional co-processing related to racialized experiences; this is captured in a different theme.

3.3.1 Grief support. Latina PhD students described peers providing emotional support during times of grief, such as the loss of a family member or the end of a close personal relationship.

"We both support each other through tough times, like my stepdad had passed during my program. And so being able to be supported, you know, throughout that." (P85)

This quote highlights peers providing support to Latina PhD students as they processed the loss of a loved one while also having to handle the many demands of graduate school.

3.3.2 Sharing graduate school frustrations. Peers served as sounding boards for Latina PhD students by providing spaces to discuss the stress and frustration associated with graduate school, including its rigor, challenges, and complex dynamics that individuals outside academia may not understand.

"Cry about classes and final papers that we thought we had crushed and then got, you know, soul-sucking feedback on." (P157)

Participants described being able to express emotional vulnerability and share the negative emotions experienced while navigating graduate school.

3.4 Companionship support

Latina PhD students commonly reported spending time with peers in both academic and non-academic contexts. While spending time together, participants

engaged with their peers in a wide variety of activities, from planned activities to everyday tasks.

3.4.1 Social companionship. Participants described engaging in social activities with peers outside of academic settings, including going to dinner, attending concerts and festivals, and participating in group activities.

“We had already gone to a concert together... all these different events... like the Latinx festival.” (P85)

This quote demonstrates that peers in academia are not only spending time together during academic activities; they’re also intentional about engaging in social activities together.

3.4.2 Task companionship. Peers were also reported to accompany Latina PhD students during routine activities and errands.

“We go to Costco, or like, we go to all these different places together.” (P85)

This example demonstrates that peers did not need a structured activity or event to provide companionship.

3.4.3 Academic companionship. Participants described engaging in academic activities with their peers, including taking classes together and attending conferences.

“The academic part is big... we'll take classes together.” (P92)

The quote highlights how peers engage in academic settings and how they create shared academic experiences.

3.5 Shared identity and understanding

Participants commonly described feeling supported and understood by their peers, who helped create counterspaces characterized by safety, understanding, and resistance to dominant norms in academia that often made participants feel excluded or unauthentic. These forms of support came from peers with shared identities, as well as allies who could sympathize with participants' lived experiences and actively worked with them to challenge hierarchical interactions and inequality in their graduate programs. Notably, nearly half of the focus group participants reported that their supportive peer interactions occurred with peers who shared an identity, such as being Latinx, a person of color, or a first-generation college student.

3.5.1 Safe space. Participants described peers fostering environments in which they felt safe enough to be their authentic selves, without needing to conform to normative expectations of professionalism.

“It's nice to have a breather right, where, like I said, where you're not performing, where you're able to have a safe space to be more than your academic self.” (P24)

This quote highlights how having peers with whom participants can be their authentic selves offers a break from the pressures of academia by separating their academic and personal selves.

3.5.2 Shared interpretation and validation of lived experiences. Participants described feeling supported when peers interpreted their lived experiences similarly and offered reassurance and validation, thereby strengthening their confidence in those interpretations. Notably, this validation stemmed from a shared understanding of experiences rather than from references to shared identities or identity-related

experiences. Identity-based understanding and validation are considered a different form of support and are described in a subsequent code.

It's been nice to have her, as a point of reassurance, like, it's not just me, right? Like, who's kind of feeling like the gaslighting and just the weirdness of it all sometimes. So that's been nice to have that point of reassurance. I think it's important to have someone who kind of sees what you see, or like, you're like, I'm not going crazy. (P24)

In these cases, participants felt validated by a shared understanding of their experiences, which reinforced confidence in their interpretation of the interactions. Oftentimes, these experiences were tied to conflict and passive-aggressive interactions in academic settings.

3.5.3 Shared underrepresented identities. Latina PhD students described bonding with and feeling supported by peers who shared underrepresented identities. This was done by confiding in one another regarding identity-related experiences such as family dynamics, cultural norms, and expectations. This code does not include co-processing discrimination, microaggressions, or identity-based inequalities; these forms of support are captured in a separate code.

She understands my culture, and also understands my family bonds. And like being the first one in my family to be so far away from my family unit. ... hard to relate to my other peers, because they could probably be like, yeah, that sucks. And then take a flight like every weekend to go see their family or things like that, things that I can't do. (P109)

Participants described connecting with peers who shared similar identities because these peers understood experiences that others could not relate to. This shared understanding of identity-related experiences enabled participants to be more open about challenges associated with intersecting identities. Most participants described experiences

in which they shared more than one marginalized identity with their peer (e.g., first-generation college student, low socioeconomic status, Latina, person of color, immigrant, child of immigrants).

Peer Conflict Resolution

While peers in academia can be extremely supportive, as previously discussed, peer dynamics are not free of conflict. In describing their experiences with peer conflict, Latina PhD students also discussed how they navigated these conflicts and whether they were ultimately resolved (See Table 4). Notably, only 7 out of the 32 described peer conflicts were considered resolved by participants. Three main themes emerged from the analysis of conflict navigation. The themes were internal conflict processing, direct conflict navigation, and third-party intervention. Across these three themes, seven codes capture the specific ways in which participants navigated and resolved peer conflicts.

3.6 Internal conflict resolution

Participants described conflict-resolution approaches that emphasized peers independently processing conflicts. In these cases, peers took a more active role in reflecting on and addressing the conflict, while participants were more often informed of the peer's reflection than directly involved in helping the peer identify the conflict itself or the impact of their actions.

3.6.1 Self-initiated reflection. Participants highlighted peers navigating conflict by independently reflecting on their own words and actions and taking responsibility for any harm caused. In these cases, the peer often initiated the first conversation following

the conflict, which included the peer apologizing or acknowledging their role in it, and was often followed by participants and peers' co-processing of the conflict or its causes.

She came up to me and was like, I feel so embarrassed about what I said and what I talked about, and I just want to apologize... So I was telling her, I think you just have different perspectives, and I think you need to reevaluate some of the things that you're looking at.... but I think, thankfully, it went in the direction of it helped us understand each other more. (P7)

This conflict navigation approach was commonly described as leading to conflict resolution and to conversations that foster an improved understanding of peers' perspectives. In some cases, these conversations focused on identity and positionality, which are described in a subsequent theme.

3.7 Direct conflict navigation

Participants commonly navigated conflicts by directly addressing concerns with their peers to reach a shared understanding or resolution. These conversations involved open dialogue from both peers and participants and facilitated mutual understanding.

3.7.1 Positionality-focused conversation. Peers contextualize differing perspectives on conflict by discussing differing identities, life experiences, and the privileges that come with those identities. These conversations were used to better understand how insensitive or inequality-based conflicts arise, particularly in relation to racial/ethnic inequality.

Because she is a White woman, and we were talking about how sometimes individuals that are not minorities or white, individual white people in general, just kind of like, had the privilege of not caring about these certain situations that are happening within the world... We had different conversations about privilege, income, like background... because we come from two very different backgrounds. (P7)

Conversations regarding identity and privilege were primarily associated with conflict resolution when peers were willing to learn and reflect on their own positionality and how it shapes their perspectives. Conversely, when peers were unwilling to acknowledge structural inequality and privilege, racial and ethnic inequality-based conflicts tended to go unresolved.

3.7.2 Revisiting conversation in a non-academic setting. Participants described removing themselves from academic settings where tensions were heightened and revisiting the conversation about the conflict in a more casual, less hierarchical environment.

“A social setting. We had all gone to a bar. And then I brought it up” (P73)

Bringing up the conflict in a more social setting led to more open dialogue among participants and their peers. This allowed both individuals to express their perspectives on the conflict and work towards identifying a better approach for navigating similar situations in the future.

3.7.3 Direct confrontation. Participants described directly addressing their concerns about conflicts with involved peers and allowed them to explain their perspectives.

Because I know I'm gonna have to [work with this person] and this person's another scholar in the field that I also want to respect, and I know their work is going to be important, but I wrote them a really long email... if you wanted to repair things... I'm happy to meet and still give grace for that. And like, *nunca me correspondio*, like he never wrote back. (P137)

Approaches to confronting peers varied, with some participants describing being more strategic and intentional in their interactions, while others were more direct and less filtered in expressing their concerns.

“I was like, hey, so what happened. How come you didn't tell me... I guess I would say talking and being direct is my way of handling conflict, just within peers. I wouldn't be straight-up like, hey. I would be more subtle.” (P73)

When peers described being less filtered in their confrontations, some participants noted that they would only take that approach with peers, not with a faculty member or advisor.

3.8 Third-party involvement

In some instances, Latina PhD students sought support, guidance, or clarification from a third party before directly addressing the conflict with a peer. These third parties helped participants identify the most effective approaches to conflict navigation, provided perspective, or served as a buffer during direct confrontation.

3.8.1 Authority-mediated conversations. When conflicts over unequal workloads arose, Latina PhD students described inviting an authority figure to mediate the conversation to reach a consensus.

"We have a mental health counselor in our department, so she, like, sat in to mediate.....we tried to divide up some responsibilities." (P75)

Authority-mediated interactions were more structured and formal, and the authority figure served as a neutral mediator to help ensure that both students were receiving equal workloads.

3.8.2 Clarification from authority. Latina PhD students described reaching out to individuals in positions of authority to obtain clarification regarding decisions that contributed to the conflict.

“I’ve just resolved this, just being honest with the supervising author or my PI. Just being like, hey, like, I want to learn more about how authorship is given.”

(P173)

In this case, the conflict with the peer stemmed from decisions made by an authority figure. Therefore, the participant sought clarification from the authority figure to better understand the situation.

3.8.3 Seeking external guidance. When faced with conflict, Latina PhD students often reached out to trusted external support sources (e.g., peers, mentors, advisors) to debrief and for guidance on navigating the conflict productively.

Reaching out to my peers that were friends and being like, read these texts, read these emails. Like, help me figure out a way of not just being like, no, screw you, but like, you know, in a way where we can stop the argument, stop the conflict. So it was both reaching out to my peers that are my friends, and I also reached out to faculty because I’m like you have more experience navigating conflict with peers in our field. (P111)

Latina PhD students were often strategic in navigating peer conflicts, drawing on peers to challenge or validate interpretations of the conflict, and reaching out to faculty for guidance on how to navigate it before directly engaging with the involved peer.

RQ3 Discussion: Peer support and peer conflict resolution

This research question focuses on two aspects of relationship dynamics between Latina Ph.D. students and their peers: peer support and conflict resolution. The themes for each component were developed and will be discussed separately. First, I discuss how

peers provide support, and then I describe how conflict is resolved. Peers were commonly described as extremely influential in participants' ability to persist in their PhD programs. Several Latina Ph.D. students explicitly stated that they would not have completed their programs or progressed as far as they had without their peers' support. Peer relationships were especially impactful for academic navigation, often filling gaps where advisor support was limited or inconsistent. However, the support described by participants went beyond academic help. Instead, many emphasized the importance of close, personal connections within peer interactions.

Peer Support

Five themes emerged from Latina PhD students' descriptions of how their peers supported them, spanning academic, culturally relevant, and emotional support. The variability in these experiences suggests that peer support is adaptive, with some participants engaging with the same peers for multiple needs, while others engaged with different peers depending on the type of support needed. Notably, this domain generated the most diverse set of examples, as is illustrated by the 16 codes embedded within the five themes. This suggests that peer support may be especially relevant to navigating academia for Latina PhD students. Notably, several participants explicitly emphasized its importance, with five Latina PhD students stating they would not have persisted in their programs without peer support. Additionally, nearly half of the focus group participants described support from peers who shared an identity, and one participant observed that peer networks within her program appeared to form along cultural lines.

Academic peer mentoring. Latina PhD students described six ways peers supported them academically, including accountability groups and check-ins, networking, navigational guidance, feedback, exposure to the hidden curriculum, and opportunity sharing. Notably, these relationships were not always formed through academic interactions. For some Latina PhD students, peer relationships began as personal connections and later became sources of academic support, while for others, academically oriented relationships, such as working together on coursework or research, evolved into more personal connections. In this way, peer relationships were described as adaptable and fluid, shifting between personal and academic roles depending on students' needs.

These findings align with prior work suggesting that peers serve as important sources of academic support in doctoral programs. For example, Lee et al. (2017) found that peers provide navigational guidance on research, teaching, and coursework, which is consistent with the findings in this dissertation. However, this dissertation extends prior literature by demonstrating that peer support is not limited to information exchange. Instead, Latina PhD students described engaging in academic and professional development practices together, such as forming accountability groups and networking by introducing one another to professional contacts.

