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Mujerista Mentorship: Studying the Relationship among a Chicana Mentor & Mentee

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
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by

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The Dissertation of Claudia Peña is approved, and it is acceptable in quality and form for publication on microfilm and electronically.

University of California San Diego

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DEDICATION

This Dissertation and work is dedicated to all of the Chicana's that have ever doubted themselves, have ever been made to feel less than, have been called aggressive, have been told they are too fiery, have been misunderstood, have been doubted by others or called insecure by people that didn't know a single thing about them (yes I am looking at you Revelle). Academia and the Professional world may not be ready for your talent. They cater and support a certain demographic but ignore all the unwanted white noise and do you. Keep breaking glass ceilings. We got this. Most importantly dedicated to my amazing men Jordan, Jacob and Netmi Balanzar. I also dedicate this to the amazing Dra's and future Dra's that were there for me when I wanted to give up. Thank you Dra. Sinai Cota, Dra. Amanda Corona, y Dra. Monica Garcia.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Mujerista Mentorship: Studying the Relationship among a Chicana Mentor & Mentee

by

Claudia Peña

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

University of California San Diego, 2024

Carolyn Huie Hofstetter, Chair

The Latinx community is a fast-growing population in the United States. With notable increases over the years, the Latinx population has become one of the nation's most significant "minority" groups and largest youth populations. As Latinos grow in America they grow in higher education. It is also essential to recognize that the Latinx demographic comprises different

subpopulations with their own stories and cultural experiences. One of the most significant Latino sub-populations in higher education is individuals who identify as Chicanx. Chicanx, by definition, is a population with cultural ties originating from Mexico. Chicanx represents all Chicanx people, eliminating the feminine and masculine identifiers. Chicana is the female population with cultural ties originating from Mexico or identifying as Mexican American.

The general enrollment rates of the Chicana/o student population in higher education institutions have increased over the years. However, in comparison to other Latinx-identified subpopulations, the persistence and retention rates of Chicanas have progressed at a slower rate. Lower retention rates for the Chicana undergraduate student population reveal that with years of research, there continues to be an achievement gap for the Chicana undergraduate students that impacts future educational aspirations, which means lower Chicana representation in positions of higher education leadership or faculty.

Research suggests there is a relationship between increased retention rates to engagement with ethnic homogeneous communities, and mentoring relationships. Unfortunately, there is minimal opportunity for this type of mentorship since statistical information also reveals the low representation of Chicanas in leadership and faculty roles. When Chicanas reach those leadership and faculty positions, they are often not retained. However, the literature suggests that Mujerista Theology informed mentorship benefits both the Mentee and Mentor, building community and contributing to retention efforts.

This qualitative case study explored an institution's Mujerista Mentorship program and studied the Chicana Mentor and Mentee relationship. The purpose was to understand if the mentorship relationship impacts the Chicana undergraduate (Mentee) degree attainment and the Chicana staff or faculty (Mentor) retention and, if so, how. The study involved eight total

participants who are involved in a mentorship partnership, so it is a total of four mentorship pairs. All participants were involved in one individual semi-structured interview and one paired interview to collect their testimonios.

Some key findings from the research were that participants found power in Chicana representation, found each other to be a source of empowerment and that both Mentor and Mentee gained an invaluable relationship. The research suggests that the relationship contributed to the Mentor and Mentee persistence as they found each other inspirational and motivational. Limitations of this study included the researcher's positionality in the research and the fact that it was only a sample of Chicanas participating in a mentorship program. The implications of this data emphasizes the benefit of implementing Mujerista Theology and Mentorship into practice at higher education institutions to retain Chicanas as undergraduate students, staff, and faculty.

Key Terms: Chicana. Undergraduate Degree Attainment. Retention. Mujerista Theology. Mujerista Mentorship.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The Latinx community is a fast-growing population in the United States. From 1990 to 2000, this population grew by 58% (Rodriguez, 2000; Zurita, 2019). Between 2010-2020, it increased by 23% (United et al. Bureau, 2020). In 2016, over 55 million Latinx individuals lived in the United States of America, and the numbers have continued to increase. One-third of the population comprises individuals under 18, which makes up the K-12 student population (Taggart, 2018). According to the 2019 National Center for Education Statistics, 26% of the K-12 student population identifies as Latinx and 54% comprise the student population in California. With notable increases over the years, the Latinx population has become one of the nation's most significant "minority" groups and largest youth populations.

This rapid population growth has significantly impacted many levels of our society today, such as their presence in P-12 education (Zurita, 2019). Additionally, there is an increase in the number of Latinx students accepted into colleges nationwide. A status report titled Race and Ethnicity in Higher Education (2019) states that the Latinx population experienced the most significant increase in college enrollment from 1996 to 2016 compared to other underrepresented groups (Espinosa et al., 2019). Identified by The Educational Trust-West (2020), in the 2019-2020 academic year, 26% of Latinx students were enrolled in the University of California system, 49% in the California State University system, and 50% in California Community Colleges.

Although Latinx retention and graduation rates have improved, they are still behind other underrepresented groups and their White peers (Hernandez & Villodas, 2019; Hurtado, 2021; Martinez, 2014). According to the Educational Trust West (2019), only 13% of Latinx-identified people have a bachelor's degree or higher. Other underrepresented groups had high educational

attainment. For example, 26% of African Americans and 15% of Native Americans have a bachelor's degree or higher. They are also behind their White counterparts; 44% of White students have a bachelor's degree or higher. In order to understand how we can support and improve the retention of the Latinx population in higher education, we need to understand this population and its diversity (Moreno & Gaytan, 2012; Taylor et al., 2012). As Latinos grow in higher education, it is also essential to recognize that the Latinx demographic comprises different subpopulations with their own stories and cultural experiences.

In recent history, researchers have used the term Latinx instead of Latino, which is a broad and all-encompassing term that describes Latino-identified people and removes the feminine and masculine identifiers (Milian, 2017; Salinas, 2020; Hurtado, 2021; Torres, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Institutions and research have focused on access to college among the Latinx, treating this population as a unified group (Venegas & Hallet, 2013). The term Latino represents several different national and ethnic groups. Each group varies by social class, has differing histories, immigration, and citizenship status, and lives in different United States regions (Chilman, 1993; Hernandez & Lopez, 2005). Nineteen Latin American countries have their diversity and are represented in the United States (Martinez & Velasco, 2012). In practice, this should be considered when supporting students, and there must be an understanding of the weight of the term Latino. Understanding this is important because, according to statistical data, some Latinx subpopulations struggle more with higher education degree attainment than others (Ceja, 2004). Therefore, supporting these groups looks different for every population. Recognizing the different subpopulations and details about who makes up our student population is essential. For example, people of Mexican origin comprise the largest student population

admitted into higher education (Huber, 2012; Hurtado, 2002; Martinez, 2014). Therefore, this population would be a great group to learn more about and understand.

The Latinx population should be treated as something other than a monolithic group to provide intentional support and understand specific needs (Martinez & Velasco, 2012). As stated above, one of the most significant Latino sub-populations in higher education is individuals who identify as Chicanx. Chicanx, by definition, is a population with cultural ties originating from Mexico. Chicanx represents all Chicanx people, eliminating the feminine and masculine identifiers. Chicana is the female population with cultural ties originating from Mexico or identifying as Mexican American (Hurtado, 2021; Mirande & Enriquez, 1981).

Although the Chicanx community makes up most of the Latinx population admitted into higher education institutions, their educational attainment is still behind other populations (Martinez, 2014; Turner, 2021). More specifically, Chicana undergraduate students attain lower college degrees than other Latinx subpopulations (Aleman,2018; Attinasi,1989; Ceja, 2004; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Martinez, 2014). Only 9% of Chicanas enroll in four-year colleges, 8% graduate with a bachelor's degree, and less than 1% graduate with a doctoral degree (Aleman,2018; Martinez,2014). Although there is an increase in enrolled Chicana students in higher education, research has highlighted the inequalities for them and several other female-identified underrepresented student populations (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Although enrollment rates for Chicana undergraduate students have increased, degree attainment for these Chicana students at four-year colleges is behind other student populations, including other Latinx subpopulations (Perez Huber et al., 2015). This negative trend prevents Chicana students from accessing professional prospects and pursuing further educational

aspirations. Because the attainment rates for Chicana undergraduates are low, this leaves little representation of Chicana in leadership roles and faculty positions (Huber et al., 2006; Solórzano& Villalpando, 2005). Research suggests that the relationship between Chicana representation and intentional mentorship impacts persistence and Chicana undergraduate retention rates; however, Chicanas have limited opportunities to participate in intentional mentorship due to the under-representation of Chicana staff and faculty.

Educational research studies have suggested ways to create intentional mentorship methods by using Mujerista theology as a framework described as centering the racial, ethnic, cultural, and gendered aspects of being a Chicana while challenging oppression and being liberated through practice (Villasenor et al., 2013). Therefore, Mujerista Mentorship is an opportunity to redefine mentorship as a partnership and emphasize the importance of cultural capital through an ethnic homogenous Chicana community. Research suggests that the under-representation of Chicana staff and faculty relates to the similar challenges and barriers the Chicana undergraduates face (Cuadraz, 2005; Villasenor et al., 2013; Yosso, 2013). It is also important to note that research suggests that Mujerista-informed mentorship impacts the Mentor because it encourages a partnership between the Mentee and the Mentor. This research study examined the Chicana higher education experience and how this unique Mujerista Mentorship relationship supports and helps retain them until degree completion. It focused on the positive impacts on Chicana-specific community building, and the impacts that participating in a Mujerista Mentorship program has on this population to display the importance of advocating for Chicana staff and faculty representation to support the students.

Purpose of Study and Research Questions

Although research suggests that Chicana staff and faculty play an essential role in this degree achievement, there continues to be a lack of Chicana staff and faculty representation in higher education institutions. However, there is a relationship between Mujerista Mentorship and Chicana undergraduate persistence and retention rates. The representation of Chicana staff and faculty in higher education has a positive impact on the retention of Chicana undergraduate students as they serve as a source of representation and motivation that helps in developing a sense of belonging for these students and advocating for diversity issues (Garcia, 2016; Kwon, 2016; Parnell, 2016; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1991). In parallel, research suggests that Mujerista Mentorship also impacts the Chicana staff and faculty experience by partnering with their Mentee because it also serves as a form of motivation. Lastly, Mujerista Mentorship plays a role in the Chicana student experience and influences persistence.