Additionally, prior research on Latina doctoral students' peer relationships highlights opportunity sharing and collective encouragement as forms of resistance to the individualistic and competitive norms that characterize academia (Ramirez & Puente, 2021). These patterns were also evident in the present study. Participants described not

only informing one another about opportunities but also, seeking them out on behalf of their peers, suggesting a shared investment in one another's success. These practices align with collectivistic and relational cultural values, such as *familismo* and *personalismo*, which emphasize interconnectedness, mutual support, and the prioritization of each other's well-being (Salgado et al., 1987; Cuellar et al., 1995). Therefore, what may appear to be purely academic support also functions as a form of resistance, as Latina PhD students employ collaborative and relational approaches that challenge dominant norms in academic spaces (Yosso, 2005).

Further, these forms of academic support illustrate how peer relationships (social capital) function as sites where multiple forms of capital are fostered within Community Cultural Wealth. Through sharing strategies and guidance, peers contribute to the development of navigational capital, supporting one another in understanding and navigating academic structures. Additionally, by engaging in collective, non-competitive practices, participants enact resistant capital, challenging dominant norms of individualism and competition in academia. These findings suggest that peer support not only reflects overlapping forms of capital but also serves as a mechanism for fostering multiple forms of capital, as suggested in the theoretical expansion portion of this dissertation.

Co-processing racialized and inequality-based experiences. Co-processing racialized and inequality-based experiences emerged as one of the most salient forms of peer support described by Latina PhD students and alludes to how Latina/o Critical Theory is enacted within peer relationships in academic spaces. Participants described

engaging in collective processes of acknowledging, processing, and responding to experiences of marginalization, including racialized and gendered inequities. Through these interactions, peers created spaces where they could validate one another's experiences, make sense of systemic injustices, and resist the marginalization they encountered in academia.

These findings align with prior work highlighting “experiencing pain and vulnerability together” as a key form of peer support among Latina doctoral students, which encompasses co-processing traumatic and marginalizing experiences and engaging in collective healing (Ramirez & Puente, 2021). Participants in the 2021 article described turning to one another, as well as to resources such as therapy, to navigate the emotional and psychological impacts of these experiences, highlighting the importance of mental health support within Latinx communities in academic contexts.

Moreover, these processes reflect the cultural value of *personalismo*, as participants described forming strong and trusting peer relationships within academia. These peer networks functioned as spaces of collective care, where individuals bonded through shared experiences and supported one another in navigating the challenges of inequitable academic environments. In doing so, participants processed their experiences and engaged in collective forms of resistance and advocacy.

Lastly, these dynamics illustrate the enactment of multiple forms of capital within Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2005). Social capital is reflected in the reliance on peer networks for support, while navigational capital emerges as participants collectively make sense of and respond to institutional structures. Additionally, resistant

capital is evident in participants' efforts to challenge inequitable conditions, and aspirational capital is reflected in their shared commitment to creating more equitable academic spaces for future generations of Latina PhD students and the communities they serve.

Emotional support. Latina PhD students described two primary ways in which they received emotional support from peers, which included receiving grief support regarding the loss of a loved one and being provided with a space to share graduate school-related frustrations. These interactions provided participants with opportunities to process emotions related to the challenges of doctoral training, including academic rigor, workload demands, and conflict within academic environments.

This form of emotional support was distinct from the co-processing of racialized and inequality-based experiences, which was discussed in the previous theme. Participants described the emotional support in this theme as opportunities to vent about and process everyday stressors of graduate school, such as difficulties with coursework, research demands, and general frustrations with academic life, rather than focusing on identity-based marginalization. These spaces allowed participants to normalize their experiences and remain engaged in their programs. By providing a consistent outlet for processing stress and frustration, emotional support functioned as a resource for managing the demands of doctoral education and maintaining overall well-being.

Companionship. Another form of support described by Latina PhD students was companionship, encompassing social, task, and academic companionship. While accompanying one another to everyday activities, such as attending events, grocery

shopping, or taking classes together, may not initially seem like a significant form of support, prior work suggests otherwise. Specifically, Ramirez and Puente (2021) conceptualize companionship in taking classes together as a form of resistance to racialized and gendered marginalization in academic spaces. They argue that Latina PhD students may reduce isolation and mitigate the burden of being part of the numeric minority in predominantly white academic environments by intentionally occupying these spaces together, especially when peers share ethnic identities. Therefore, companionship may extend beyond social interaction and functions as a demonstration of solidarity.

While Ramirez and Puente specifically emphasize companionship within academic spaces, the findings in this dissertation suggest that companionship in other settings, such as task companionship (e.g., grocery shopping) and social companionship (e.g., attending festivals), also reflects important forms of solidarity. These interactions may similarly help reduce isolation, strengthen relational bonds, and create spaces of affirmation that extend beyond the academic environment, thereby helping students navigate academic spaces by fostering a sense of belonging and community in other areas of their lives. Thus, even when they do not occur directly within academic contexts, these forms of companionship may indirectly challenge the isolating and individualistic norms of academia by reinforcing and strengthening community-oriented support systems.

This aligns with resistant capital within Community Cultural Wealth, as participants engage in collective practices that challenge dominant norms of isolation and individualism in academia (Yosso, 2005). Additionally, these findings connect

to Latina/o Critical Theory, as shared-identity-based companionship can serve as a means of collectively navigating and resisting intersecting systems of marginalization. Although identity matching was not required for these forms of support to occur within this dissertation, prior work suggests that when peers share multiple identities, these interactions may more directly counter the intersecting forms of oppression experienced by Latina PhD students.

Shared identity and understanding. Another important form of peer support emerged through shared identity and understanding. This theme was reflected not only in how participants described being supported by peers, but also in the prevalence of shared identity within those supportive relationships. Nearly half of the participants explicitly described supportive interactions with peers who shared some form of underrepresented identity. Although the remaining participants did not always specify their peers' identities, it is possible that additional shared identities were present but not explicitly named. Therefore, these findings suggest that shared identity plays a meaningful role in shaping supportive peer relationships for many Latina PhD students.

Within this theme, the three patterns that emerged were the creation of safe spaces, shared interpretation and validation of lived experiences, and connections based on shared underrepresented identities. Participants described peer relationships as spaces where they felt more comfortable expressing themselves, processing experiences, and navigating academic environments without fear of judgment, which is consistent with prior work highlighting the impact of identity-affirming peer relationships (Flores & Patron, 2013; Ramirez & Puente, 2021). These spaces were characterized by a sense of

psychological safety, in which students could speak openly about their experiences, similar to the notion of counterspaces (Solorzano et al., 2000).

Importantly, validation within these relationships did not always stem from shared identity, but rather from shared interpretation of experiences. Participants described feeling supported when peers understood and interpreted situations similarly, even when identity was not explicitly referenced. This distinction highlights that shared understanding itself can function as a form of support, separate from shared identity. In contrast, identity-based validation involved peers drawing on shared experiences tied to underrepresented identities, such as navigating family dynamics.

From a theoretical perspective, these dynamics reflect the enactment of resistant capital within Community Cultural Wealth, as students cultivate collectivist, affirming relationships that challenge the individualistic norms often emphasized in academic environments (Ramirez & Puente, 2021). By forming bonds grounded in shared understanding and, at times, shared identity, Latina PhD students create supportive spaces that validate their experiences while functioning as forms of collective resistance.

Peer conflict resolution

While Latina PhD students described numerous ways their peers supported them, they also reported conflicts within these relationships, many of which remained unresolved. When resolution occurred, participants described it as resulting from internal processing, such as peer-initiated reflection, direct engagement with the conflict, or involvement of a third party. These patterns highlight the complexity of peer

relationships, suggesting that while they function as critical sources of support, they also require ongoing navigation and do not always lead to clear or immediate resolution.

Internal conflict resolution. One of the more distinctive patterns described by Latina PhD students regarding conflict resolution was self-initiated reflection by their peers. In these cases, participants noted that resolution did not require active intervention on their part. Instead, when peers were at fault, they sometimes independently reflected on the situation, acknowledged their behavior, and initiated the resolution process by apologizing or addressing what went wrong.

This form of conflict resolution required minimal cognitive and emotional labor from Latina PhD students and was described as particularly meaningful in conflicts related to privilege, positionality, and vicarious experiences of inequality. In these situations, participants did not have to take on the burden of initiating difficult conversations, as peers engaged in their own processes of reflection and accountability.

Direct conflict navigation. A commonly described conflict-resolution approach involves directly addressing conflicts with peers. Participants described having positionality-focused conversations, revisiting conflicts in non-academic settings, and directly calling attention to the conflict. In these resolution approaches, participants drew on their linguistic capital within Community Cultural Wealth to outline their concerns in ways aimed at resolution. Additionally, they demonstrated navigational capital by recognizing and responding to hierarchical dynamics within academic environments. For example, some participants described intentionally revisiting conflicts in more casual,

non-academic spaces where power dynamics felt less prominent, allowing for more open and productive conversations.

Notably, positionality-focused conversations often involved attempting to prevent future conflicts. In some cases, participants described directly calling attention to peers' positionalities to encourage reflection and prevent similar issues from occurring in the future. Therefore, direct conflict navigation reflects the use of multiple forms of capital, as linguistic capital supported the articulation of concerns, navigational capital contributed to strategic decision-making, and aspirational capital was evident in participants' real-time investment in fostering more equitable and sustainable peer relationships in the future.

Third-party involvement. Another common way that Latina PhD students described resolving peer conflict was through the involvement of a third party. Participants commonly described using this approach to navigate conflicts over unequal work distribution and a lack of recognition for their contributions. Third-party involvement included authority-mediated conversations, seeking clarification from individuals in positions of authority, and obtaining external guidance from others within their networks. This approach was often used in response to conflicts that participants perceived as involving labor exploitation or insufficient credit for their work. In these cases, involving others appeared to facilitate more equitable outcomes, as participants reported clearer expectations or more balanced labor distributions following the third party's involvement. In these instances, Latina PhD students utilized their social capital,

as described in the community cultural wealth model, to draw on their social relationships to facilitate resolution (Yosso, 2005).

Notably, third-party involvement often included individuals with some level of authority, suggesting that students strategically leveraged their broader support networks when navigating conflict. This pattern also reflects the use of navigational capital, as participants demonstrated an understanding of when to seek third-party input and how to utilize appropriate resources to address interpersonal challenges. Latina PhD students engaged in relational and strategic approaches to conflict resolution, drawing on both social and navigational capital to identify effective pathways forward rather than handling the conflict on their own. These approaches may promote more sustainable and constructive peer relationships by allowing students to access additional perspectives, clarify misunderstandings, and navigate complex relational dynamics in academia.

RQ 4 Results & Discussion: How do Latina Ph.D. students utilize social media for support, and what factors influence its effectiveness?

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to assess whether there was a significant difference between the mean scores of the esteem/ emotional online social support subscale and the informational online social support subscale. The results indicated a significant difference, such that the esteem/emotional subscale ($M = 3.18$, $SD = .70$) was significantly higher than the informational subscale ($M = 2.84$, $SD = .69$), $t(191) = 7.04$, $p < .001$. These results are consistent with the findings from the open-ended survey question investigating online connections among academic peers. While most participants did not use social media for connecting with peers in academia, those who did use social

media for these purposes commonly noted that connecting with other Latinx PhD students and learning about their experiences navigating graduate school made them feel validated and fostered a sense of community among Latinx PhD students, especially among those who were the only or one of few Latinx graduate students in their department or university.

To further assess the role of online social support, a path model within a structural equation modeling framework was utilized to examine associations between two forms of online social support, burnout, and researcher community support. The fully saturated model also included healthy advisor relationship behaviors in in-person relationships. This allowed me to examine whether forms of online social support were associated with burnout and researcher community support, even when accounting for healthy in-person behaviors. Controls included generation college status and age.

Significant associations emerged for both online social support and healthy advisor behaviors. Specifically, higher levels of online esteem/ emotional support were associated with lower levels of burnout and greater perceived researcher community support (see Figure 2). Additionally, greater reports of advisor conflict management were linked to lower levels of burnout and greater perceived researcher community support (see Figure 2).