This research study examined how and why Mujerista Mentorship relationships impact those involved through relationship building and serve as a motivation to persist. It investigated the experiences of the Chicana student, staff, and faculty involved in the mentorship program and how and why it directly impacts their retention. This research contributes to literature surrounding Mujerista Mentorship and its impact on our Chicana community in higher education. The research study focused on the following research questions:

1. What perceived institutional support and barriers impact the persistence and retention of Chicana undergraduate students, staff, and faculty?

2. Does the relationship between the Chicana staff, faculty Mentors, and Chicana undergraduate students' Mentees participating in this mentorship program affect student persistence/retention? If so, how?

3. Does the relationship between the Chicana staff and faculty Mentors and Chicana undergraduate students' Mentees participating in this mentorship program affect staff persistence/retention? If so, how?

Significance of this Study

Since the Latinx population is such a large and growing population in higher education, it is essential to understand the areas of need. Some significant research has been conducted surrounding Latinas in education, and some research has focused on specific subpopulations like Chicanas. However, there is a need to expand on some of that research and focus on subpopulations like Chicanas. Not only is there a need to focus on how to support Chicana undergraduates in their degree attainment, but how and why specific mentorship programs like Mujerista Mentorship support them throughout their journey. Chicana undergraduates participated in this study, and Chicana staff and faculty were also engaged in this program as Mentors. Since this Mujerista Mentorship program aims to develop a partnership between Mentor and Mentee, this study also focused on understanding how it impacts both Mentor and Mentee. This study's significance contributed to research on specific student populations like Chicana and their journey through higher education. This research also contributes to the minimal research surrounding the impacts of Mujerista Mentorship. Overall, this study's significance contributes to research and challenges common ideologies in research and education practice.

Methodology

This research study involved the Chicanx Mujersita Mentorship Program created in 2019 at Southern California Eucalyptus University. In order to understand the impact this mentorship program has on the Chicana Mentees and Mentors, the researcher conducted a qualitative case

study that focused on the participant's testimonios as they experienced the mentorship program and their relationship with each other. Yin (2014) describes case studies as a specific phenomenon or case within a real-life context (Yin, 2014). The researcher recruited participants in this Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program at Southern California Eucalyptus University. This program creates an opportunity to connect Chicana students with Chicana staff and faculty. Participants for this current study are Chicana students (Mentees) with Chicana staff or faculty (Mentors). The researcher recruited eight participants who identified as four mentorship pairs from this program. Four participants identified as Mentees, and the other four participants identified as their Mentors.

In Phase One of the research study, the researcher collected survey data from the Mentorship directors to understand the Mentor and Mentee relationships. The researcher conducted an open recruitment process through email and identified eight participants based on research criteria. The eight participants selected engaged in Phase Two of the research study. Phase Two included two semi-structured interviews to gather testimonios about their mentorship relationship and experience. The first interview was conducted individually, and the other involved the Mentor and Mentee. The researcher was interested in investigating the relationship between the Chicana undergraduate student Mentee and the Chicana staff or faculty Mentor. It explored the individual perspective, how this relationship impacts those involved, and why. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with the Mentees and Mentors to understand how participating in the mentorship program has impacted them as Chicana undergraduate students and the faculty and staff Mentors involved.

Testimonios derive from Chicana Feminist practice and use the personal narrative as a research methodology that challenges academic knowledge production (Huber, 2009). Using

testimonios is to share Chicana stories to inform educational practice and make further commitments towards social justice. Testimonios is a methodology that challenges the dominant ideologies and centralizes the experiential knowledge of historically oppressed individuals. This tool was used to amplify the individual and collective voice of this Mujerista Mentorship program.

Mujerista Theology informed the research as the primary conceptual framework to focus on how the Chicana Mentors and Mentees shared cultural knowledge through partnership and mentorship. Although Mujerista Theology was this research study's primary guiding conceptual framework, the researcher recognizes several other frameworks that overlap with Mujerista theology. Some guiding conceptual frameworks include Community Cultural Wealth and Latinx Critical Race Theory. Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth moves away from a deficit mindset and focuses on the benefits of the power of cultural and community capital for under-represented groups like Chicana (Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). Similarly, Mujerista theology highlights a strategy for Chicanas to use their collective knowledge as power and practice liberation toward their future (Isasi-Diza, 1993). Community Cultural Wealth, Social Capital, Cultural Capital, and Mujerista theology are integral to preserving the culture and validating the knowledge shared collectively amongst Chicanas. These frameworks emphasize that these women are the experts of their own stories. These frameworks, along with Latinx Critical Race Theory, also challenge the dominant ideologies that regularly oppress underrepresented communities.

Therefore, this study was meant to use their voice to contribute to research and provide institutions with additional ways to serve the Chicana community. As the Mentee and Mentor form partnerships through the Mujerista Mentorship program, we asked questions about their experience in education, how this program has impacted their experience, and why (Yosso,

2016). Mujerista's theory was used to create this mentorship program to build a partnership that preserves cultural values and forms a partnership between the Mentee and Mentor.

Definition of Terms

The researcher wanted to provide definitions for the following terms to clarify the use of these terms throughout this research. As this chapter mentioned, Latinx is a term used to describe Latin American individuals living in America. In recent history, researchers have used the term Latinx instead of Latino, which is a broad and all-encompassing term that describes Latino-identified people and removes the feminine and masculine identifiers (Milian, 2017; Salinas, 2020; Hurtado, 2021; Torres, 2018; Rodriguez et al., 2000). In this research study, the researcher uses the term Chicanx. Chicanx, by definition, is a population with cultural ties originating from Mexico. Chicanx represents all Chicanx people, eliminating the feminine and masculine identifiers. Chicana is the female population with cultural ties originating from Mexico or identifying as Mexican American (Hurtado, 2021; Mirande & Enriquez, 1981). It is also essential to recognize that the x in Latinx and Chicanx is a growing and more familiar term in research but still a growing term to the general Latino community. The researcher uses the term *Ethnic homogeneity*, defined as sharing identical ethnic identities or cultures with others in that environment (Aleman & Gaytan., 2017; Santos & Reigadas., 2002; Santos & Reigadas., 2004).

The researcher uses the terms Mujerista theology and Mujerista Mentorship. Mujerista Theology is a work centered on the racial, ethnic, cultural, and gendered aspects of being a Chicana, challenging oppression, and being liberated through practice (Villasenor et al., 2013). Isasi-Diaz (1993) stated that the strategy of Mujerista theology is for Latinas to denounce oppressive behavior and commit to liberating practice toward their future (Isasi-Diza, 1993). Mujerista Mentorship is an asset-based model that focuses on relationship-building and strays

from the hierarchy of Mentor vs. Mentee (Villasenor et al., 2013). Lastly, *degree attainment* is completing a degree (Adelman,1999). This research study focused on what impacts Chicana undergraduate student degree attainment and how we retain them. This study also focused on how the institution impacts the Chicana staff and faculty and their retention. The researcher is also highlighting how or why students, staff, and faculty are retained and persist to obtain their degree or in the field of work at this institution.

Overview of Research

The first chapter briefly overviews the Latinx population and, even more specifically, the Chicana undergraduate. It continues to suggest ways this student population, Chicana staff, and faculty can be supported through their academic endeavors and introduce us to the research study the researcher conducted. This research suggests that Mujerista Mentorship impacts the Chicana student, staff, and faculty population. It also discusses that the Mujerista Mentorship structure is meant to create a partnership between Mentor and Mentee so that both could benefit from this relationship. The second chapter discusses the barriers and benefits that impact the Chicana experience. It also discusses how culturally relevant frameworks positively impact their experience and how Mujerista Theology was used as the guiding conceptual framework for this study. The third chapter describes the qualitative case study between Chicana Mentees and Mentors participating in a specific Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship program. This chapter will also include details on how participants were selected and how data was collected and analyzed. The fourth chapter will discuss the research findings that emerged through the research study. In this chapter, the researcher will introduce the participants involved in the research process, discuss the research analysis process, and introduce the emerging themes. Finally, chapter five will discuss the research questions and revisit the limitations of the research study itself. Overall,

this research aims to contribute to educational research and provide recommendations on supporting the Chicana student population.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As the researcher previously stated, the Latinx community is a fast-growing population in the United States, and one-third comprises individuals under 18 (Taggart, 2018). In California alone, 54% of the K-12 student population identifies as Latinx. This means more of this population is applying for admission into college. Although this is statistical information about the Latinx population, the Chicanx population is part of the Latinx population. Previous statistics above have suggested that the Chicanx community makes up most of the Latinx population in the United States, and most students are admitted into higher education institutions (Martinez, 2014). However, Chicanas' retention rates and degree attainment still need to catch up and move slower than other underrepresented student populations.

Research suggests that one way higher education institutions can support Chicana student retention is not only by hiring Chicana-identified staff and faculty representation but, most importantly, by retaining them through their higher education journey (Crisp et al., 2015; Gloria & Herrera, 2004; Villasenor et al.,2013). Similarly to Chicana undergraduates, demographics demonstrate that the Chicana-identified staff and faculty are not keeping up with the Chicana student population, leaving little opportunity for the benefits this representation provides (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Gloria, 1997; Gonzalez, 2002; Hurtado, 2001; Smith, 1989). Lower undergraduate degree attainment means less opportunity for future educational aspirations, which leads to minimal Chicana staff and faculty representation (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005; Serrano, 2017). However, when Chicanas advance in their educational journey, they still face similar challenges as they did during their undergraduate studies.

Research states that Chicanx faculty and staff face obstacles and feelings of isolation and are made to feel like a hindrance in academia (Aguirre, 1993; Lopez et al.,2020; Villasenor et al.,2013).

The percentage of Chicana professionals across all leadership levels is disproportionate to that of Chicana students (Martinez-Benyarko et al.,2022). However, there are benefits to having Chicana staff and faculty as a source of representation and motivation. Having Chicana staff and faculty representation can contribute diverse perspectives inside and outside the classroom that benefit the students' needs (Aguirre & Martinez,1993). This also increases the possibility of creating mentorship opportunities, which can support Chicana students through higher education. Research has demonstrated that mentorship plays an essential role in the Chicana undergraduate experience, graduate school, navigating academia, and positions in leadership (Figueroa & Rodriguez., 2015; Ramirez., 2017; Rios Ellis et al., 2015; Stanley., 2015).