To further explore associations between predictors and burnout, burnout was divided into its three subscales of exhaustion, cynicism, and efficacy, and the fully saturated model was run with the decomposed version of the burnout scale. Significant associations emerged between online esteem/emotional support and outcomes, as well as

between advisor conflict management and outcomes. Meanwhile, no significant associations emerged for online informational support (see Figure 3). Specifically, greater perceived online esteem/ emotional support was linked to lower levels of cynicism, higher efficacy, and greater researcher community support. Regarding advisor conflict management behaviors, healthier advisor conflict management behaviors were associated with lower levels of exhaustion and cynicism, and greater perceived researcher commitment support.

RQ5 Results & Discussion: How do university programs and departments support Latina Ph.D. students in building effective relationships?

When Latina PhD students were asked whether their department or university made an effort to foster more supportive relationships, few participants reported having such programming. Of the 214 survey participants in Study A, 68 indicated that their university or department implemented initiatives to foster more effective relationships between students and advisors.

The 68 participants most commonly described structured opportunities for students and faculty to share space (e.g., networking events, colloquiums). The types of interactions in these spaces commonly focused on research and professional experiences. Notably, several participants mentioned that the effectiveness of these activities often resulted from faculty efforts to get to know students. Others referenced program- or university-based requirements (milestone meetings, annual evaluations, mentoring contracts) designed to encourage communication between advisors and students about academic plans, expectations, and progress. Fewer participants described approaches

aimed at preventing conflict escalation or addressing conflicts between students and advisors, such as formalized escalation processes or mediation meetings. One participant mentioned that after several students experienced conflicts with advisors in the same academic year, a flowchart was developed to help advisors and students navigate such conflicts. Only three participants mentioned mentorship-related training for students or advisors. However, these responses did not include specific details about the content or structure of the mentor training sessions.

To further identify approaches utilized by universities and departments to help foster more positive relationships for Latina PhD students, a thematic analysis of the described approaches was conducted. Five themes and 14 codes emerged from participant responses.

5.1 Disparities and barriers

5.1.1 I got lucky (advising disparities). Students reported that efforts to build effective relationships are primarily driven by individual faculty or student initiatives.

"I have been lucky to have a Latina advisor that has gone above and beyond for me. She worked to cultivate our relationship, I would not say the department or university has done that." (Eve)

"I don't think there's anything formal to help support relationships. Some other students and myself have largely taken the initiative to host some socials for mentees and their advisor(s). Those efforts were supported and appreciated.

(Nubia)

5.1.2 Reactivity instead of prevention. Departments beginning to consider mentorship as a reaction to consistent mentoring issues.

"After the incident of switching advisors due to improper mentoring, the department started to incorporate mentoring within faculty evaluations and to have active discussions between faculty members on good mentoring styles."
(Helena)

5.1.3 Mentorship Barriers. Departments or other faculty discouraging faculty from working with students.

"No, my department actually kept blocking me and was very discriminatory regarding 'extra support accommodations' which were not true. They sent emails, letters, and other communications to potential chairs and enforced the entire department to not work with me when my chair passed." (Joey)

5.2 Facilitated interactions

5.2.1 Student and faculty socials. Informal events sponsored by the department to bring students and faculty together in a more casual environment.

"Yes, they will hold dinners or gatherings at faculty homes for the PhD students."
(Flor)

5.2.2 Student and faculty committees. Department facilitated opportunities for students and faculty to collaborate in committees, organizations, or departmental groups focused on departmental decisions.

"We have several committees where students meet with faculty members and students are looped into departmental decisions (hiring new faculty, recruiting students)." (Tina)

5.2.3 Physical work proximity. Positioning student and faculty work areas close to each other to increase opportunities for interaction.

"The department intentionally provides workspaces with proximity to advisors."

(Lisa)

5.3 Structured mentoring

5.3.1 Advisor selection. The department's process of pairing students with advisors. This process can include both students choosing their own advisors and advisors being assigned based on similar research interests.

"You are paired with someone who has similar research interests as you and there is a required yearly meeting to review our performance but there isn't anything in place to foster positive relationships." (Nena)

5.3.2 Mentoring contracts. Formal agreements between students and advisors to establish expectations and ensure accountability in the mentor-mentee relationship.

"They encourage creating advisor-student contracts" (Agustina)

5.3.3 Meeting requirements. Universities or programs requiring a minimum number of meetings between students and their advisors during the academic year.

"Our department requires that you meet with your advisor at least once a semester to talk about your progress, but there is nothing specifically for building a relationship." (Kim)

5.3.4 Mentoring training and workshops. Program-facilitated sessions, courses, or workshops designed to provide guidelines for navigating, fostering, and improving the mentor-mentee relationships.

"Yes, they did a training for faculty advisors to teach them the essentials of being a mentor. They also allowed us to give anonymous feedback to our advisors that they would review with each faculty member on how they can improve." (Luisa)

5.4 Academic and professional development

5.4.1 Structured networking. Department facilitated professional events featuring invited speakers or faculty research presentations, providing opportunities for students and faculty to network.

"general academic talks during the year." (Cecilia)

5.4.2 Progress meetings. Meetings focused on students' academic and professional development, including expectations, goals, and milestone progress.

"They make us discuss milestones/IDPS to make sure we are on track with our program and communicate our progress with our mentors" (Lia)

5.5 Conflict management

5.5.1 Conflict management meetings. Opportunities for students to discuss advisor-related concerns and conflicts with other faculty members or departmental administration.

"We have a committee where we can discuss any potential problems with our mentors, which is confidential." (Belinda)

5.5.2 Advisor change flexibility. Policies and departmental norms allow advisor changes if the advisor-adviser relationship isn't working.

"They use a mentorship model so it's possible to switch advisors. I think I got lucky in having one of the best (most supportive) advisors in our program."

(Isadora)

General Discussion

In the present dissertation, guided by Ecological Systems Theory, the Community Cultural Wealth, and Latina/o Critical Theory, I examined how Latina PhD students navigate social relationships in academia, focusing on peer, mentor, and advisor support as well as conflict navigation within these relationships. I also sought to explore the role of social media in shaping social support experiences and the ways in which universities and programs foster connection between students and others in academic spaces.

However, given the limited online engagement reported by focus group participants and the lack of institutional programming in these areas, these components were examined primarily descriptively, while most of the analysis focused on the first three research questions:

RQ1: What strategies or behaviors do mentors use to foster meaningful, culturally responsive connections with Latina Ph.D. students?

RQ2: How does cultural identity shape the navigation of conflict with advisors?

RQ3: How do peers support Latina PhD students, and how are peer conflicts resolved?

RQ4: How do Latina Ph.D. students utilize social media for support, and what factors influence its effectiveness?

RQ5: How do university programs and departments support Latina Ph.D. students in building effective relationships?

This study employed a multi-method design, including survey data from 214 Latina PhD students, followed by 12 online platica-style focus groups with a subset of 40 Latina PhD students, all of whom were first-generation college students in the social sciences. These focus groups were designed to identify the mechanisms and cultural factors that shape how Latina PhD students navigate relationship dynamics in academia, including how they build and maintain relationships with peers and advisors, and how they respond to challenges within these relationships. In the following subsections, I synthesize my interpretation of key findings for each research question based on the relevant themes and codes, and then discuss recommendations, limitations, and future directions.

Findings highlight the complex, culturally embedded ways in which Latina PhD students navigate academic relationships across mentoring, peer support, and conflict contexts. Across these domains, relationship navigation was shaped by cultural values, social networks, and hierarchical dynamics. In mentoring, participants described experiences that reflected adaptation and resource navigation, relational mentoring, and critically conscious mentoring. Conflict navigation with advisors was influenced by cultural dissonance, persistence and resistance, and navigating whiteness and belonging, while peer relationships provided multiple forms of support, including academic mentoring, co-processing of inequality-based experiences, emotional support, companionship, and shared identity and understanding.

Notably, online emotional support was perceived as more accessible than informational support, further underscoring the role of relational connection in shaping support experiences. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that Latina PhD students do not passively experience academic relationships, but actively and strategically navigate them within systems that were not designed with them in mind. In doing so, this dissertation contributes to the literature by illustrating that relationship navigation is a dynamic, culturally grounded process that is continuously shaped by interaction, context, and power within academic environments.

Connections across research questions

Across the thematic analysis, several consistent patterns emerged regarding the role of cultural values and approaches to relationship navigation. In particular, *familismo*, *respeto*, and *personalismo* consistently shaped how Latina PhD students built and maintained relationships, as well as how they navigated conflict across both peer and advisor contexts. At the same time, differences emerged in how these values were enacted across relational contexts, particularly in conflict navigation and engagement.

Similarities in relationship cultural influence. Another notable pattern across findings was the consistent role of Latinx cultural values in shaping relationship-building and conflict navigation. Across themes, *respeto*, *personalismo*, and *familismo* repeatedly emerged as central influences in how Latina PhD students experienced and navigated relationships with both peers and advisors. While prior work has emphasized the importance of these values in Latinx family contexts (Crowther & Brodsky, 2017), less

attention has been paid to how they operate in academic relationships, particularly among Latina doctoral students.

Personalismo was especially influential in shaping expectations and experiences of relationships. Participants described that when relationships with advisors or mentors reflected *personalismo*, they were more likely to feel supported, connected, and able to engage openly, including during moments of conflict. However, the absence of *personalismo* also contributed to relational strain. In some cases, participants described having to grieve the mentoring relationships they had expected to receive, particularly when they entered doctoral programs expecting more relational and humanizing forms of mentorship. This suggests that *personalismo* can function as both a facilitator of strong relationships and a source of tension when expectations are unmet.

Similarly, *respeto* shaped both expectations for behavior within relationships and willingness to engage in conflict. Participants described hesitancy to challenge authority figures, particularly advisors, due to norms of respect, which sometimes limited direct engagement in conflict. *Respeto* also influenced peer interactions, where collaborations were expected to include mutual respect and shared decision-making. For example, conflicts arose when these expectations were violated, such as in group work contexts where one individual dominated decision-making, disrupting assumptions of collective engagement.

Familismo was also evident across relationship types. Especially in the ways participants described forming close peer relationships. These relationships often

functioned as chosen families, where students created communities of care, support, and shared understanding while navigating academic environments away from home.

Differences between peer and advisor conflict. An important difference across findings emerged when comparing conflict navigation within peer relationships versus advisor-advisee relationships. Participants described greater use of direct conflict navigation with peers, whereas this approach was less common in interactions with advisors. In fact, one participant explicitly stated that they would engage only in direct communication with peers, not with advisors, suggesting that hierarchy plays a role in shaping strategies for navigating conflict.

These differences can be understood in relation to the power dynamics embedded within academic environments. Peer relationships are generally more horizontal (Lopez et al., 2022), which may allow for more direct communication and flexibility in how conflict is addressed. In contrast, advisor-advisee relationships are situated within formal hierarchies, where advisors hold significant influence over students' progress, opportunities, and overall academic trajectories (Sverdlik, 2018). As a result, participants often approached advisor conflict with greater caution, engaging in more indirect, delayed, or strategic forms of navigation.

Additionally, the stakes associated with these relationships appear to shape how conflict is handled. While peer conflicts were described as stressful, they were sometimes left unresolved or avoided altogether, as evidenced by the high number of “ghosted” conflicts. In contrast, advisor conflicts were more difficult to disengage from, given the central role advisors play in doctoral training (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2021). This suggests

that, although peer conflicts may allow for disengagement, advisor conflicts require more intentional navigation due to their potential impact on students' academic outcomes.

Online social support. Findings from both the quantitative and qualitative social media data suggest that online spaces may represent an important source of support for Latina Ph.D. students. Exploratory analyses revealed significant associations between online esteem/emotional support and lower burnout, as well as greater perceptions of researcher community support. Similarly, participants in the focus groups described using social media to connect with peers, access academic information, and identify others with similar experiences within academia.

At the same time, participants' experiences with social media were not uniformly positive. Several participants reported avoiding social media for academic purposes due to previous negative experiences or concerns about how academic spaces are represented online. Therefore, engagement with online spaces may be shaped by both the support available through these platforms and by prior experiences and expectations regarding academic interactions on social media platforms.

These findings suggest that social media may function differently depending on the source and level of support being accessed. Participants described using online spaces to connect with individual peers, build broader researcher communities, access discipline-specific information, and consume content related to academic conversations. Therefore, social media may serve as a mechanism for accessing support across multiple contexts, while simultaneously exposing students to experiences that may discourage engagement.

Theoretical and methodological contributions

This dissertation builds on existing theoretical frameworks, particularly Community Cultural Wealth and Latina/o Critical Theory, by conceptualizing cultural wealth as a process-oriented phenomenon that is continuously constructed, enacted, and negotiated within academic contexts. Rather than solely identifying the presence of different forms of capital, the findings of this study identify mechanisms through which cultural wealth is fostered and exchanged in the social experiences of Latina PhD students.

An important contribution of this study is the reconceptualization of cultural wealth as a process rather than a fixed set of assets. While prior work has identified multiple forms of capital (e.g., social, navigational, and resistant), the present findings demonstrate that these forms of capital are not simply possessed by individuals but are actively produced through interactions. Across peer, advisor, and mentor relationships, participants engaged in ongoing processes of co-constructing knowledge, sharing strategies, and making meaning of their experiences. These findings shift the focus from what forms of capital exist to how they are generated and sustained.

Building on this process-oriented perspective, this study advances the conceptualization of social capital within Community Cultural Wealth by positioning it as a generative mechanism for fostering other forms of capital. Rather than existing as a parallel or overlapping form of capital, social capital functioned as the relational context through which navigational, resistant, aspirational, and other forms of capital were developed. Peer and mentor relationships served as opportunities to share knowledge, model strategies, validate experiences, and respond collectively to structural challenges.

In this way, social capital operates not only as a resource but as a conduit for the production and activation of other forms of cultural wealth.

Another key contribution of this study is the identification of conflict navigation as a critical context for the mobilization of cultural wealth. Conflict served as a context through which multiple forms of capital were enacted and developed. Specifically, participants drew on linguistic capital to articulate concerns, navigational capital to determine when and how to engage, social capital to seek support, and resistant capital to challenge inequities. By situating cultural wealth within moments of tension and decision-making, this study highlights how capital is actively employed in navigating academic environments.

This study also expands understandings of Latinx cultural values by demonstrating that they function as both motivators and deterrents, depending on context. Values such as *respeto*, *familismo*, and *personalismo* shaped how participants engaged in conflict. While *respeto* and *familismo* sometimes limited direct engagement to maintain relational harmony, they also facilitated collective advocacy, strategic communication, and the development of supportive networks. *Personalismo*, when present in advisor-student relationships, enabled more open and direct communication.

Moreover, consistent with ecological systems theory and Latina/o critical theory, this study underscores the role of broader structural contexts, particularly the centrality of whiteness in academia, in shaping how cultural wealth is expressed and recognized. Participants described filtering their behavior, delaying engagement in conflict, and modifying their self-presentation to align with dominant norms. These patterns

demonstrate that the expression of cultural wealth is shaped not only by individual or relational factors but also by institutional expectations and power structures.

Lastly, a key methodological consideration in this study was the role of recruitment strategies in accessing the target population. Initial recruitment efforts relied on more traditional approaches, such as listservs and general outreach, which yielded some participation but had limited reach. Given the focus on Latina PhD students, who represent a relatively small and dispersed population within academia, these methods alone were not sufficient to generate a diverse and robust sample.

As recruitment progressed, the use of social media, particularly through individuals who serve as informal “gatekeepers” within online Latina PhD communities, proved significantly more effective. These individuals, often considered influencers within academic or identity-based spaces, facilitated access to networks of Latina doctoral students that might not be readily available through institutional channels. These experiences highlight the importance of considering alternative and culturally relevant recruitment strategies when working with underrepresented populations. Leveraging existing online communities and trusted figures within those spaces may enhance both access and participant engagement. At the same time, this approach raises important considerations regarding representation and network-based sampling, as participants may be more likely to be connected to certain online communities than others.

Practical Recommendations

While this dissertation highlights how Latina PhD students navigate relationships in academia, the responsibility for fostering supportive and effective relationships should

not rest solely on Latina PhD students, as relationship dynamics are co-constructed. Rather, there is a need for shared responsibility among advisors, peers, institutions, and Latina PhD students to foster environments in which these relationships can be meaningfully developed and sustained. Drawing on participants' lived experiences, the following recommendations include strategies at multiple levels. Specifically, the levels of Latina PhD students, advisors, peers, and institutions, to support the development of more equitable and culturally responsive academic relationships.

Given the focus of this dissertation and the reflections on lived experiences described by Latina PhD students, I begin by outlining participant-informed *consejos* (advice) for navigating academia, grounded in those reflections. Therefore, this section incorporates insights from a supplementary thematic analysis of participants' reflections on how their approaches to navigating advisor relationships evolved over time. These reflections included both strategies participants engaged in and those they wished they had adopted earlier in their programs. As such, these *consejos* are not presented as prescriptive solutions, but rather as data-driven considerations that may support Latina PhD students navigating similar academic contexts.

Data informed *Consejos*. There are 5 main *consejos* that emerged from the shared lived experiences of Latina PhD students.

1. **You don't have to be perfect.** Participants described learning to let go of the pressure to be perfect, which helped them feel more confident taking up space.
 - i) For Latina PhD students: Reframing your experiences in this way can be a form of resistance to academic norms that reward overperformance and

perfectionism. Allowing yourself to be in the process of learning does not mean you are less capable; it means you are human in a system that values productivity over well-being. You matter more than the institution, please don't forget that

2. **Self-advocacy can take some getting used to.** Participants emphasized that developing self-advocacy and learning to say no were important for more positive academic experiences. However, these skills do not develop overnight. It is also important to recognize that setting boundaries may feel like it goes against cultural values such as *respeto* and *familismo*, as well as expectations to overperform.
 - i) For Latina PhD students: Navigating tension between self-advocacy and cultural values is normal. It's part of the process of finding ways to advocate for yourself that feel aligned with your values.
3. **You don't have to navigate academia alone.** When advisors were unable to meet their needs, participants turned to peers and other mentors for emotional support and guidance.
 - i) For Latina PhD students: Seeking support from others is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of resistance to the erasure of collectivistic perspectives in academia and a strategy for navigating oppressive systems.
4. **Not all advising relationships will meet your needs.** Participants described both supportive and challenging dynamics with advisors. In some cases, they adapted

to inflexible or unresponsive expectations in order to remain in their programs.

While these strategies may support survival, they do not always support thriving.

- i) For Latina PhD students: When possible, consider what you need from mentoring relationships and seek out additional sources of support that can help fill those gaps. Building layered support networks can be essential, especially when primary advising relationships are limited or inconsistent.

- 5. **You have power in these spaces.** Participants described the importance of recognizing their legitimacy, power, and right to resources within academic spaces. While academia is often structured hierarchically, reframing your role from someone simply being trained to an active participant in the academic community can shift how you engage in these spaces.

- i) For Latina PhD students: You deserve respect, mentorship, and support; don't settle for less. You worked hard to be in these spaces, and your role in academia is valued by the community of Latinas cheering you on.

Practical recommendations for Latina PhD students

Communicate challenges. Conflicts often arose from misaligned expectations about productivity, especially when students were still developing new skills or navigating unfamiliar academic processes. These findings highlight the importance of normalizing not knowing and communicating challenges early. When students need additional time, clarification, or support, making these needs visible to advisors can create opportunities for collaborative efforts to address barriers. Without this communication, it becomes more difficult to access the support needed to succeed.

Prioritize personal processing and wellbeing. There are substantial emotional demands of doctoral training, and findings suggest that having spaces to process these experiences is critical. Students may benefit from identifying consistent outlets for emotional processing, such as trusted peer relationships, mentorship, therapy or external resources. Engaging in these practices can support well-being and sustained engagement in academic work.

Set boundaries. Students may benefit from developing strategies for setting boundaries that are responsive to both their needs and the academic context. Findings suggest that boundary-setting, such as learning to say no, clarifying expectations, or protecting time and energy, was associated with more positive academic experiences. Students may benefit from identifying when and how to establish boundaries in ways that align with their values, while accounting for relationship dynamics and potential risks.

Practical recommendations for advisors

Engage in humanizing practices. Advisors can foster more effective, supportive relationships by adopting humanizing interactions that recognize students as whole individuals rather than solely as academic trainees. Findings suggest that when advisors demonstrated care through personal check-ins, follow-ups on students' well-being, and personal disclosure, relationships were described as more trusting, open, and productive.

Adaptive and responsive mentoring. Advisors can support more effective mentoring relationships by adopting an approach that is adaptable to students' individual needs, goals, and working styles. Findings suggest that students often adjust to advisors' expectations, communication styles, and approaches to work; however, mentoring

relationships may be strengthened when advisors also demonstrate flexibility in responding to students. Advisors may benefit from directly asking students what they need and creating space for open dialogue about expectations. When needs cannot be met, the mentoring relationship can be strengthened by being transparent and helping students identify alternative resources or sources of support.

Affirming students' value in academia. Findings suggest that when students' cultural values and identities were recognized and integrated into their academic experiences, they reported greater confidence in themselves as scholars and a stronger sense of belonging in their fields. Affirming students' cultural values may include validating their research interests, recognizing culturally grounded approaches to scholarship, and explicitly acknowledging the contributions that Latina researchers bring to academia. These practices can help counter messages that suggest students must conform to dominant norms to be successful. By intentionally creating space for students' cultural identities within academic work, advisors may support the development of confidence and scholarly identity.

Practical recommendations for peers.

Exposing the hidden curriculum and navigational guidance. Peers can serve as important sources of navigational support by sharing strategies for managing academic expectations, advisor relationships, and institutional structures. Providing guidance based on lived experience may help others anticipate challenges and make more informed decisions about how to approach different situations.

Academic peer mentoring. Peers can support each other's academic success by sharing knowledge, resources, and opportunities. This may include forming accountability groups, exchanging feedback, sharing opportunities, and helping each other navigate coursework and research expectations. These collaborative practices not only support individual success but also challenge competitive norms within academia by fostering more collective approaches to achievement.

Multidimensional reciprocal support. Peers can support one another by engaging in relationships that extend across academic, emotional, and social domains. Findings suggest that peer relationships were most effective when flexible and responsive to changing needs, including academic guidance, emotional support, and companionship. Developing reciprocal relationships may help sustain these forms of support over time.

Practical recommendations for institutions and departments.

Access to conflict resolution resources. Students can be supported by increasing access and awareness of ombuds offices and other conflict-resolution resources. Participants' experiences suggest that students may lack access to, or awareness of, available support, or may be unsure when and how to seek it. Providing regular presentations, orientations, or workshops led by ombuds or similar professionals may help normalize help-seeking and expand students' understanding of available strategies for navigating conflict.

Investing in relational mentoring programs. Institutions and departments can strengthen doctoral training by implementing mentoring programs that explicitly prioritize relationship-building. Findings suggest that little to no programming is offered

in doctoral programs to build stronger relationships between Latina PhD students and their advisors. These programs may include training for faculty in culturally responsive mentoring, communication practices, and strategies to support diverse student needs. Emphasizing relational aspects of mentoring may help foster more supportive and effective advisor-student relationships.

Multiple-mentor advising structures. Institutions can support more effective mentoring by promoting access to and awareness of multi-mentor advising structures. Findings suggest that students often rely on multiple individuals for different forms of support, including academic guidance, emotional support, and career development. Formalizing this approach may help ensure that students have access to a broader network of mentors rather than relying on a single advising relationship. Encouraging multi-mentor models can also help distribute the mentoring load across faculty, reducing pressure on any one advisor to meet all aspects of a student's needs. This approach may create more sustainable mentoring systems while increasing students' access to diverse perspectives, resources, and forms of support.

Limitations & Future Directions

While the current dissertation has many implications, it is not without limitations. Four main limitations were identified. First, the study primarily included individuals who were currently in a PhD program or who had already graduated. As a result, individuals who left their program and did not return to academia, or those who were dismissed, were underrepresented in this sample. Therefore, the study may not fully capture the experiences of those who were pushed out of academia or who left in pursuit of

environments that better met their needs or protected their well-being. This limits the ability to understand how relationship dynamics in which harm outweighs potential benefits develop. This is especially important for understanding how to support students who may be on the verge of leaving their programs due to difficult or harmful relationships. Moreover, the underrepresentation of these experiences in this sample limits the understanding of leaving as a form of resistance, particularly when relationships cannot be repaired or negotiated. Future research should examine the experiences of students who leave PhD programs to better understand the conditions in which relationships dissolve and the types of support that may prevent this outcome.