This introduction addressed the gaps and emphasized the need to further the research surrounding Chicanas. It also focuses on recommendations for supporting this population through their higher education experience. This chapter elaborates further on some barriers and benefits that impact the Chicana undergraduate student and even the Chicana staff and faculty experience:

1. The researcher will discuss the cultural expectations and values that hinder and support them through their academic journey. Then, there will be a discussion of the institutional barriers Chicanas navigate during their educational experience.
2. The researcher will elaborate on Mujerista theology and secondary guiding conceptual frameworks that create intentional support opportunities for Chicanas in higher education.

3. It will focus on how we see Chicanas thriving in education and challenge how we conduct research and inform our practices.
4. This chapter will conclude with how previous research suggests how Mujerista Mentorship practice impacts the Chicana's educational experience and suggest ways to support these Chicana undergrads, staff, and faculty through their journey in higher education.

Cultural Expectations, Cultural and Familial Values, and Institutional Barriers

While higher education institutions continuously enroll Chicana students, retention issues persist (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Several factors contribute to lower college completion rates, including family, traditional gender roles, finances, neighborhood poverty, and first-generation college student status (Alvarado, 2016; Engle & Tinto, 2008; Fletcher & Tienda, 2010). Research also suggests that the rapid increase of the Chicana student population is outpacing the higher education institutions' capacity to understand the needs and support this student population (Hu & John, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2016; Stout et al., 2018). Institutions do not recognize the harm and emotional distress that students of color endure simply by coming to a college campus that was not created for them (Minthorn & Nelson,2018). Institutions enroll Chicana students who need to understand the population's needs and change the structural organization to truly support historically oppressed groups(Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015).

Both positive and negative factors impact the Chicana undergraduate student experience. Some of these factors stem from cultural expectations and institutional barriers. It is essential to discuss both expectations and obstacles while at the same time recognizing the cultural values that positively affect the Chicana undergraduate experience. Acknowledging

these expectations, barriers, and values sheds light on what this student population needs and how educational institutions can support and advocate for necessary resources to improve persistence and retention rates for Chicana students (Swail, 2003; Valencia, 2002).

Cultural Expectations

Research has demonstrated that cultural values emphatically impact Chicana students' resiliency to persist through their educational journey (Morgan et al., 2013). Several cultural stressors contribute to the Chicana undergraduate experience. Barron (2020) uses the phrase "no hay apoyo," which translates to "there is no support" (Barron,2020,p. 58). There are several reasons why this phrase is essential; Chicanas often feel they do not belong or are not welcomed in academia and sometimes need to be supported when they diverge from cultural expectations (Barron, 2020; Castillo & Hill, 2004). According to DeMirjyn (2010), Chicanas, who are typically branded as "success stories 'are often described as sell-outs to their home/ethnic communities (p.1). For Chicanas, some traditional expectations include being responsible for maintaining the home, getting married, and caring for their children (Niemann, 2004; Vasquez, 1982).

In the early 1900s, education was considered a luxury for Chicanas. As time progressed, there were still inequitable opportunities for Chicanas in education compared to their male counterparts (Mirandé & Enriquez, 1981; Vasquez,1982). Gloria Anzaldua (1987) describes Chicana cultural norms as tyranny because of the pressures of conforming to the traditional expectations of being a Chicana. Anything outside that norm could make them deviant (Anzaldua, 1987). Anzaldua identified as a queer Chicana intrigued by art education who did not conform to cultural expectations. She was never seen as the traditional Mexican woman and was viewed as rebellious or "la mala Mujer" (Niemann, 2004,p.62). This essentially led to

estrangement from her family. Anzaldua's experience is just one example of the repercussions of not abiding by the cultural pressures and traditions of Chicanx culture. It is important to note that these levels of cultural expectations differ from family to family. However, this is an example of the inequity that exists solely based on gender.

Recent studies have shown that familial support for Chicanas pursuing their educational aspirations is more prevalent today than in the historical context above (Bernal, 2006; Ceja, 2004). However, the cultural expectation for a Chicana to maintain familial obligations while balancing educational aspirations is still a stressor for Chicana students (Espinoza, 2010; Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Cultural expectations, lack of support from their family, or the simple unawareness of how to support them through their academic journey impact Chicana students' persistence (Bernal,2006; Langenkamp, 2019; Valdez, 2001).

Research shows that Chicana students with a college degree had parents supporting their endeavors (Ceja, 2004; Valdez, 2001). Further exploration in the field indicates that today, Chicana families are more likely to help their students' educational endeavors and serve as a source of motivation for them during adversity (Morgan et al., 2013). In many cases, Chicana students' families support their academic journey; however, since many Chicanas identify as first-generation, families may need to learn how to support them (Ceja, 2006). It means knowledge of applying to college and navigating academia is a foreign concept. It also means parental guidance and support are limited because of their limited exposure to higher education (Ceja,2006). For Chicanas, this is another barrier to achieving their degree. The lack of knowledge before beginning higher education impacts students not just entering college but throughout their journey, often unknown academically rigorous territory. Therefore, research suggests that institutions should provide Chicana students with easier access to obtaining

resources and support from the institution because of the need for more institutional knowledge prior to and throughout their academic journey (Ceja,2006).

Cultural and Familial Value

Although research describes the stressors that derive from cultural expectations, it is also essential to recognize that cultural values play a positive role in the Chicana student experience (Bernal, 2001; Morgan Consoli et al., 2016). Familismo is beliefs or relationship structures connected to family dynamics and resilience. Familismo or family is also considered a source of motivation through adversity (Morgan Consoli et al., 2016). In this case, the Chicanx family and culture foster a sense of hope attributed to resilience and thriving through educational obstacles (Morgan Consoli et al., 2016). In some cases, Chicanas believe in giving back to their parents, especially immigrant parents who have made sacrifices for their children to succeed in the United States of America (Enrique, 2011; Valdes, 1996). Chicana persistence can also be attributed to cultural values such as faith and religion, which have also been suggested as a form of hope for overcoming difficulties (Morgan Consoli et al., 2016). Although Chicanas experience stressors associated with cultural obligations, cultural values have contributed to their success and the ability to be resilient while navigating institutional barriers (Bernal, 2001).

Previous research and literature also speak to how language plays a role in the education experience for Chicanas. In previous literature, authors highlighted how language can be viewed as a barrier as Institutions of higher education often marginalize languages that do not follow the dominant culture(Diggs et al., 2009; Pérez Huber, 2011; Yosso et al., 2009). Over the years, researchers have also suggested that being in a community with others who speak the same language enhances cultural capital, enhances the Chicanx experience, and preserves cultural values (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Gonzalez et al., 2005; Hurtado, 2003; Orellana, 2003; Yosso,

2006). Although research highlights the benefits and opportunities for Chicanx-identified individuals to build their cultural capital at higher education institutions, it is crucial to recognize that the lower representation makes it difficult for this to occur.

As mentioned in Chapter One, there is an increase in the Chicanx population in higher education. Therefore, there is an increase in Chicana undergraduates in higher education (Garcia & Mireles-Rios, 2020). However, the weight and expectations they carry remain. These cultural expectations and values still impact the Chicana student experience. Even if more Chicana students are admitted into higher education institutions, institutions still need to prepare to provide resources or support through cultural stressors that impact academia (Vasquez, 1982). Therefore, higher education institutions need to prepare to understand and support Chicana students as the population increases in higher education.

Institutional Barriers

Chicanx cultural expectations and values create a mixture of support and stressors for the Chicana undergraduate student. Unfortunately, stressors continue to arise solely from being a Chicana in a Predominantly White Institution and navigating academia (Gloria et al., 2005). Research demonstrates that Chicana students face common institutional challenges. Researchers posit that Chicanas are subjected to four sources of stress, including lack of financial resources, academic issues, family obligations, expectations, and gender role stereotyping (Rodriguez et al.,2000). The researcher will discuss the following institutional factors that are a source of stress for Chicana students, which include experiencing financial instability, microaggressions, and the pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture (Von Robertson et al., 2016).

Even though cultural and familial support may serve as a source of motivation, Chicanas still face institutional obstacles impacting their educational experience. Statistically, the Chicanx

population comes from a lower socioeconomic status (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Valdez, 2001). Unfortunately, over the years, tuition costs have continued to increase. Rising tuition costs and financial obligations affect underrepresented students like Chicana students more than white students (Hurtado et al., 1998). Hence, economic instability or inability to afford the increasing tuition cost is another reason Chicanas do not persist throughout their undergraduate journey (Castillo & Hill, 2004; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Institutions will argue that financial aid packages are available for students with lower socioeconomic status, but resources still need to be expanded, time-sensitive, and sometimes conditional (Castillo & Hill, 2004). Funding for college has not kept pace with rising tuition costs (Hurtado, 1998). Even if there is financial support when Chicana students enroll in higher education institutions, financial need is a continued stressor unless they can cover the entire undergraduate years and cost of living expenses outside of tuition (Castillo & Hill, 2004).

Additional stress accompanying the need to pay for this educational journey is finding a continued source of economic stability, such as searching for scholarships, work-study, loans, and more (Hurtado et al., 1999). There is a combination of significant stressors that marginalized students often manage, such as maintaining a job to afford college, the requirement of being academically competitive and building community at the institution (Espino, 2020). There is additional stress for the first-generation Chicana students unfamiliar with the competitive and rigorous academic environment while maintaining financial responsibility (Salas et al., 2014). Overall, the financial circumstance while pursuing an education causes distress for Chicana students and other underrepresented groups, influencing whether or not they can or will continue their educational aspirations (Castillo & Hill, 2004).

Another hurdle impacting Chicana students' educational journey is experiencing

stereotyping and microaggressions. Research has shown Chicana students experience significantly more stress while attending college than White women, White men, and their Chicano counterparts (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996; Rodriguez et al., 2000). These stressors can stem from the specific behaviors targeted toward Chicana women or associated with discriminatory labels that their white counterparts do not have to face. Through the 1950s and 1960s, Chicana women were labeled undisciplined and passive. They were labeled as unmotivated or a population that did not value education (Casas & Ponterotto, 1984; Rodriguez et al., 2000; Andrade, 1982). Even more explicitly, Chicanas were labeled as the invisible minority (Casas & Ponterotto, 1984; Gloria, 1999). Chicana students did not feel visible in higher education or think they had a voice in these spaces; therefore, they did not speak, and their silence contributed to the labels.