In the focus groups, three participants described attending other PhD programs and leaving due to toxic work environments, choosing to protect themselves from abuse and exploitation. In this context, leaving can be understood as a form of resistance. As previously noted, Yosso (2005) conceptualizes resistant capital as skills and knowledge that challenge inequality by challenging the status quo. Notably, resistant capital is commonly associated with resisting from within the academy; however, when environments appear unchangeable, leaving to protect oneself may also demonstrate resistance (Ramirez & Puente, 2021). For many Latina PhD students, leaving a program is not an easy decision, as getting into and navigating a PhD program often involves significant personal sacrifices and time investment. As described earlier, students may hesitate to engage in conflict because they have so much to lose, suggesting that leaving may be a difficult but necessary decision that is made in response to harmful conditions. This highlights the need for more research on this population, as this form of resistance

may go unrecognized in academia and may reflect systemic failures in environments not designed to support Latina PhD students (Ramirez & Puente, 2021).

Secondly, participants who used social media were underrepresented in Study B. During the first 5 months of recruitment for Study A, there was limited success recruiting via social media, as relationships with academic influencers were still developing. As a result, the earlier sample in Study A, which was used to recruit for Study B, primarily consisted of participants recruited through listservs and smaller-scale social media outreach. Many of these participants reported not using social media for social support related to academia or intentionally avoiding it to protect their well-being. Minimal to no social media use among Study B participants limited my ability to fully examine my fourth research question related to using social media for social support. Therefore, this data may not fully reflect the role social media can play in promoting supportive online environments and relationships for Latina PhD students.

After the focus groups were completed and with the support of research assistants, social media recruitment expanded to include additional online networks that supported Latina PhD students (e.g., Instagram academic influencers, LinkedIn groups) and were initially inaccessible. This led to increased participation from individuals who actively used social media, highlighting a shift in the sample. This suggests that online spaces may play a more significant role in providing support than was captured in Study B. Given the growing evidence that online spaces can help bridge gaps in access to support within academic programs and serve as online counterspaces (Gomez & Cabrera, 2023), future research should explore how social media can function as a source of social

support and validation for Latina PhD students. Additionally, future research should also examine potential differences in perceived social support across different social media platforms.

Third, the notion of conflict was intentionally left undefined in focus group questions. Although this approach aligns with the inductive approach to question development, it can be considered a limitation, as Latina PhD students may have differing perspectives on what constitutes conflict. Interestingly, most focus groups had at least one participant who began their description of a conflict by saying, “I’m not sure if this is a conflict,” before describing an interaction that fostered tension or negative affect. This pattern suggests that conflict is subjective. Additionally, some participants described conflicts in which only one person was aware of the tension, such as when an advisor was unaware that a participant had perceived the interaction negatively, or that tension existed until the participant brought up their feelings about the situation. Together, these patterns suggest that the formation of conflict is a dynamic and subjective process that can differ not only from person to person but also within the dyadic relationship.

Given the patterns identified in the data and the dissertation’s guiding theoretical frameworks, the decision to leave conflict open to interpretation can also be considered a strength. Ecological systems theory highlights how contextual experiences can vary in their level of influence, while the inductive approach allowed participants to define conflict and tension based on their own lived experiences. Rather than imposing a predetermined definition of conflict, this approach enabled identification of the types of

interactions that Latina Ph.D. students perceived as producing tension in academic relationships. This is important given the limited research examining the specific interactions that contribute to conflict within Latina Ph.D. students' academic support networks. Leaving conflict undefined allowed participants to self-identify the interactions that were most salient to them, including those that may not align with prior conceptualizations of conflict.

Another limitation of this dissertation is that the perceptions and experiences of the described relationships are based on a single perspective. While capturing the perspectives of Latina PhD students is critical and closely tied to their outcomes, relying on one perspective limits the ability to fully understand relationship dynamics. Because relationships are bidirectional, both individuals contribute to how interactions unfold and how conflict is experienced and addressed (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). In this study, some insight into these dynamics emerged when participants described conflict, including both their own responses and those of their advisors or peers. However, these accounts still reflect only one perspective and may omit important contextual factors, including how advisors and peers perceive their own behaviors during conflict and the support they provide. Additionally, individuals may not always be aware of existing tensions, as in participants in the current study described cases where conflict was experienced but went unrecognized by the other person until it was explicitly addressed by the participant. This suggests that gaps in awareness and communication may shape these dynamics. Future research could build on this work by examining dyadic relationships through approaches such as separate interviews with advisors/peers and

students, to better understand shared and differing perspectives on conflict. This could enable the development of more effective interventions that incorporate the perspectives of both individuals.

Conclusion

The current dissertation project aimed to enhance understanding of the social network challenges and supports that Latinas in PhD programs experience, emphasizing the need for stronger support structures within academia. This dissertation takes on added significance considering that Latinas face notably lower doctoral degree completion rates compared to their Black, Asian, and White counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). This is a stark contrast to their strong performance in associate and bachelor's degree programs, where they hold the second-highest degree conferral rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

The outcomes of this study are set to do more than fill a gap in the existing literature. They are poised to inform actionable strategies and shape policies, interventions, and doctoral training programs, all centered on identifying and strengthening the social support factors that contribute to thriving and success among Latina doctoral students in the social sciences. The ultimate goal is to pave a more supportive and fruitful path for Latina scholars in their pursuit of doctoral degrees, ensuring their experiences, challenges, and achievements are acknowledged and addressed cohesively, thereby contributing to the retention and academic success of Latina Ph.D. students.

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Table 1*Themes and codes for culturally responsive mentoring strategies (N=40)*

Themes and codes	Definitions	Example Quotes
Adaptation and Resources		
Adaptive Mentoring	Mentors adapting to the needs and requests of students based on student's expressed requests	"I get a very just warm and present person when we interact and when we're in meetings, but I do notice that there is even a difference with the other doctoral students that she's advising. But I went in talking to, you know, my professor, and she had asked, like, what is it that you need from a relationship that will make this as successful for you? And I really like that, like the personable piece that the relationship piece, seeing the other person, not just as my advisor, but seeing them as a human being too, and I would hope for the same. And so I think she really tries to highlight what each student needs in a relationship."
Instrumental Support	Mentors provided tangible resources such as financial assistance, research funding, and access to necessary academic tools (e.g., a laptop)	"In our program, summer funding is not guaranteed. So I had applied for a summer fellowship at my school, didn't get it. I was kind of nervous, because I need money... I'm also helping support my family and things like that, even at this level. And so she was like, okay, I'll just, give you the funds for the summer out of, my own startup... she's just been very kind of receptive in that way, where she understands that financial issues is something that is very serious to me, and being able to support myself and my family, like I contribute a lot and support

		my family financially. So she knows that those are things that are important to me."
Relational Mentoring		
Humanizing Interactions	Mentors engaged with students as whole individuals by checking in on their well-being, following up about information disclosed, and providing emotional validation, thereby making students feel seen as individuals as opposed to solely as academics	"Our mentorship, our budding relationship, really started because of how she started all of our meetings from when I was just a student of hers, then when I transitioned to being an advisee of hers. She instilled in me this really great practice of intentionally asking at the beginning of every meeting, how are you doing, and asking follow-up questions to conversations that we had in the past."
Mentors Sharing Personal Experiences	Mentors shared personal experiences inside and outside of academia to increase transparency and relatability. Participants commonly noted that their mentors drew on aspects of their shared identities to foster a more personal relationship.	"An example of something that he did that really made me feel comfortable and strengthen the mentorship/mentee connection was when I was kind of struggling with some mental health issues, and it was causing big delays, like I couldn't get anything done. He actually shared with me that there was a period of time when he was in undergrad that he had to take a leave for the same thing. And I was like, wow, this professor shared that with me, like... he understood what I was going through at that time, and that made me feel like, wow, I can really ask questions. I don't have to feel weird or stupid or whatever. So that made a big difference. And so even though he couldn't understand everything about me as a Latina PhD student, there were certain elements that I think we had in common, where he was willing to share his own experiences that helped me feel like this is a really good mentorship experience."

Mi Casa es tu Casa (My Home is Your Home)

Mentors went beyond traditional forms of academic support by welcoming students into their homes, thereby fostering trust and more personal relationship with students.

"Don't have family around, didn't have a car at the time and so my advisor, who I had applied to work with in the program, was really kind, really sweet, like reaching out, asking if I needed supplies and then if I wanted to come stay with her. She was like, I did my program down here. I know what it's like to kind of be by yourself and like, kind of create, and so we were talking back and forth, but I ended up evacuating with her and her family to her parents' house and living with her for like, 10 days, almost two weeks."

Critically Conscious Mentoring

Affirming Cultural Value in Academia

Mentors promoted a sense of belonging in academia by validating participants' culturally relevant intellectual contributions and emphasizing the value of their lived experiences in shaping their research.

"She validated my scholarship. Like I wasn't intending on... doing a certain methodology, but she validated my experience.... And was like, no, actually, your experience is really important, and it should be centered in the research... she was allowing me to see the research and really focusing on prioritizing Chicana, feminist methodology, epistemology, like, she... validate that type of research and those methods."

Navigating Academia with a Marginalized Identity

Mentors acknowledge and share experiences navigating academia as individuals with marginalized identities, and discuss systemic barriers, problematic experiences, and strategies for addressing inequality in academia.

"And she told me... I've learned that people will ask me to do trivial things just because I can, like to translate something, to do extra work, just because I'm the only one who can, but I'm a researcher first, and I want you to start thinking of your identity that way too. So it's more than just the academic advising. It's more than the dissertation. It's also conversations about like, how to navigate spaces that aren't made for us, and how to be respectful of your own title, too... I wouldn't get those conversations from everyone. So I felt like the

Sociopolitical Responsiveness	Mentors created spaces for students to discuss and process sociopolitical issues and their personal and community impact.	communication was really genuine and really just like, really targeted, and a one-on-one relationship" "I mean, there's one faculty that I can remember of when this new administration was voted in, and everybody felt very distressed. I mean, he literally took us out and, like, took to offer community and talk about or say nothing and wallow together, and that was actually really nice."
Inequality Advocacy	Mentors intervened to advocate for and support students when they faced inequality in academia and professional settings. This includes advocating for students and encouraging them to prioritize their well-being and set healthy boundaries.	"I shared I had been offered a job that requires me to move to another state, and I was about to tell this job that I would start in three weeks, like January 1st, and she's like, Well, what about healthy boundaries? Like, don't you think you owe yourself some healthy boundaries, especially as a first gen student, and I was like, wait, you're right...this is something that I've been working on... learning boundaries... people pleasing... it feels weird to even think that we can negotiate things... so having that advice, I was like, Oh my gosh. This gives me so much more peace of mind to know that I don't have to just say yes to a timeline that this job has for me. Like, I have rights too. I get to say what works for me. I have agency, and I feel like I had forgotten that. I'm not just a student, I'm a human, and I'm also first gen, and I need this break to, like, recharge and reconnect."
Identity Based Community Building	Mentors fostered and promoted connections among students within academia by facilitating introductions and	"My advisor, he's very proudly Latino, so I would say for sure my cultural identity influences these strategies, because he encourages it a lot. He's always talking about how we thrive off of community and that we have each other's back all the time..."

creating opportunities for interactions in and outside of academic spaces.

And I do feel very comfortable fostering community with our Latino lab, with our Latino advisor... He's always sharing current readings, poems, sayings, books that show the importance of fostering community.”

Note: Themes and codes were developed from 12 focus group transcripts, including 40 participants.

Table 2

Themes and codes for aspects of identity impacting conflict navigation (N=40)

Themes and codes	Definitions	Example Quotes
Cultural Dissonance Between Academia and Latinx Values		
Respeto	The cultural value of viewing elders and individuals in positions of authority as deserving of respect.	"I hold back a lot on her. I don't hold back on other things. So I'll go and I'll address things... about my other classes, or any other professors I've had, but with her specifically, like, that's hard for me, and maybe it is part of like, cultural values, like, of having respect, right? Like, of respeto.. just not wanting to be disrespectful to her.
Personalismo	The cultural emphasis of building confianza (trust) and creating personal relationships.	"I am going to send her an email, and I'm going to, like, kindly request, like, girl, like, please just meet with me, like, one time before the quarter ends.... It's the nature of, like, how she communicates with her advisees. I think there is just, like, this very blunt form of communication, um where it also just feels like it creates an emotional disconnect with the professor, like there's almost no relatability in a way, like it's purely academic or professional, at times, in forms where, like, I don't know, I just it's very different from the relationship that I have with my other advisor, where it is very like holistic advising. I feel in contrast. I think it's that and it's also just like,

almost like an expectation of, like, a lack of of like, compassion from her part.. I think it's because she didn't really receive that grace from her advisor, who was a white man. You know, it's just kind of like it's been the way that she's trained. She feels like she's successful because of that training.

Familismo A cultural value that prioritizes group harmony and cohesion over individual needs.

"kind of putting yourself aside. And. Well, for me, it's more of okay, how do I keep the harmony? How do I prevent from conflict or anything like that, from actually happening? Um. That's kind of like how I grew up with my siblings. So with that, or like, with friendships, I kind of always find, think about my actions to keep the harmony. "

Resistance and Persistence in Academia

Responsibility and Sacrifice A sense of responsibility and guilt related to self and family sacrifice during the pursuit of educational opportunities.

"you can't leave your program and as, like, someone who, sacrificed so much to, like, move across the country, that's a big ask, and it felt like, I don't know, in our culture, that's like, giving up, you know, like, you shouldn't give up on things like that. So it was, like, really challenging"

Anti-Marianismo The resistance of culturally based gender norms that frame women as passive, submissive, or dependent on men.

"education has always been, like, an important conversation, of, like, as a woman, you have to be educated because you don't want to rely on a man. Like my parents... something they talked about all the time, about, like tú te tienes que valer tú sola y tú misma"

Navigating Whiteness and Belonging in Academia

Stereotype Awareness The awareness of racial/ethnic stereotypes, academic norms centering Whiteness, and White professional standards

"The concern with having the conflict was my tone. And you kind of think about, the stereotypes that come with that, like the Latina woman with, the fiery, arrogant, whatever tone, and so being very

	impacting how individuals choose to portray themselves in academic spaces and relationships.	maybe, like over correcting that overall, with all of my supervisors, with all of my experiences, being very aware of my tone in general, and so being aware of that fear with this conflict.
Imposter Phenomenon	Students feeling as though they do not belong or deserve to have a say in academia because of their marginalized identities.	"How could I have been so dumb... As a first generation low income student, of course, this tenure track faculty member knows more than I do about what I'm capable of, which is often not the case, but that I come to learn years later. And so I'm sitting in front of this woman who has all of these publications under her belt, who has successfully gone through the PhD process, thinking she has to know more than I do. She has to be correct"

Note: Themes and codes were developed from 12 focus group transcripts, including 40 participants.

Table 3

Themes and codes for how peers support Latina PhD students (N=40)

Themes and Codes	Definitions	Examples
Academic Peer Mentoring (Academic & Navigational Support)		
Accountability Groups & Check-Ins	Peers creating and scheduling writing groups, mirrored work time, or email updates to keep each other accountable.	"We started implementing weekly memos, or bi-weekly memos, for our dissertation. So we started doing that in the summer, and every two weeks, we give each other updates on each of our dissertation and what next steps are" "we were able to set up, like for a year, a weekly, bi weekly Summer Intensive writing group um, for all of us... co-present writing, but you're not like, doing the same thing or working towards like, the same goal."

Networking	Peers introducing each other to professors, peers, or others in academic or professional settings, and facilitating conversations.	"She knows so many people, and so she's the one that will drag me, like, if we go to conferences, that's like, let's go meet this professor, let's go meet this faculty member, whether or not she knows them already, she's just so confident in herself, in that so she's the one that's like helping me get a broader network, especially of Latina people in our field"
Navigational Guidance	Peers providing guidance on how to navigate common, explicit experiences in academia, such as classroom dynamics, milestones, conflict, or professional interactions.	"Sometimes I just don't know how to navigate the issue. So I feel like, I feel comfortable going to her and kind of asking her, like, what do you recommend?"
Feedback	Peers providing each other feedback on papers, assignments, or projects.	"When it came to my written exam, I did a practice run with them. So I had like three individuals, three friends... two of them were Latinas, and one of them was Asian... they were my audience, and they gave me feedback and recommendations"
Exposing the Hidden Curriculum	Peers sharing unspoken academic norms and expectations that contribute to thriving in academia.	"like you've been through things that I'm now going through, and you can sort of tell me... these secrets."
Opportunity Sharing	Peers informing each other of academic or professional opportunities, such as conferences, fellowships, or awards.	"They were more than willing to share like anything, um, scholarships, fellowships that they think I'd be good for, not gatekeeping them."

Co-Processing Racialized and Inequality Based Experiences

Racial
Trauma
Bonding

Sharing and processing
experiences involving racially
charged language or actions.

"all in my PhD program who
are POC trauma bonded over
some of the similar experiences
that we had with being in
certain spaces and the kind of
language that was used, or the
kind of comments that we like
had to look at each other and be
like, did someone just say that?"

Collective
Resistance

Peers collectively engaging in
activism, challenging White
professional standards in
academia, or introducing race-
conscious discussion in the
classroom to challenge
dominant narratives in
academia.

"I feel like we started to look
like, oh well, the two brown
kids who are always bringing
up race. And they would kind of
divert the conversation... every
time we spoke about that...
always changed... being very
dismissive... if we weren't here
talking about this, who would
be talking about it here? You
know, who would be these
voices?"

Emotional Support

Grief Support

Peers helping students
navigate the emotions that
come with grieving the loss of
a family member or personal
relationship.

"we both support each other
through tough times and so like,
you know, like my stepdad had
passed, like, during, you know,
my program. And so being able
to be supported, you know,
throughout that."

Sharing
Graduate
School
Frustrations

Peers discussing stress or
frustration regarding the rigor,
challenges, and complexity of
graduate school dynamics.

"cry about (slight laugh) classes
and final papers that we thought
we had crushed and then got,
you know, soul-sucking
feedback on"

Companionship Support

Social
Companionship
(Non-
Academic)

Peers spending time together
socially in nonacademic
contexts, such as going out to
dinner, concerts, or other
social gatherings.

"we had already gone to a
concert together... all these
different events... like the
Latinx, like festival."

Task Companionship (Non-Academic)	Peers accompanying each other during personal errands like grocery shopping.	"we go to, like, Costco, or like, we go to all these, like, different places together"
Academic Companionship	Peers accompanying each other in academic settings, such as taking classes together or going to academic events together.	"The academic part is, is big. Like... we'll take classes together."
Shared Identity & Understanding		
Safe Space	Peers fostering environments where students feel safe enough to be authentically themselves and do not need to worry about portraying their "academic self." (No need for academic code switching)	" it's nice to have a breather right, where, like I said, where you're not, like performing, where you're able to have, like, a safe space to be um more than your academic self."
Shared Interpretation & Validation of Lived Experiences	Peers viewing experiences similarly and providing reassurance and validation, thereby strengthening self-confidence in the interpretation of experiences.	"It's been nice to have her, like, as a point of, like, reassurance, like, it's not just me, right? Like, who's kind of like feeling like the gaslighting and just like the weirdness of it all sometimes. So that's been nice to have that point of reassurance. Like, I think it's important to have someone who, like, kind of sees what you see, or like you're like, I'm not going crazy."
Support through Shared Underrepresented Identities in Academia	Peers bond because of shared identities and confide in each other regarding identity-related experiences, such as family dynamics and cultural norms and expectations.	"She understands my culture, and also understands my family bonds. And like being the first one in my family to be so far away from my family unit. ... hard to relate to my other peers, because they could probably be like, yeah, that sucks. And then take a flight like every weekend to go see their family or things like that, things that I can't do"

Note: Themes and codes were developed from 12 focus group transcripts, including 40 participants. Some participants provided multiple examples of the types of support provided by peers.

Table 4

Themes and codes for peer conflict resolution approaches (N=40)

Themes and Codes	Definitions	Example Quotes
Internal Conflict Processing		
Self Initiated Reflection	A peer independently reflects on their words and actions and takes responsibility for the harm caused	"She came up to me and was like, I feel so embarrassed... I just want to apologize"
Direct Conflict Navigation		
Positionality Focused Conversations	Peers conversing about differences in identities, lived experiences, and privilege to contextualize differing perspectives regarding the conflict	"So I was telling her, I think you just have different perspectives, and I think you need to reevaluate some of the things that you're looking at.... we had different conversations about privilege, income, like background... because we come from two very different backgrounds"
Revisiting Conversation in a Non-academic Setting	Students removed themselves from the academic setting and returned to the conversation in a more casual and less hierarchal environment	"We had all gone to a bar. And then I brought it up"
Direct Confrontation	Students directly address concerns regarding the conflict and allow the peer to explain their perspective	"I was like, hey, so what happened. Um. How come you didn't tell me... I guess I would say talking and being direct is my way of handling conflict, just within peers."
Third-Party Involvement		
Authority-Mediated Conversations	Students invite a person of authority to mediate the conversation and reach a compromise or consensus	"We have a mental health counselor in our department, so she, like, sat in to mediate.....we tried to divide up some responsibilities"
Clarification from Authority	Students reach out to someone in a position of power regarding the situation to	"I've just resolved this, just being honest with the supervising author or my PI. Just being

Seeking External Guidance	better understand the rationale for decisions related to the conflict	like, hey, like, I want to learn more about how authorship is given"
	Reaching out to trusted support sources who are not involved in the conflict for advice on how to productively navigate the issue.	"Reaching out to my peers that were friends and being like, read these texts, read these emails. Like, help me figure out a way of not just being like, no, screw you, but like, you know, being in a way where we can stop the argument, stop the conflict."

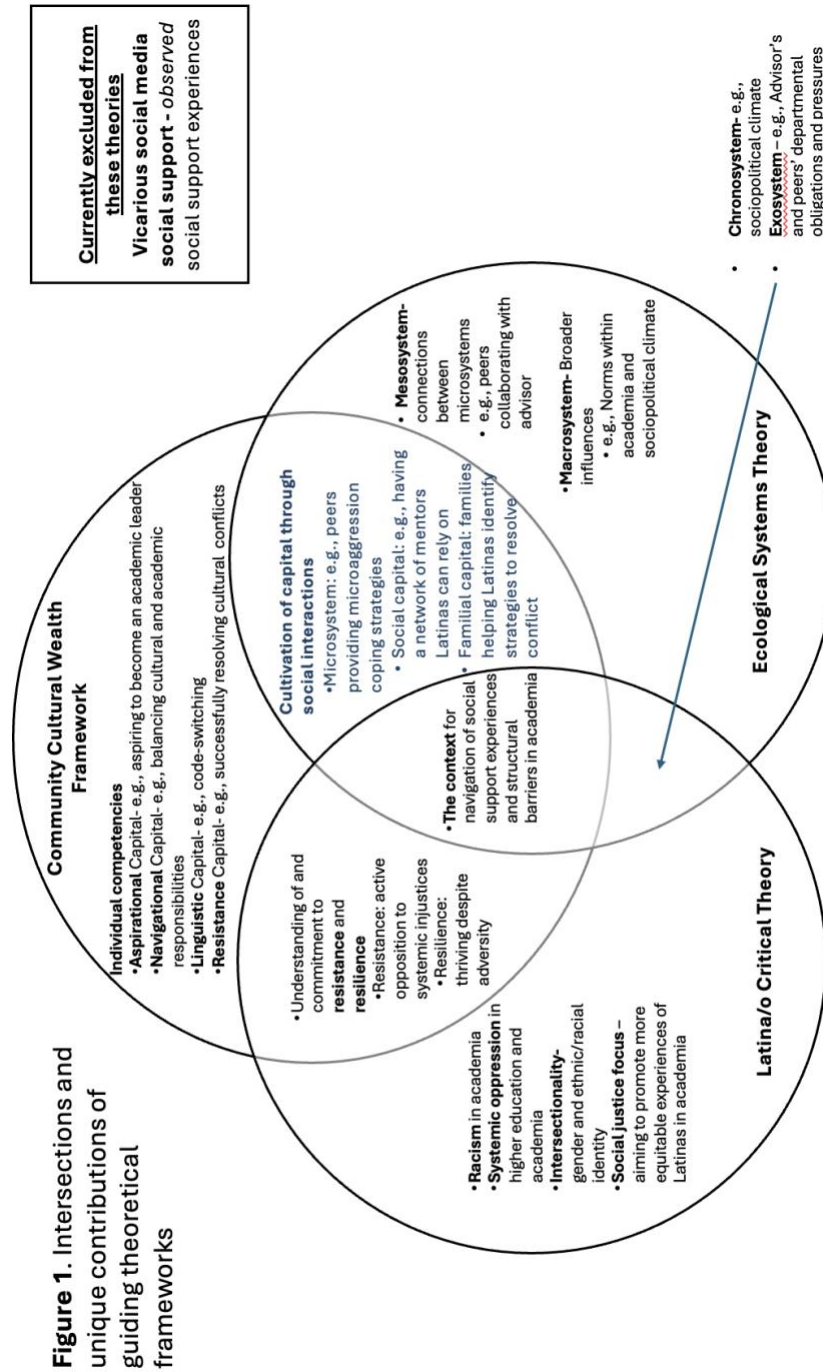
Note: Themes and codes were developed from 12 focus group transcripts, including 40 participants. A total of 32 peer conflicts were described. The conflict resolution approaches listed only include those that were utilized to effectively resolve a conflict. Only 7 examples of resolved conflicts were described.