Research shows that Chicanas feel intimidated by the academic environment and need more comfort in the educational setting, influencing whether or not they feel confident enough to speak up in the classroom (Rodriguez et al., 2000). This resulted in labeling Chicana students as passive or uninterested in their education (Casas & Ponterotto, 1984; Gloria, 1999). Assumptions were made and used to discriminate against Chicana students without understanding their needs. Chicanas face multiple stressors, a possible lack of college preparation, and potential familial obligations encountered as an underrepresented student group (Rodriguez et al., 2000). More importantly, these misperceptions or misunderstandings of Chicana students lead to harmful assumptions, microaggressions, and stereotypes from faculty and staff members that create patterns of marginalizing behavior (Gloria & Kurpius, 1996; Rodriguez et al., 2000).

Stereotyping and marginalization inevitably impact the Chicana's perception of academia and their persistence, sometimes causing them to terminate their educational endeavors (Gloria

& Kurpius, 1996; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Over time, research has encouraged staff members to improve their cultural knowledge and aspire to serve diverse student population needs with equity-minded practice to prevent marginalization (Bensimon, 2017; Quaye et al., 2019). However, hiring more Chicanx-identified staff and faculty could benefit the institution with cultural knowledge of the population and potentially assist with pushing damaging stereotypes further out of the picture. Regardless of the makeup of the staff and faculty population at higher education institutions, educators inside and outside the classroom should be culturally aware of their diverse student population and commit to equity-minded practice (Bensimon, 2007; Lindsey et al., 2018; Quaye et al., 2019; Tinto, 1997).

Lastly, another institutional barrier Chicana undergraduate students face is the pressure to assimilate to the dominant culture rather than institutions changing to serve them as an underrepresented population (Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995; Villasenor et al., 2013). When individuals feel the pressure to change themselves in academia, there is sudden stress to assimilate. This stress and anxiety make the transition more difficult and decrease the students' sense of belonging, as they no longer feel they can be themselves (Hurtado & Carter, 1996; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Unfortunately, there are several examples of how institutions encourage assimilation. One example was shared by a Chicana student when an instructor insinuated that this student would fail because they did not fit the mold of an average college student (Chabram, 1990). These comments often lead Chicana students to invalidate and water themselves or their cultural identity to fit into the institutional standard of the "norm" (Sanchez et al., 2020,p.593).

Higher education institutions send mixed messages on cultural appreciation. Chicanas are valued for their educational capability. However, institutions place little value on understanding their culture (Cuadraz, 1996; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Institutions have proven this by enrolling

diverse student populations like Chicanas without providing intentional ways to support them. This contributes to the mixed understanding of where the Chicana and many underrepresented groups stand at these institutions (Rodriguez et al., 2000). College institutions continue to place little to no value on the Chicana culture but only focus on their ability to perform academically and demonstrate scholastic talent (Rodriguez et al., 2000).

College institutions continue to place little to no value on the Chicana culture but only focus on their ability to perform academically and demonstrate scholastic talent (Rodriguez et al., 2000). Institutions have created standards of what is deemed successful, which are still rooted in what serves the White middle-class student (Takimoto et al., 2021). Over time, the institutional demographics have changed, which means students come from diverse cultures and different educational experiences. Because of this, institutional academic standards should adjust to serve the diversification of the student population and value their culture, and all that comes with it (Villasenor et al., 2013). Unfortunately, these academic and social pressures to assimilate still exist and impact Chicana students' connectedness to their culture and a sense of belonging to the institution, influencing their persistence and retention rates (Gloria & Segura-Herrera, 2004). However, research has recommended ways to support Chicanas through practices that provide validation and an increased sense of belonging in higher education institutions (Gloria & Carter, 1996; Rendon, 1994). This is through the support of ethnic homogeneous communities and mentorship opportunities(Crisp & Cruz, 2009).

Guiding Frameworks

Although the previous section of this literature highlighted some of the barriers Chicanas experience, this research aims to focus on something other than the deficits of the Chicana student experience. The goal is to highlight the experiences benefiting Chicana persistence and

retention rates so institutions can support Chicana undergraduate degree completion and retain Chicana staff and faculty. It is also crucial to focus on the validity of the Chicana voice and their story to inform future research. In this section, the researcher will first focus on the secondary guiding conceptual frameworks that overlap with the primary guiding framework of Mujerista Theology (see Figure 1 below).

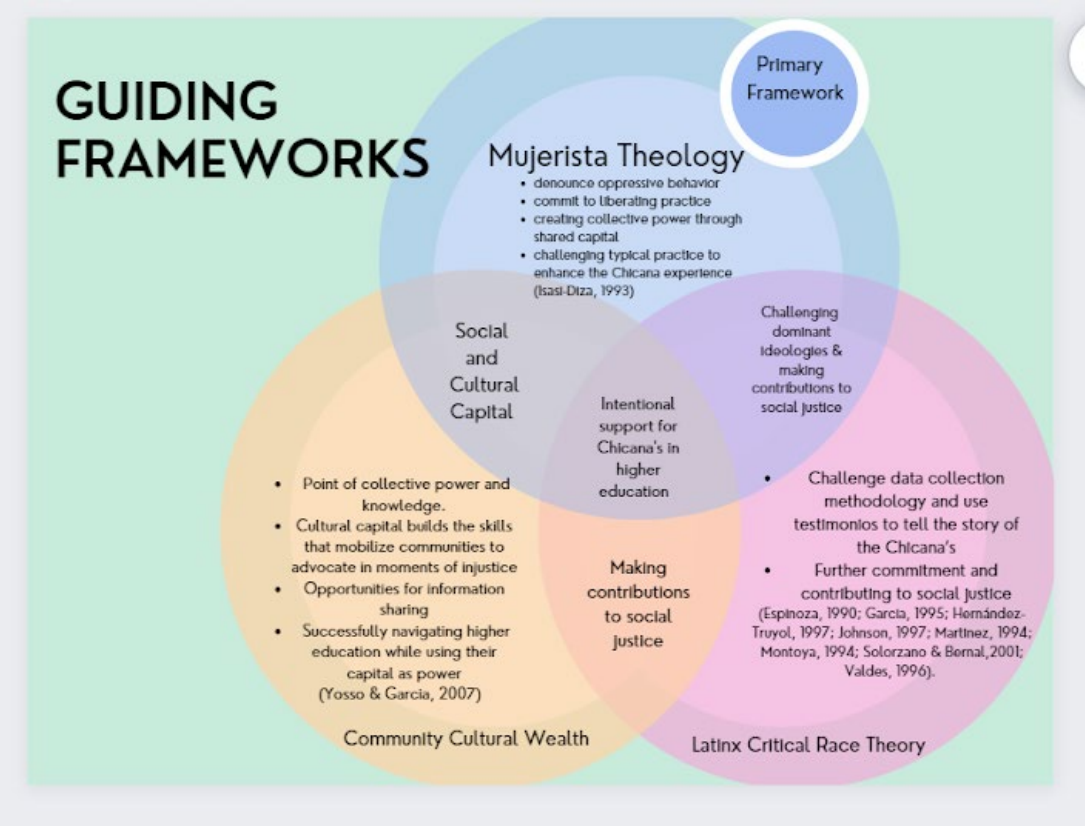

Figure 1. Guiding Conceptual Frameworks

Some secondary guiding frameworks include Community Cultural Wealth, which emphasizes how cultural and social capital collectively builds skill and mobilizes Chicana communities. This leads to how social and cultural capital creates opportunities for Chicanas to network and share community resources that support them through their education journey and are also tied to cultural values (Yosso & Garcia, 2007). In this case, a Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program uses social and cultural capital between mentorship pairs to create their

own equitable higher education experience. Then, the researcher identified Latinx Critical Race Theory as a way to identify research methodologies that amplify the Chicana voice (Garcia, 1995; Hernández-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994; Solorzano & Bernal, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Valdes, 1996). This section will also touch on the importance of Chicanas being heard, identify their collective knowledge as research, contribute to further social justice research, and challenge dominant ideologies. This connects to the primary guiding conceptual framework of Mujerista Theology, which embodies a strategy of denouncing oppressive behavior using cultural and social capital through liberating practice and mentorship, which aims to define their future and success (Isasi-Diaz, 1993). All of these frameworks contribute to intentional support for Chicana navigating higher education.

Community Cultural Wealth Framework

According to Mohanty (1994), there is an essential value in forming cultural connections. Especially for underrepresented groups that thrive on collectivist culture and creating a "collective voice" (Mohanty, 1994, p.153). *Collectivism* is a cohesive group that builds solid social and individual relationships (Allik & Realo, 2004). Community cultural wealth can create a collectivist voice (Matos, 2021). Research has stated that in an educational setting, the building of Chicana communities creates wealth through the capital that benefits their journey (DeMirjyn, 2010; Yosso & Garcia, 2007). Cultural capital can be created through sharing cultural or traditional knowledge, skills, and language that assist in navigating higher education (Ayala & Contreras, 2019; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Yosso and Garcia discuss the importance of cultural capital, as it serves as a point of collective power and knowledge. This cultural capital builds the skills that mobilize communities to advocate in moments of injustice and opportunities for information sharing and successfully navigate higher education while using their culture as a

value (Yosso & Garcia, 2007). This also provides networking engagement that could benefit future academic or career aspirations (Ayala & Contreras, 2019). Some examples of where social and cultural capital can be built are ethnic homogenous mentorship programs, involvement in culturally based organizations, and cultural resource centers. These opportunities to obtain and share knowledge can also help retain Chicana students by creating a community while preserving their cultural values (Hurtado,1997; Tinto, 1993).

Social and Cultural Capital

Underrepresented student populations like Chicana students often experience a culture shock phenomenon when entering higher education institutions. Culture shock can be described as not fitting in with others or feeling unfamiliarity because they do not relate to the dominant culture at the institution (Jack, 2014). These feelings of culture shock re-emphasize the importance of building social and cultural capital within their culture to make a community they find comfortable (Quaye et al., 2015; Vasquez, 1982). Yosso & Solorzano (2005) incorporate these concepts within the community's cultural wealth framework and define *social capital* as networking between people and community resources and cultural capital as the knowledge that stems from Chicana communities (Yosso & Solorzano, 2005).