Table 5*Descriptive Statistics and Correlations for Study Variables among Latina PhD Students (N =214)*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Burnout	---											
2. Exhaustion	.76***	---										
3. Cynicism	.81***	.49***	---									
4. Efficacy	-.49***	-.03	-.11	---								
5. Researcher Com. Support	-.43***	-.24**	-.49***	.13	---							
6. Student Conflict Man.	-.36***	-.19**	-.31***	.27***	.32***	---						
7. Advisor Conflict Man.	-.41***	-.25***	-.44***	.16*	.38***	.55***	---					
8. Student Openness	-.40***	-.25***	-.30***	.31***	.31***	.58***	.65***	---				
9. Online Esteem Support	-.23***	-.10	-.19**	.20**	.28***	.12	.21**	.14	---			
10. Online Info. Support	-.08	-.02	-.05	.12	.11	.09	.11	.07	.65***	---		
11. First Gen. College	.12	.02	.03	-.23**	-.01	-.04	-.10	-.08	.05	-.02	---	
12. Age	-.09	.02	-.09	.13	-.03	.02	-.04	.07	-.01	-.06	-.08	---
Mean	3.18	4.32	2.56	5.27	5.01	5.91	5.51	5.04	3.25	2.96	.67	29.87
Standard deviation	.90	1.42	1.50	.99	.96	.82	1.32	1.36	.81	.90	.47	6.06
Range	1.44-5.63	1.2-7	1-7	2.33-6.83	1.89-7	1.8-7	1-7	1.14-7	1-5	1-5	0-1	21-55

*Note.** $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Appendix A



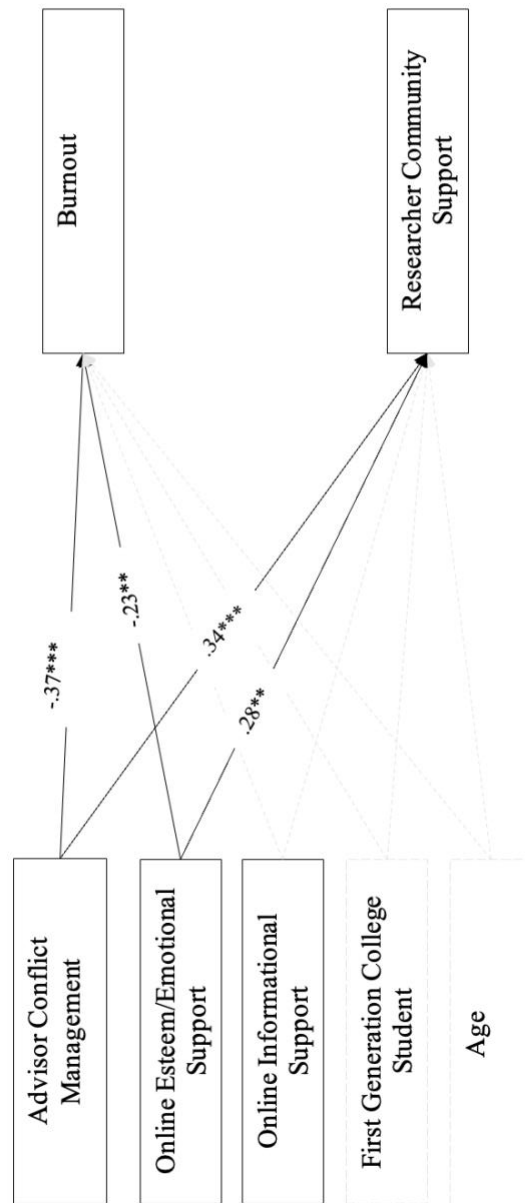


Figure 2. Two-outcome Study Model. The illustrated model is fully saturated. All predictors and outcomes were allowed to covary. Control variables are displayed in grey dashed boxes. The first-generation college student variable was coded such that 0 = not a first-generation college student and 1 = is a first-generation college student. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

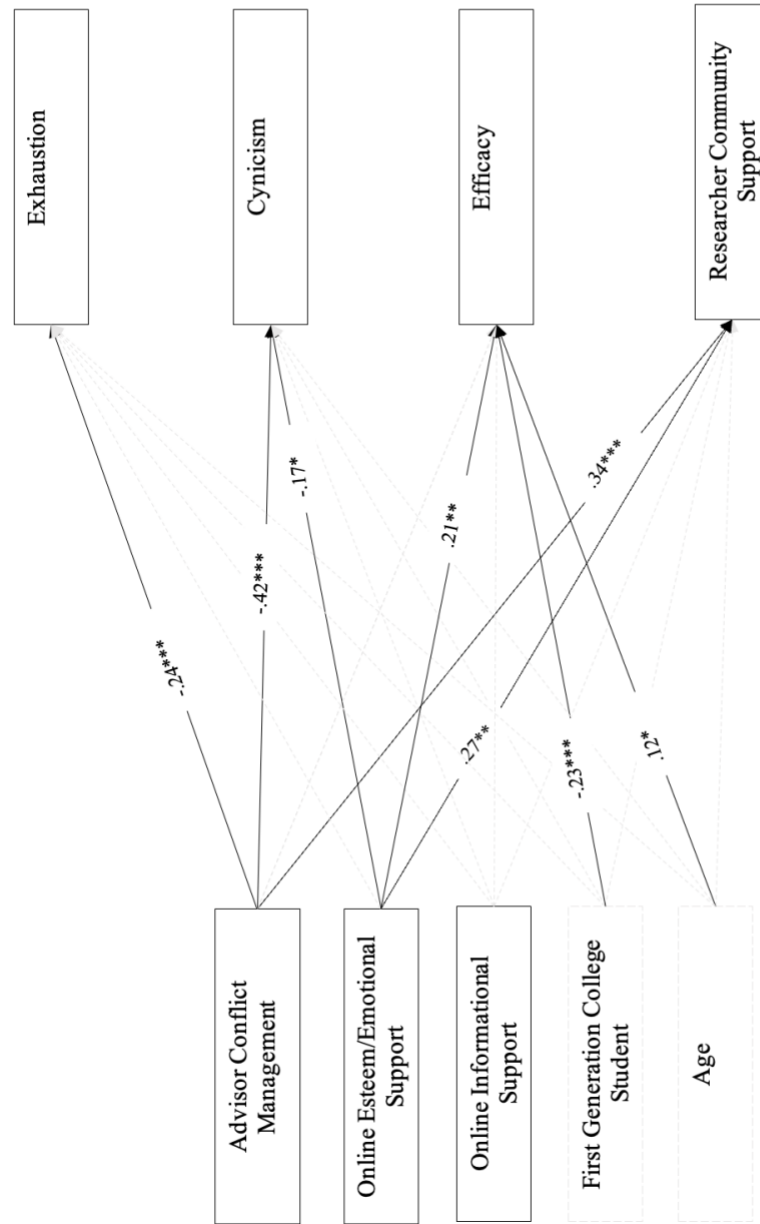


Figure 3. *Four-Outcome Study Model using the burnout subscales.* The illustrated model is fully saturated. All predictors and outcomes were allowed to covary. Control variables are displayed in grey dashed boxes. The first-generation college student variable was coded such that 0 = not a first-generation college student and 1 = is a first-generation college student. *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Appendix B

Dissertation Survey

1. What is your age?
 - a) Fill in
2. What is your race/ethnicity?
 - a) Fill in
3. If you answered Hispanic/Latina/x as your race/ethnicity, how would you best describe yourself? (Check all that apply)
 - a) Mexican/Chicano/a/x
 - b) Puerto Rican
 - c) Cuban
 - d) Argentinian
 - e) Colombian
 - f) Dominican
 - g) Guatemalan
 - h) Ecuadorian
 - i) Nicaraguan
 - j) Salvadoran
 - k) Spanish
 - l) Another Hispanic/Latino/a/x origin (Fill in)
4. What is your gender identity?
 - a) Fill in

5. What country were you born in?
- a) U.S.
 - b) Other _____(Fill in)
6. If you were not born in the U.S., how old were you when you came to the U.S.?
- a) Fill in
7. What is your current relationship status?
- a) Single
 - b) In a committed relationship but not living together
 - c) In a committed relationship and living together
 - d) Married or in a domestic partnership
 - e) Separated
 - f) Divorced
 - g) Widowed
 - h) Other (Fill in)
8. Are you a parent or legal guardian?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
 - c) Other _____(Fill in)
9. Are you the first person in your family to attend college in the U.S.?
- a) Yes
 - b) No
10. Are you the first person in your family to attend graduate school in the U.S.?

a) Yes

b) No

11. Were one or both of your parents born outside of the United States? Which country or countries?

a) Fill in

12. What is your mother's highest level of educational attainment?

a) No formal schooling

b) Elementary school

c) Middle school

d) Some high school

e) High school graduate

f) Some college

g) Associates degree

h) Bachelor's degree

i) Master's degree

j) Doctorate or professional degree

13. What is your father's highest level of educational attainment?

a) No formal schooling

b) Elementary school

c) Middle school

d) Some high school

e) High school graduate

- f) Some college
- g) Associates degree
- h) Bachelor's degree
- i) Master's degree
- j) Doctorate or professional degree

14. What university do you attend?

- a) Fill in

15. Do you attend an online PhD program?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Other (Fill in)

16. Graduate school enrollment status

- a) Full time
- b) Part time
- c) Other (Fill in)

17. Field of study

- a) Psychology
- b) Sociology
- c) Education
- d) Other (Fill in)

18. How many years have you been in your current graduate program?

- a)

19. When do you expect to graduate?

a)

20. Is this your first doctoral program?

a) Yes

b) No

21. Do you have one or multiple advisors?

a) One advisor

b) Multiple advisors (please specify how many ____)

c) I do not have an advisor (please explain)

22. Will (or did) you finish your coursework on schedule?

a) Yes

b) No (Please explain _____)

23. How confident are you that you will finish all degree requirements in the

"average" time for your program?

a) Not at All Confident

b) Not Very Confident

c) Moderately Confident

d) Confident

e) Very Confident

24. Have you passed your qualifying exams?

a) Yes

b) No

c) N/A

25. What do qualifying exams look like within your program?

a) Fill in

26. Did you take any leave of absence during your current PhD program? If so, please explain

a) Fill in

27. What is the gender identity of your advisor

a) Fill in

28. What is your advisor's race/ethnicity?

a) Fill in

29. What is the academic rank of your advisor?

a) Assistant professor

b) Associate professor

c) Full professor

d) Other (fill in)

e) Don't know

30. May we contact you in the future to participate in related studies?

a) Yes (please provide email)

b) No

The following questions are related to your experiences with your advisor. Please select your level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

31. I encourage my advisor to be honest with me.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

32. I simply tell my advisor how I feel about the relationship.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

33. I talk about my concerns/fears with my advisor.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree

g) Strongly Disagree

34. I disclose what I need or want from the relationship to my advisor.

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Moderately Agree

d) Undecided

e) Moderately Disagree

f) Disagree

g) Strongly Disagree

35. I like to have periodic talks about our relationship with my advisor.

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Moderately Agree

d) Undecided

e) Moderately Disagree

f) Disagree

g) Strongly Disagree

36. I am open about my feelings with my advisor.

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Moderately Agree

d) Undecided

- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

37. I talk about where we stand with my advisor.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

38. My advisor is honest with me.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

39. My advisor tells me how he/she feels about the relationship.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree

- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

40. I apologize to my advisor when I am wrong.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

41. I cooperate in how I handle disagreements with my advisor.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

42. I listen to my advisor and try not to judge.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

43. I am understanding with my advisor.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

44. I am patient with my advisor.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree

g) Strongly Disagree

45. My advisor apologizes to me when they are wrong.

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Moderately Agree

d) Undecided

e) Moderately Disagree

f) Disagree

g) Strongly Disagree

46. My advisor cooperates in how he/she handles disagreements with me.

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Moderately Agree

d) Undecided

e) Moderately Disagree

f) Disagree

g) Strongly Disagree

47. My advisor listens and tries not to judge.

a) Strongly Agree

b) Agree

c) Moderately Agree

d) Undecided

- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

48. My advisor is understanding with me.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

49. My advisor is patient with me.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

50. I ask my advisor what he/she thinks I should do about my academic and/or career problems

- a) Strongly Agree

- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

51. I ask my advisor's opinion on things going on in my life.

- a) Strongly Agree
- b) Agree
- c) Moderately Agree
- d) Undecided
- e) Moderately Disagree
- f) Disagree
- g) Strongly Disagree

52. My advisor meets my academic needs.

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

53. I am satisfied with my relationship with my advisor.

- a) Strongly Disagree

- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

54. I have a positive relationship with my advisor.

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

55. There are times when I wish I hadn't initiated a relationship with my advisor.

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

56. My current relationship with my advisor meets my expectations.

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

57. I respect my advisor.

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

58. I have encountered several problems with my relationship with my advisor.

- a) Strongly Disagree
- b) Disagree
- c) Neutral
- d) Agree
- e) Strongly Agree

59. My advisor gives me assignments or tasks that prepare me for my desired position
(teaching, research, or industry) after I graduate.