An example of successful and vital community building and community representation is Maria Hinojosa's journey through journalism as a Chicana. Hinojosa hosted a TED Talk discussing the importance of being comfortable in an environment, being visible, and being able to tell your own story and be accepted for who you are(Hinojosa, 2015). Hinojosa discussed her experience in journalism; she found it difficult being in this field when other journalists did not look like her and did not offer any opportunity for guidance and relatability. This inspired Hinojosa to create her journaling platform, an inclusive professional environment for

systematically oppressed groups (Hinojosa, 2015). Hinojosa's courageous stand against the invisibility she was subjected to create a space for those in her profession that opened up opportunities for more relational connections and creativity in a field that traditionally was not accepting of Chicanas. Hinojosa's journey supports the research surrounding the impacts of social and cultural capital; there is power and benefit of community building for Chicanas with those who share similar identities (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). More specifically, research has shown some benefits of forming Chicana-identified communities to combat the feeling of disconnection and encourage resource sharing (Villasenor et al., 2013). Some benefits include that Chicanas create community by sharing everyday experiences, relating to each other's struggles, feeling supported, and navigating institutional barriers together (Salas et al., 2014).

Research suggests that community building among Chicana students is beneficial by creating room for social and cultural capital (Murakami et al., 2014). In some instances, culturally focused sororities are another example of how ethnic homogeneous communities positively impact academic persistence (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013). Delgado-Guerrero and Gloria's (2013) research suggested that Chicana undergraduates who participated in their research claimed they experienced stress and difficulty but also reported they still felt supported and confident. These students persisted in academia by being exposed to community and mentorship through this sorority experience. These students were exposed to the culturally relevant community they created through the sorority and the peer mentorship they benefited from through their "bigs" and "littles" process. They attributed their persistence to their sorority and support from their sisterhood or Hermandad through social and cultural influences(Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria,2013).

As previously mentioned, Chicana students face institutional barriers such as microaggressions and discrimination. Therefore, forming a community and sisterhood amongst Chicana students helps navigate a male-dominated system and the common inequity they face as a community. There is a need for community and sisterhood to create a sense of belonging within academia (Ek et al., 2010).

Research has also suggested that Chicana faculty and staff experience more discrimination, pressures, and stressors than their white counterparts (Aguirre, 2000). The benefit of designing and building a community is not specific to Chicana undergraduate students but also to Chicana graduate students, staff, and faculty. An institution in Texas researched the Educational Advancement of Latin@s (REAL) collaborative, which established supportive networks with scholars and developing scholars. This collaboration was created to represent the voices of future Latinas within academic institutions. This collaboration documents the journey with specifics regarding support, persistence, and legitimacy (Ek et al., 2010). There is no pressure to assimilate into the dominant culture in these groups because they are in an environment where they feel like they can be their whole authentic selves (Villasenor et al.,2013). The goal is to be a part of a community where they can share their culture, support each other, develop mentorship opportunities, and find their way to be a part of the academic community. These individuals define their success and are the experts of their stories while not jeopardizing their cultural values. Latinx Critical Race Theory guided the researcher in contributing to the research while amplifying the voices of the Chicana involved.

Latinx Critical Race Theory

The researcher will use Latinx Critical Race Theory (LCRT) as a framework to challenge data collection methodology and use testimonios to tell the story of the Chicanas participating in

the research study. Latinx Critical Race theory stems from Critical Race Theory; however, this particular theory not only focuses on the understanding of the oppressive aspects of society but also considers other aspects such as language, gender, sexuality, immigration status, culture, and more (Garcia, 1995; Hernández-Truyol, 1997; Montoya, 1994; Solorzano & Bernal,2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000; Valdes, 1996). Five themes make up the perspective of LCRT; one, in particular, focuses on challenging dominant ideologies, and another is to make further commitments to social justice. In this study, the researcher explores ways social and cultural capital enhances the opportunity for Mujerista practice to occur and supports the Chicana population. The Mujerista practice that will be the focus is mentorship. LCRT is a framework, so the Mentee and Mentor tell their experience through their lens and experiential knowledge. This research challenges the dominant ideologies of conducting research and emphasizes the importance of naming the individuals involved as the experts (Solorzano & Bernal,2001).

This study will use testimonios derived from Chicana Feminist practice and their narrative as a research methodology that challenges academic knowledge production (Huber, 2009). Using testimonios to share Chicana stories, inform practice in education, and make further commitments to social justice. The LCRT framework is used to understand the areas Chicanas are navigating in higher education to thrive and the importance of sharing their narratives to inform future educational practice. The LCRT framework and challenging research methodology complement the primary conceptual framework of Mujerista Theology because of its commitment to denounce oppressive behavior but rather let the Chicana navigate their journey while valuing who they are culturally.

Mujerista Theology and Theory

Yosso's community cultural wealth framework, social and cultural capital suggests there is power in forming a collaborative network or community of similarly identified student groups and scholars to process the educational experience while preserving the Chicana culture (Ek et al., 2010). Like LCRT, Yosso's framework also complements Mujerista Theology. This theology centers on the racial, ethnic, cultural, and gendered aspects of being a Chicana, challenging oppression, and being liberated through practice(Villasenor et al., 2013). Isasi-Diaz (1993) stated that the strategy of Mujerista theology is for Latinas to denounce oppressive behavior and commit to liberating practice toward their future (Isasi-Diaz, 1993). Mujerista embodies resiliency, strength, activism, self-expression, creativity, spirituality, connection, self-definition, and liberation of all oppressed people (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Davis, 2016). This definition and theology were created so Latinas, including Chicanas, can work together in partnership and community towards a common good and, in this case, an equitable educational experience. It is suggested that Chicanas find community and benefits in social and cultural capital forms such as sororities or cultural community spaces and Mujerista Theology incorporates cultural and social capital. In this case, the researcher learned more about how mentorship informed by Mujerista theology enhances the Chicana undergraduate students, staff, and faculty experience. Mujerista Mentorship is an asset-based model that focuses on relationship-building and strays from the hierarchy of Mentor vs. Mentee (Villasenor et al., 2013). Chicana will be allowed to commit towards liberation and denounce acts of oppression through partnerships and Mujerista Mentorship practice.

Research has recommended that Chicana staff, faculty, and undergraduate students benefit from programs rooted in Mujerista theology (Ek et al., 2010; Villasenor et al., 2013). This theology presents the opportunity for partnership between Chicana students, staff, and

faculty, which research suggests experience similar and significant barriers throughout their various stages of navigating higher education. Social and cultural capital enhances the opportunity for Chicanas to engage in intentional mentorship. Intentional mentorship can be described as an ethnically homogenous and Mujerista-informed practice. It is also suggested that intentional mentorship practice creates a sense of belonging in Chicana students, contributing to their persistence and retention. This next section will dive deeper into the impacts of Mujerista-informed mentorship created through social and cultural capital and used as a form of liberation from oppression within education.

Mentorship

The term mentorship has been defined and redefined over time. According to Merriam, Thomas, and Zeph (1987), mentoring contributes to the development of an individual, which can be defined as a "guide" (p.199). Mentorship should always be considered when considering the Chicana student experience, as research suggests it plays a role in their retention (Gloria, 1999). It is also essential to recognize the type of mentorship and why it impacts their persistence through higher education. As the previous section suggested, Chicana students have a better educational experience by building community and relationships with others that they closely identify (Gloria, 1997). This statement can also be described as ethnic homogeneity, defined as sharing identical ethnic identities or cultures with others in your environment (Santos & Reigadas, 2002). As Gloria (1999) mentioned, this type of mentorship allows Chicanas to find balance and even bridge cultural values and academics. Therefore, it is essential to recognize that ethnic homogenous mentorship is an impactful relationship between Chicana students and their academic persistence.

Mentorship helps Chicana students navigate higher education when they can share cultural knowledge and define their success (Figueroa & Rodriguez, 2015). Several researchers have recommended ethnic homogenous mentorship and have demonstrated that it positively impacts the Chicana undergraduate student (Crisp & Cruz.,2009; Ek et al., 2010; Hernandez., 2019; Villasenor et al., 2013). Ethnic *homogeneity* is sharing identical ethnic identities or cultures with others in your environment (Aleman & Gaytan, 2017; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Santos & Reigadas,2004). Research suggests ethnic homogeneous mentorship benefits Chicana undergraduates and considers their social, cultural, and gendered contexts (Villasenor et al., 2013). Providing opportunities for mentorship guides students to culturally tied communities, a sense of family, and building relationships. Ethnic homogenous mentorship serves as a source of guidance and empowerment for students, especially coming from an individual who can relate to their experience (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Santos & Reigadas, 2002). This type of mentorship presents opportunities to navigate higher education with someone who understands the power of family, the traditional pressures of being female in the Chicanx community, navigate institutional barriers and systemic racism that targets women of color (Ek et al., 2010; Villasenor et al., 2013). It also creates an opportunity to connect to resources academically, professionally, and socially.

Ethnic homogeneous representation and connections to Chicana staff and faculty also benefit a student's educational journey for several reasons, including what is listed above (Gonzalez, 2002). This representation is connected to validating non-traditional students (Rendon, 1994). Rendon (1994) suggested that socially and academically involved students found success and an easier transition into college. However, taking the initiative from peers, staff, or faculty is recommended to validate them, encouraging the students to believe they could

be successful (Rendon, 1994). Although validation can come from non-Chicana-identified staff and faculty, there is also a sense of empowerment and motivation that stems from ethnic homogeneous representation and relating to those in staff or faculty positions (Villasenor et al., 2013). This representation of Chicanas symbolizes the possibilities of their potential. Research has shown that this type of empowerment and opportunity for mentorship positively impacts the Chicana student persistence and retention rates (Villasenor et al., 2013). In addition, research demonstrated that the Chicana staff and faculty succeed in academia. Their visibility empowers and validates students by reminding them that through all the obstacles, they can achieve too (Gloria, 1999). Opportunities for validation can stem from the representation but, more importantly, when there is a chance for relationship-building, such as mentorship opportunities.

Mujerista Mentorship

The act of mentorship is well-intended, and many definitions of mentorship can be described similarly. However, another way researchers have suggested defining mentorship is a partnership (Crisp & Cruz,2009). Several redefinitions of mentorship benefit underrepresented groups and, in this case, derive from Mujerista theology. Mujerista embodies resiliency, strength, activism, self-expression, creativity, spirituality, connection, self-definition, and liberation of all oppressed people (Bryant-Davis &Comas-Davis, 2016; Rodriguez, 2019). This theory and definition aim to encourage Latinas to work towards a common good through a partnership and, in this case, create their own equitable educational experience. Research has recommended supporting mentorship with theories that better address the needs of the Chicana students and even benefit the staff and faculty involved in the mentorship pairing.

Mujerista Mentorship is an asset-based model that focuses on relationship-building and strays from the hierarchy of Mentor vs. Mentee (Villasenor et al., 2013). Villasenor et al. (2013)

suggest that Mujerista's theory challenges the traditional mentorship models and presents a mentoring model that supports underrepresented populations like Chicanas. Although the definition states that this benefits Latina, researchers have implemented and assessed their Mujerista Mentorship models and have found that Chicanas in higher education resonate with this type of partnership (Ek et al., 2010; Villasenor et al., 2013). Not only did Chicana students persist in their undergraduate education, but they also considered further academic aspirations. Since these mentorship programs are developed as partnerships, research suggests benefits for the Mentee and the Mentor through their social and cultural capital. Therefore, research suggests this type of mentorship program supports the Chicana undergraduate, graduate student, staff member, and or faculty member, depending on who is involved in the Mentee and mentorship role (Alarcón & Bettez., 2017; Ek et al., 2010; Villasenor et al., 2013). Mujerista Mentorship suggests that this partnership benefits both Mentee and Mentor, which would potentially help retain not only the undergraduate student but also the staff and faculty involved. These mentorship or relationships have created an opportunity to navigate higher education through their path while using that partnership as a resource. This theory and definition were created so Latinas, including Chicanas, can work towards a common good and, in this case, an equitable educational experience.

As previously stated, Chicana undergraduate students face several barriers that impact their educational journey. Similar barriers affect the Chicana staff and the faculty experience. Based on the Mujerista theory, this mentorship fosters a sense of solidarity between mentors and mentees. Mujerista Mentorship bridges the academic, professional, and personal fields under a culturally relevant framework for all parties involved (Villasenor et al., 2013). For Chicana students, when role models or Mentors are present, there is a significant impact on both

professional and academic success (Chandler, 1996; Huber et al., 2006). As previously mentioned, Chicana staff and faculty representation in higher education are essential for many reasons, including an opportunity for students to engage in Mujerista Mentorship. However, Chicana staff and faculty representation at four-year institutions are difficult to find (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Gonzalez, 2002; Turner et al., 2008). The representation of Chicanas in positions of leadership and faculty positions at higher education institutions limits their opportunities to engage in this type of mentorship. Therefore, institutions should reflect on the hiring practices of Chicanas and retain them in these positions. Research has suggested that the retention of Chicana staff and faculty is another reason the representation could be higher**.**

Chicana students find that family is a motivator; therefore, creating a chosen family within an institution and creating a support system to navigate institutional barriers together are impactful (Rodriguez et al., 2021). The Chicana undergraduate student population is continuing to grow. Therefore, institutions must make changes that ultimately improve the Chicana undergraduate experience. One of the ways institutions can support this community is by increasing Chicana staff and faculty representation. However, Chicana staff and faculty must still be more represented (Perez, 2019). As previously stated, Chicana staff and faculty face barriers while working at higher education institutions. Perez (2019) describes how Chicana staff and faculty are less likely to be promoted or tenured, impacting the length of time and presence at a given institution. Research has also shown us that Chicana staff and faculty experience ongoing discrimination, sexism, institutional racism, and more at four-year institutions, impacting the retention of these individuals (Aguirre, 2000; Turner et al., 2008).

Even if Chicana staff and faculty presence increase on college campuses, like Chicana students, the institution may need to learn how to support them. Barriers, racism, and

discrimination do not disappear just because institutions hire more Chicanx-identified staff (Perez, 2019). Research suggests that institutions should reflect on hiring initiatives and, more importantly, how to retain Chicana-identified staff and faculty (Castellano & Jones, 2003). Research suggests that advocating for practical retention efforts for Chicana staff and faculty is vital in serving Chicana undergraduate students to improve higher education persistence and retention rates (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007). Therefore, significant institutional changes must support and retain them throughout their academic journey. The Chicana staff and faculty can mirror those described earlier regarding the undergraduate Chicana student experience and not feeling supported or welcomed in academia (Ek et al., 2010; Villasenor et al., 2013). Like the undergraduate Chicana population building community, finding mentorship opportunities for guidance is a way to support Chicana staff and faculty through their professional endeavors (Ek et al., 2010).

Since Chicana faculty and educational leadership staff experience cultural and institutional barriers while navigating academia, Ek et al. (2010) suggest that Mujerista Mentorship is also essential and beneficial to support and retain them. Ek et al. (2010) used the example of Mujerista Mentorship and how it has benefited the research for the Educational Advancement of Latinas (REAL) collaborative. Chicana educators share that the tenure process is an oppressive experience that essentially influences their duration at the institution (Ek et al., 2010). This group aimed to support Chicana faculty through the tenure process and aspiring Chicana scholars navigating their educational journey (Ek et al., 2010).

Another goal for this group of women was to use Mujerista Mentorship to focus on relationship building and create a strategic model of resistance to combat the racism and sexism that Chicana women commonly face within academia (Ek et al., 2010). This REAL collaborative

uses Mujerista Mentorship to create an experience for Chicanas to feel supported, bridge the gaps for students, staff, and faculty, and define their success. As previously stated, Mujerista mentorship develops as a partnership between the student and the staff or faculty. It also creates a culturally relevant framework that works through inequity and injustice while resisting assimilated stress (Villasenor et al., 2013). Another intention behind Mujerista Mentorship is to persist in using what works for them rather than assimilate to the institutional standards. There is less time spent understanding each other's cultural backgrounds and more time assisting one another through their relationship with academia (Salas et al., 2014). Therefore, it is recommended that institutions use the example of the REAL collaborative and encourage ethnic homogeneity in Mentor-Mentee relationships. Mujerista mentoring supports the Chicana student population, staff, and faculty navigate similar institutional barriers (Santos et al., 2002).

Mujerista mentoring is an impactful intentional relationship because of the power of sharing narratives to lighten the load for themselves and future Chicanas. Researchers discuss the documentation and the power of storytelling to capture the cultural wealth, the community's ability to be resilient, and the resistance to institutional inequities (Ek et al., 2010; Lopez et al., 2020; Huber, 2009; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005). According to Bernal (2002), students of color should be recognized as creators of knowledge through their experiences and cultures using critical race-gender epistemologies. Eurocentric perspectives are viewed as the standard of beliefs and the construct of our world; however, these standards continue to be challenged through narratives and epistemologies (Bernal, 2002). Sharing narratives is also used to inform students, staff, and faculty of shared experiences and is a way for them to relate to one another. Narratives transmitted through the Mujerista Mentorship can be

used as data to inform educational and institutional practices to support the Chicana student population (Ek et al., 2010).

Researchers have collected these narratives from those who participated in Mujerista Mentorship and used the data to inform how their institutions can better support Chicana students, staff, and faculty (Ek et al., 2010). Current narratives help support future students as institutions create an equitable and culturally proficient educational experience. For Chicanas to experience Mujerista mentoring, there is a need for Chicana faculty or educational leadership staff to be a part of their journey. Unfortunately, Chicana-identified tenured staff is rare, and there continues to be a disproportionate number of Chicanx faculty across U.S. educational institutions (Ek et al., 2010; Contreras & Gandara, 2006; Turner & Myers,2000). Therefore, it is recommended that institutions reflect and use the narratives of current Chicana-identified staff on why they are struggling to retain Chicana faculty and educators. Finally, institutions may consider ways to encourage Mujerista mentoring networks that provide career-centered support for Chicana staff and faculty.

Summary

Institutions are continuously enrolling diverse student groups, but if they are committed to diversifying their college campuses, there should be a commitment to serve the needs of the specific student demographic (Smith, 1989). This literature review shows that institutional values and practices must provide a supportive, equitable experience for underrepresented student groups, specifically Chicana undergraduates (Cuadraz, 2005; Smith, 1989). Research suggests community spaces with other Chicana-identified people, and Mujerista Mentorship supports them by learning how to navigate higher education institutions. However, institutions struggle to

provide this support when limitations include the lack of Chicana staff and faculty representation to support Chicana undergraduate students (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).

When there is less representation, Chicana students have fewer opportunities to build relationships that could help navigate the cultural and institutional barriers in an academically rigorous environment (Salas et al., 2014). Higher education institutions should consider hiring and retention practices for Chicana-identified staff and faculty. Institutions should also conduct a consistent assessment to keep up with current trends and themes reported by Chicana staff and faculty (Stanley, 2006). It is essential to recognize that the Chicanx student population is growing and will continue to grow as they are one of the fastest-growing populations in the nation (Yosso, 2013). Based on the literature review, it is recommended that institutions reflect on what they need to serve Chicanas to degree attainment, the number of Chicana-identified staff and faculty, and how they support Chicana students, staff, and faculty to retain them.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As the previous chapter stated, Mujerista theology and Mentorship is an asset-based model that focuses on relationship-building and strays from the hierarchy of Mentor vs. Mentee (Villasenor et al., 2013). Mujerista Theology was the conceptual framework used in developing this program to create an intentional partnership that works to determine their success. This qualitative case study examined how this Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program, specifically the Chicana Mentee and Mentor relationship, benefits those involved through relationship building and serves as a motivation to persist. It investigated the experiences of the Chicana students, staff, and faculty involved in the mentorship program and how and why it directly impacted them.

This study sheds light on the barriers and benefits both Mentor and Mentee face in navigating higher education institutions. This study also investigated whether or not this program has supported them through their higher education experience. Specifically, this study explored how (and why) participating in the mentorship program as a Mentee has impacted their experience as a Chicana undergraduate student. It also explored how (and why) participating in the mentorship program as a Mentor has impacted their experience as a staff or faculty member. This study contributes to the minimal research conducted surrounding Mujerista-style Mentorship and aims to better inform higher education institutions on supporting the Chicana community in higher education.

This qualitative case study was composed of different phases. Phase One of this research study included analyzing a brief survey collected by the Mentorship Directors and implemented into the assessment practice of the program itself and is referenced as Appendix A. This survey

informed the researcher of the recent experience of those participating in the Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship program and the relationship between their mentorship pairing. The researcher conducted an open recruitment process and selected participants that met specific criteria.

Details regarding the criteria are listed later in this chapter. In Phase Two, those recruited into the research study participated in semi-structured interviews in order for the researcher to collect participant testimonios. Research on underrepresented populations, like Chicanas, emphasized the value of their knowledge, the power of a story, and using it as a form of data (Arriola, 1996; Garibay, 2020; Savala, 2014; Solorzano, 1997; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Zamudio et al., 2011). The researcher used the Mentor and Mentee experiential knowledge to inform higher education practice about the Chicana experience at higher education institutions and how to support this growing population.