- a) To a very slight extent
- b) To a slight extent
- c) To a moderate extent
- d) To a large extent
- e) To a very large extent

60. My advisor gives me assignments that present opportunities to learn new skills.

- a) To a very slight extent
- b) To a slight extent

- c) To a moderate extent
- d) To a large extent
- e) To a very large extent

61. I try to imitate the work behavior of my advisor.

- a) To a very slight extent
- b) To a slight extent
- c) To a moderate extent
- d) To a large extent
- e) To a very large extent

62. My advisor discusses my questions or concerns regarding feelings of competence, commitment to advancement, relationships with peers and faculty, or school/family conflicts.

- a) To a very slight extent
- b) To a slight extent
- c) To a moderate extent
- d) To a large extent
- e) To a very large extent

63. My advisor encourages me to talk openly about anxieties and fears that detract from my work.

- a) To a very slight extent
- b) To a slight extent
- c) To a moderate extent

- d) To a large extent
- e) To a very large extent

64. My advisor conveys empathy for the concerns and feelings I have discussed with him/her.

- a) To a very slight extent
- b) To a slight extent
- c) To a moderate extent
- d) To a large extent
- e) To a very large extent

65. How often do you communicate with your advisor?

- a) Once every two months
- b) Once a month
- c) Twice a month
- d) Once a week
- e) Twice a week
- f) Every other day
- g) Everyday
- h) Multiple times a day

66. How do you communicate with your advisor? (select all that apply)

- a) Phone calls
- b) Texts
- c) Emails

d) Video calls (i.e., Zoom, Facetime)

e) Social media

67. How often do you contact your advisor via social media (i.e., Bluesky, Instagram, Twitter)?

a) Never

b) Monthly

c) Weekly

d) Daily

e) More than 1 time/day

68. Have you had to set boundaries with your advisor in the past?

a) Yes

b) No

69. If yes, were your boundaries respected?

a) Yes

b) No

70. If not, how did you respond?

a) Fill in

71. Does your department or university do anything to help foster supportive relationships between advisors and their PhD students? If so, please describe.

a) Fill in

Now, think about the online spaces you use above. Rate how often the following things have happened for you while you interacted with others online over the last two months.

72. People show that they care about me online.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

73. Online, people say or do things that make me feel good about myself.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

74. People encourage me when I'm online.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

75. People pay attention to me online.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes

d) Pretty Often

e) A Lot

76. I get likes, favorites, upvotes, views, etc. online.

a) Never

b) Rarely

c) Sometimes

d) Pretty Often

e) A Lot

77. I get positive comments online.

a) Never

b) Rarely

c) Sometimes

d) Pretty Often

e) A Lot

78. When I'm online, people tell me they like the things I say or do.

a) Never

b) Rarely

c) Sometimes

d) Pretty Often

e) A Lot

79. Online, people are interested in me as a person.

a) Never

- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

80. People support me online.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

81. When I'm online, people make me feel good about myself.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

82. Online, people make me feel like I belong.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

83. When I'm online, people give me useful advice.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

84. Online, people provide me with helpful information.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

85. If I had a problem, people would help me online by saying what they would do.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

86. Online, people would tell me where to find help if I needed it.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes

d) Pretty Often

e) A Lot

87. People help me learn new things when I'm online.

a) Never

b) Rarely

c) Sometimes

d) Pretty Often

e) A Lot

88. People offer suggestions to me online.

a) Never

b) Rarely

c) Sometimes

d) Pretty Often

e) A Lot

89. People tell me things I want to know online.

a) Never

b) Rarely

c) Sometimes

d) Pretty Often

e) A Lot

90. When I'm online, people help me understand my situation better.

a) Never

- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

91. If I had a problem, people would share their point of view online.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

92. People help me see things in new ways when I'm online.

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Pretty Often
- e) A Lot

93. Have you ever connected with peers from academia using social media? Could you describe how these platforms support your social support needs?

- a) Fill in

94. Can you think of a time when social media hindered your ability to attain social support?

- a) Fill in

95. How do these online interactions differ from in-person support? Do you find them more or less effective?

- a) Fill in

Indicate how frequently the following statements apply to you since starting your current doctoral program.

96. I feel burned out.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

97. I ruminate a lot in my free time over matters related to my doctoral research.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

98. The pressure of my doctoral research is causing me problems in my close relationships with others.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

99. I feel overwhelmed by the workload of my doctoral research

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

100. I feel overwhelmed by the workload of my doctoral research.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

101. I have difficulty finding any meaning in my doctoral dissertation.

- a) Never

- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

102. I feel my doctoral dissertation is useless.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

103. I feel that I am losing interest in my doctoral research.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

104. I used to have higher expectations of my doctoral research than I do now.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year

- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

105. I often feel that I am failing in my doctoral research.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

106. I can efficiently solve the problems that arise in my studies.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

107. I believe that I make an effective contribution to the classes that I attend. 3. In my opinion, I am a good student.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year

- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

108. I feel stimulated when I reach my study goals.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

109. I learned many interesting things during the course of my studies.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month
- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

110. During class I feel confident that I am effective in getting things done.

- a) Never
- b) At least a few times a year
- c) At least once a month

- d) Several times a month
- e) Once a week
- f) Everyday

111. Have you ever been diagnosed with anxiety?

- a) Yes
- b) No

112. Have you been diagnosed with depression during your PhD program?

- a) Yes
- b) No

113. Are you currently taking psychiatric medication such as anxiety or depression medication?

- a) Depression medication
- b) Anxiety medication
- c) Both anxiety and depression medication
- d) Other (fill in)

Rate the following statements about your research community

114. I feel accepted by my research community.

- a) 7 point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree 7 = fully agree

115. I feel that other members of my research community appreciate my work.

- a) 7 point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree 7 = fully agree

116. There is a good sense of collegiality among the researchers I interact with.

- a) 7 point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree 7 = fully agree

117. I feel like an outsider in my own research community.

a) 7 point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree 7 = fully agree

118. My expertise is put to use in the research community.

a) 7 point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree 7 = fully agree

119. I receive encouragement and support from other doctoral students.

a) 7 point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree 7 = fully agree

120. I am treated equally in my research community.

a) 7 point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree 7 = fully agree

121. My research community addresses problems in a constructive way.

a) 7 point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree 7 = fully agree

122. I can influence matters concerning doctoral education in my research community.

a) 7 point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree 7 = fully agree

123. A mentor is a faculty member who provides you with career and/or emotional support beyond what you would receive in the classroom. Mentoring generally involves a level of engagement beyond simply approving courses, etc. Do you consider your advisor a mentor?

a) Yes

b) No

124. Are there faculty members besides your advisor within your graduate program that you consider a mentor?

a) Yes (how many)

b) No

125. Are there individuals outside of your graduate program who you consider mentors?

- a) Yes (who are they)
- b) No

126. How do you explain to your family what it means to be a PhD student?

- a) Fill in

127. How well do the people closest to you (outside of your academic life) understand what it means to be a Ph.D. student?

- a) 5 point Likert scale from 1 = Not well at all to 5 = Extremely well

Appendix C

Latina Graduate Student Focus Group Questions

Fostering Mentor Connection

A mentor is a faculty member who provides you with career and/or emotional support beyond what you would receive in the classroom. Mentoring generally involves a level of engagement beyond simply approving courses, etc. (note- will be revised based on how students define mentorship in the survey)

Question: Could you share an example of something an academic mentor did that helped build a stronger connection with you, especially considering your experiences as a Latina Ph.D. student?

Probe: In what ways did this mentor's support feel tailored to your identity or experiences as a Latina Ph.D. student?

Goal: Understand how mentors effectively foster stronger connections with Latina graduate students, particularly concerning the intersection of their cultural and gender identities.

Advisor Relationships

1. Helpful Communication with Advisor

Question: Can you share a time when communication with your advisor was particularly helpful in navigating challenges related to your academic journey as a Latina PhD student?

Probe: How was the communication style different from what you've seen or heard from other students' experiences with their advisors?

Goal: Identify communication approaches that effectively address the needs of Latina PhD students.

2. Advisor Conflict Resolution

Question: What is an example of a time when you resolved a conflict with your advisor?

Probe: Did any aspects of the conflict resolution approaches you used connect to your identity as a Latina PhD student?

Goal: Explore how the intersection of culture and gender identity contributes to strategies for resolving conflicts.

3. Changes Promoting Positive Interactions with Advisor

Question: What strategies or adjustments have you implemented when interacting with your advisor that have positively impacted your relationship?

Probe: How did your cultural identity influence the strategies you chose to implement with your advisor?

Goal: Examine strategies Latinas use to promote positive relationships with their advisors.

4. Changes in Conflict Resolution Approaches

Question: Have your approaches to conflict resolution with advisors changed since starting graduate school?

Probe: How has your understanding of cultural dynamics in academia influenced your conflict resolution strategies?

Goal: Understand how Latinas are adjusting their communication and behavior to maintain advisor-advisee relationships.

Peer Relationships

1. Peer Support

Question: Can you recall a specific experience where you found your academic peers to be especially supportive?

Probe: How have your peers supported you during graduate school?

Goal: Identify effective approaches peers can implement to support Latina PhD students.

2. Peer Conflict

Question: Can you describe a time when you navigated conflict with a peer in graduate school? How did you resolve the conflict?

Probe: Were there any challenges faced in resolving the conflict?

Goal: Understand the types of peer conflict Latinas experience in graduate school and approaches to conflict resolution with peers.

Perceived Social Media Support and Interactions

1. Social Media Emotional Validation

Question: Can you share a moment when social media content like a video or post made you feel *validated* or seen as a Latina graduate student?

Probe: What specific aspects of the content resonated with your experiences?

Goal: Investigate how social media can serve as a source of emotional support for Latina graduate students.

2. Supportive Social Media Interactions

Question: Can you describe a social media interaction that made you feel *supported* as a graduate student?

Probe: Have interactions like this impacted how you engage with social media?

Goal: Identify ways online environments can serve as virtual counter spaces and sources of support for Latina graduate students.

3. Challenging Social Media Interactions

Question: Have you ever encountered challenges or conflicts in online academic interactions? How did you handle them?

Probe: Did the challenge or conflict affect your perception of online academic spaces or your willingness to engage in them?

Goal: Explore the types of negative experiences that Latinas have in online spaces and how these interactions impact viewing social media as a virtual counter space.

Institutional Support

1. Institutional Support for Fostering Advisor-Student Relationships

Question: Does your department do anything to help foster supportive relationships between advisors and their Latina PhD students? If so, please describe.

Probe: How effective are these efforts at addressing the specific needs of Latina students?

Goal: Identify strategies departments can implement to foster supportive relationships for Latina PhD students.

2. University Programming for Supporting Latina PhD Students

Question: How does programming within your university help promote supportive relationships for Latina PhD students?

Probe: How were you introduced to these programs?

Goal: Assess how universities use programming to support Latina PhD students and the accessibility of these programs