Research Design

This research used a qualitative design method by collecting participant survey entries and verbal testimonios. This qualitative study aimed to understand how the mentorship program has impacted the Chicana undergraduate, staff, and faculty experience. Therefore, the researcher used pre-collected survey data and two semi-structured interviews. Testimonios have been used to document the narrative and experiences of historically oppressed and marginalized groups and therefore condemn injustice (Booker, 2002; Huber, 2009). After reviewing participants' individual and written survey responses, the researcher conducted two semi-structured interviews. One interview was an individual interview with the Mentor or Mentee, and the other was a paired interview with both the Mentor and Mentee. The researcher captured the testimonios from the Mentee and Mentor perspective as they navigate higher education while participating in this mentoring program and understand their relationship through this program.

Setting and Context

In the previous sections, the researcher pointed out that although there is an increase in Chicanx student enrollment, there still needs to be higher degree attainment for Chicana. Research has suggested that Chicana staff and faculty face similar social and academic challenges to Chicana undergraduates (Lopez et al., 2020). It also suggests they thrive in community and involvement in ethnic homogenous Mentorship (Lopez et al., 2020; Yosso & Solorzano, 2005; Villasenor et al., 2013). The researcher focused on Southern California Eucalyptus University because it has developed a Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship program to develop a partnership with its Mentor or Mentee. This research aimed to understand how this ethnic homogenous Mentorship impacts the Chicana students, staff, and faculty involved in this program. It is also essential to recognize that this research aimed to learn this perspective directly from the participants' voices. That is why the researcher used testimonios as the methodology of this study.

Research has supported the idea that educational institutions do not accommodate the lived experiences and stories of underrepresented groups like Chicanas (Aleman, 2013; Conchas et al., 2019; Yosso, 2013). Therefore, there is a need to listen to the Chicana experience and learn how to support them through higher education. It is also essential to focus on providing opportunities that ultimately support them on their higher education journey.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

At Southern California Eucalyptus University, 20.9% (6,976) of Chicanx-identified people comprise the undergraduate student population. A smaller percentage comprises the Chicanx staff and faculty population. This does not differentiate the percentage of Chicana vs. Chicano-identified individuals, which is why Chicanx is used. Staff Associations were

established to support the growing Chicana staff, and faculty communities and initiatives were implemented that have expanded over to support student populations. The Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship program was one initiative created to help foster community and an ethnic homogeneous mentorship opportunity. Before jumping into the participants and how they were selected for this research study, the researcher thought it would make sense to provide some information about this program and the historical context of how it was created.

Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program

The overall mission of the mentorship program is to provide support and partnership between Chicanx students, staff, and faculty as they navigate higher education. As previously stated, the higher education system was not created to serve the diverse student population and is still rooted in systems that serve most upper-class white students (Banks & Banks, 2004). The research has stated that this is also relevant to the Chicana staff and faculty. Therefore, these mentorship initiatives were created to help retain undergraduates by promoting a smooth transition from high school to college. It also allowed staff and faculty to build an intentional relationship with a student and build a sense of motivation for themselves. Secondly, it was meant to build a supportive partnership between Mentor and Mentee to create pathways and define their success.

The Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program was created at Southern California Eucalyptus University because the executive board members of the Staff Association felt that as staff members, they came together to be in community with each other. The Staff Association members mentioned how difficult it is to find a Chicanx Latinx community, which brought them together to be in a community. The Vice Chair of this association felt that this was an opportunity to invite students into this community as they most likely had similar feelings. The

Vice-Chair also felt that through personal experience at this large institution, mentorship retained her. The Vice-Chair put together a proposal that elaborated on what an ethnic homogenous mentorship program would entail and presented it to the rest of the Executive Board and the Vice Chancellor of Equity Diversity and Inclusion. This proposal and mentorship program highlighted Mujerista theology and ways we could build an intentional partnership with their Mentor and Mentee. This program aims to empower Chicanas to battle against structural inequalities in higher education and work towards closing the achievement gap (Villasenor et al., 2013). This included opportunities to engage with each other through social and professional development opportunities and regular assessments to consistently learn about how the program was doing. These engagement opportunities were tied to Mujersita theology and implementing activities and discussions surrounding resiliency, strength, activism, self-expression, creativity, spirituality, connection, self-definition, and liberation of all oppressed people (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Davis, 2016).

The Staff Association decided to pilot the mentorship program in the Summer of 2019 and created two new executive positions, Directors of the Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program. They began recruiting students, staff, and faculty through specific email blasts to students, staff, and faculty identifying as Chicanx or Latinx. The Staff Association also included tabling opportunities and flyering in resource centers specific to the Chicanx Latinx population. It is also important to note that students applied to be Mentees and staff and faculty as Mentors.

In the application, Mentors and Mentees are asked questions about themselves. Some of the questions on the application asked about their identities, including race, ethnicity, and whether or not they are transfer, first-generation, or commuter students. Questions regarding identity allowed participants to add other identities they felt were essential to disclose. Some

other questions include information about their major, hobbies, and, most importantly, why they are interested in participating in this mentorship program. With this information, the program directors decide who should be matched with one another. Upon reading the applications for each individual, the directors would look at each Mentee's application and develop themes from their responses. The directors would compare this to Mentor applications that stated similar responses. Some key themes from this application are advice on combating imposter syndrome, finding the Chicanx community, and persisting when things become difficult. Many applicants, Mentors, and Mentees stated similar reasons why they wanted to participate in this mentorship program. Because applicants stated similar reasons why they wanted to participate in this program, the Directors looked at other factors, such as majors, departments of study, or similar interests and hobbies. The Directors take this matching opportunity seriously, hoping to pair all the participants that would be an ideal match.

Mentors participate in intentional mentorship training while Mentees attend welcome orientation from a student and Mentee perspective. In the training and orientation, the Mentor and Mentee both learn about the historical context of this program and the meaning of Mujerista Theology. The Directors present the engagement opportunities for the year and how they are tied back to Mujerista Theology. They also emphasized the importance of partnership in this program and how, although guidance from the Mentors will emerge, the directors hope both parties will learn something from this experience and feel empowered by each other. The directors then spend time with the Mentors discussing best practices to develop a partnership rather than a hierarchy. The Directors also spend time with the Mentees, welcoming them into this program along with tips and advice on navigating this mentorship relationship. The directors also spend time discussing topics surrounding self-advocacy, resiliency, and empowerment. The overall

intention of these training sessions and orientations is to get participants on the same page about this program and understand the Mujerista approach we encourage throughout this program.

The Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program follows the following timeframe. In summer and early Fall, the Directors conduct the recruitment process. In early Fall, the participants are informed about their match. The directors invite the participants to their corresponding sessions. Mentors attend their training, and Mentees attend their orientation and welcome session. The Directors also host a mingle that invites everyone into the space to get to know each other, participate in activities to get to know their match and be in community with other Chicanx Latinx students, staff, and faculty all over campus. In the remainder of the Fall, the Directors send biweekly newsletters to remind individuals to communicate with their mentorship pairs, send out assessment surveys, and provide information on how to engage with the match. These surveys help to inform the Directors how the program is going and helps them understand the relationship of the matches. One of the first surveys the matches submit will be used as Phase One in the data collection process. Some of these activities include sending a picture with a mentorship match and offering them prizes. The Directors also provide a coffee voucher program with a campus coffee shop where the mentorship participants can get free coffee once a quarter, but they must be in attendance with their match. The Directors also provide more opportunities for engagement in the Winter and Spring Quarter. The opportunities include social, professional development, and affinity space discussion opportunities. Mentors personally contact and communicate with Mentees once a week to encourage them to use services, programs, and resources to contribute to their overall positive and successful experience at the university. However, Mentees can also reach out to their Mentor and check in; this communication only sometimes relies on the Mentor.

The Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship program stops providing opportunities after the Spring Quarter. However, the Directors still send information that could help support participants in the program throughout the summer and encourage engagement. The following year, we begin the same recruitment process and allow participants to connect with the exact match or be matched with another individual. The program directors use assessment feedback to improve the program every year. They aim to provide a learning experience for those involved and have learned that most participants appreciate this program as they have returned to it since the inaugural year. It is also essential to recognize that this program has grown. In the program's first year, the Directors matched twenty individuals; in the second year, they matched thirty individuals; and in the most recent year, they matched eighty. The directors felt that participants of this mentorship program would be perfect candidates for a research study and to learn more about the experience of some of those who have participated in this program.

Participant Recruitment

Participants for this research study were Chicana students (Mentees) with Chicana-identified staff or faculty (Mentors). An open call for participation and recruitment was conducted in the form of an email to recruit people for this study. The participants were required to identify as female and Chicana to participate in the research study; the researcher recruited eight participants—four participants identified as Mentees, and the other four identified as Mentors. At most, eight participants signed up to participate in this research study. However, if the researcher had to limit the sample, the researcher selected the participants based on pairings that identified as first-generation and had participated in the mentorship program for the entire academic year. Upon filling out the interest form, they also needed to converse with their mentorship partner and claim that their Mentor or Mentee agreed to participate in the study.

The researcher identified eight participants, retrieved survey responses of these participants from the Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program Director, and finally conducted two semi-structured interviews with them. The survey was meant to understand more about the individual involved in the program and their mentorship relationship. The first interview was conducted individually to understand the individual's experience navigating higher education, their perspective on how the mentorship program has impacted their experience, and why. The second interview was conducted between both the Mentor and Mentee. It aimed to understand the relationship dynamic between the two and learn any themes from all participants involved in the study. Participants received a thirty-dollar gift card as a token of appreciation for participating in this research study.

Data Collection

The data collection method for this case study consisted of two phases. Phase One consisted of gathering pre-existing survey responses collected by the Mentorship Directors to obtain information about those involved in the mentorship program and to understand their experience thus far. This survey was used to understand the participants involved in the program and their perspective on their relationship with their Mentor or Mentee. The first phase helped the researcher understand everyone's experience in the program thus far, including the study participants.

Phase Two of the study began with the researcher conducting an open recruitment process. An email was sent to all mentorship participants. The second phase involved the study participants engaging in two in-depth and semi-structured interviews. The first interview was conducted individually, which included collecting the Mentee or Mentor testimonios separately. This would be followed by a second interview that included both Mentor and Mentee. The

researcher met with the participants in person at the Southern California Eucalyptus University in a private space since there was a discussion of personal questions about themselves and their experiences. The researcher met with the participants to build personal rapport and engage in active listening. This was an opportunity to observe visual cues as the participants were being interviewed to capture what might not be seen while interviewing via Zoom or the phone (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). The researchers also asked that the participants consent to audio-recorded interviews to be transcribed later. The audio recordings were saved using a pseudonym for each participant and saved on a password-protected computer that the researcher owned.

Surveys

In the Mujerista Mentorship Program, participants are asked to complete a quarterly assessment throughout the academic year to understand the Mentors and Mentees and their experience in this program. The questions are focused on learning more about the person and their journey in higher education up until this point and describing their mentorship relationship. The researcher was able to review the survey and code the responses regarding their barriers, support, and mentorship relationships. This was an opportunity for the researcher to get a glimpse of the relationship of those participating in the research study through the survey analysis. The second and third data sources were the study participants engaging in semi-structured individual and paired interviews to gather their testimonios.

Interview Testimonios

Testimonios thrive from the oral narrative of a person's lived experiences and use it as a source of knowledge (Delgado Bernal et al.,2012). As the previous chapter mentioned, Mujerista Theology and Latinx Critical Framework challenge the dominant ideologies of conducting research and emphasize the critical nature of an individual telling their story (Solorzano &

Bernal, 2001). Mujerista Theology emphasizes the importance of advocating for Chicana's to be the leaders of their own journey and pathways. Testimonios emphasize the power of telling their story directly by those experiencing their journey through higher education while participating in this mentorship program. The researcher used testimonios because previous research studies utilized it as the best way for participants to share their perspectives and capture the true essence of Mujerista theology but also believe that in order to give Chicana's voice power gave them the platform to use it (Ek et al., 2010). The researcher also used Mujerista Theology as a way to inform the questions that were asked during these testimonios. The researcher asked questions to understand the Chicana student ,staff, and faculty general experience in education and mentorship. However, they also formulated the questions to understand how participating in this specific mentorship program relates to their experience and how it's impacted or changed their experience. Mujerista Theory helped to develop the questions by asking how this mentorship relationship may or may not have contributed to this advocacy for Latina's and collective power. These testimonios were collected through two semi-structured interviews and will be conducted individually and between the Mentorship pairs.

After the researcher received Institutional Review Board approval, interviews were conducted in the Winter and Spring Quarter 2023. The participants had to read and sign the consent forms prior to participating. The researcher conducted two semi-structured interviews, one individually and the other between the two mentorship pairs. Although the consent form mentioned that the interviews would be recorded during their session, the researcher confirmed with the participants that we could record the interview. The audio was transcribed after every interview using the REV.com transcription service. The researcher also reviewed the transcripts in order to correct any mistakes or errors. Participants were given a copy of the interview

transcripts and allowed to provide feedback or clarification on the transcripts, also known as member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After each interview, the researcher also wrote an observational summary to track any reactions through body language and to capture any visible emotional reactions. Upon the interview completion, the researcher could also summarize the observational components of this interview. The researcher conducted member checking and allowed the participants to review a summary of the observational notes and a summary of their testimonios.

Data Analysis

The researcher describes the qualitative data analysis as iterative (Merriam & Tisdell,2016). The researcher used the previously collected qualitative survey data and verbal interviews of the Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program participant. The researcher decided to use verbal testimonios to capture the experience of both mentor and mentee, and in order to capture the themes that would emerge from these testimonios. Although there is overlap between all three theories mentioned in the previous chapter, Mujerista Theology is the dominant theology and used in the selection of the researchers methodology. The reason why the researcher selected this as the dominant ideology is because Mujerista Theology was created so Latinas, including Chicanas, can work together in partnership and community towards a common good and, in this case, an equitable educational experience. Which is what the Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program aims to do. This data analysis aimed to verbally tell the story of the participants and their experience in higher education while participating in this program and how it can inform better education practice for future generations.

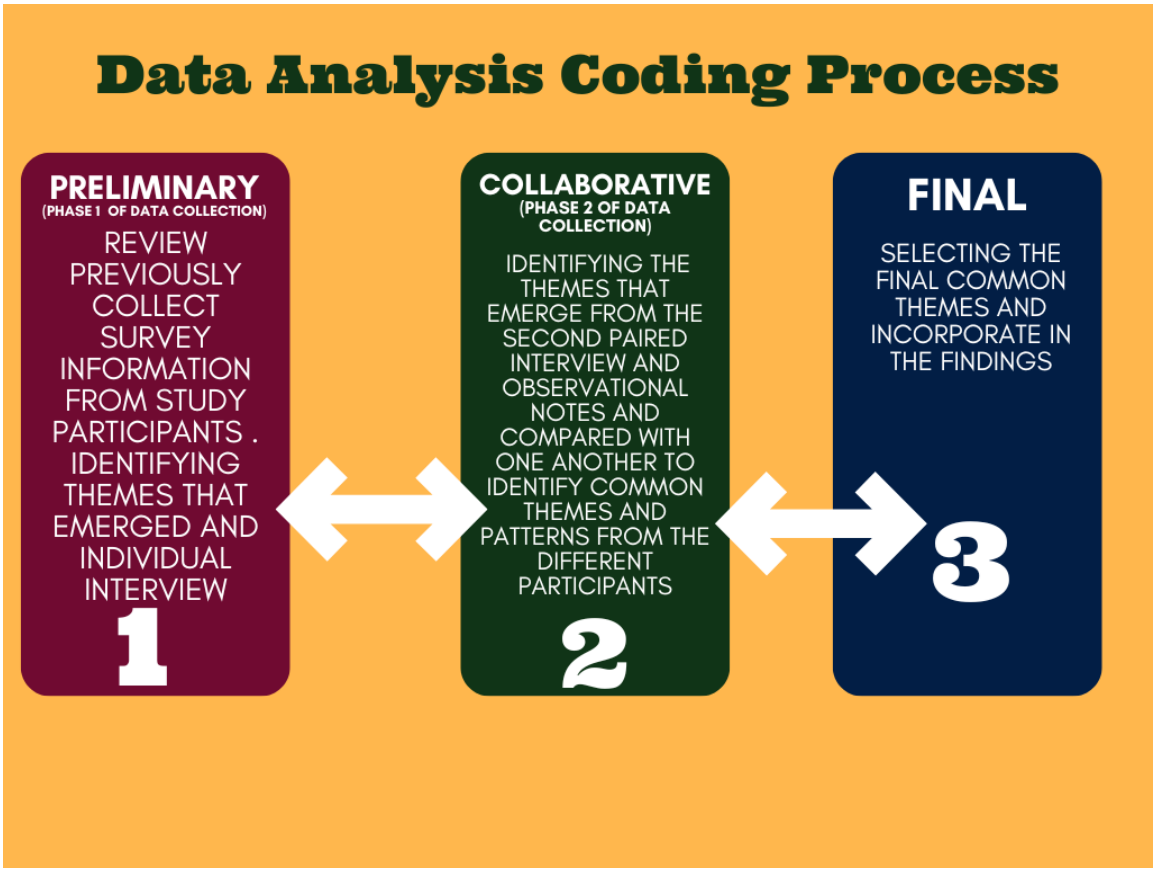

Figure 2. Data Analysis Coding Process

This data analysis process mirrored researcher Lindsay Perez Huber's (2009). Like Huber, the researcher broke up the data analysis process into three iterative stages to analyze the survey data and testimonios (See Figure 2). The researcher selected this process because the researcher wanted to be as thorough in the data analysis process but also rooted in the participant narrative that was emerging from the different types of testimonios. For example one was an individual interview and the other was a paired interview. These research participants are actively participating in the Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program , therefore the researcher wanted to capture their perspective on their experience and their relationship between one another and how it has impacted their journey.

Like Huber (2009), the researcher aimed to use testimonios to disrupt and inform educational research. The researcher collected survey data from the director of the Mentorship program, eight individual testimonios and eight paired testimonios. The researcher then used the Mujerista Theology to isolate themes that emerged from the data in the preliminary stage through an open coding process. As expected, there were also themes that emerged from the secondary themes as well. These themes informed the researcher how ethnic homogenous mentorship influenced the Chicana staff, faculty and student experience and if it impacted their persistence.

The first was preliminary, the second was collaborative, and the third was the final analysis (Huber, 2009). As mentioned, the researcher conducted an open recruitment process and emailed all mentorship program participants for this research study. There was a form that Mentors and Mentees completed if they were interested in participating. Eight participants or four Mentor pairs filled out the form and moved forward in the research study process. The preliminary stage of the data analysis was to review the previously collected individual surveys of those participating in the mentorship program to develop preliminary codes to produce a set of emerging themes. The researcher had a preliminary code book, and a table developed using characteristics derived from the Mujerista theology described in Chapter Two. The researcher was also mindful of themes that emerged and overlapped from the secondary frameworks, Community Cultural Wealth and Latinx Critical Race Theory. This codebook grew as the researcher coded the data. The researcher had access to Mentors' and Mentees' survey data that asked questions regarding them as individuals, their experience at Southern California Eucalyptus University, and their experience with their mentorship pair. The researcher also collected the participants first testimonios through an individual interview. This data was also used as part of the preliminary data collection because it was with the individual participants and

gathering information about their experience in education and in the program as well. This information allowed for the researcher to compare any discrepancies between the individual interviews and the paired interviews.

The secondary data analysis stage is named the collaborative stage, which includes analyzing the paired interviews between Mentor and Mentees. The paired interviews allowed for both mentor and mentee to reflect on their experience, open up the dialogue about mentorship experience and how this one differs, and for the researcher to observe the relationship between the two. After coding each participant's survey response and individual interview, the researcher developed a code book and continued to contribute to it with themes that emerged from the paired testimonios. Codes were created for each question and compared with the other participants to identify significant patterns. Then, the researcher reviewed the themes from all surveys to identify the most poignant and common themes from all survey data.

The individual and paired testimonios were also included in the secondary collaborative data analysis stage. All participants engaged in an individual and a paired interview. The transcripts of each interview were provided to the participant for review, and the participant provided the researcher with any clarity if necessary. The researcher used the transcripts from each interview and created a code book from each testimonios directly after each interview with each participant. Participants also participated in a paired interview, and the research took a similar coding approach. The themes were noted for each question, and the codes were compared to the other interviews to create dominant themes. Codes were also developed regarding the summary of observations created after each interview. Themes emerged after every piece of collaborative data listed above, such as surveys, interviews, and observational notes. They were compared to one another to identify common themes, crucial data points, and potential patterns.

The third and final stage consisted of collaborative coding, where the researcher reviewed the data again. There was a first round of coding and then a second to present the most poignant themes from the testimonios. This final analysis solidified the most poignant and common themes in the findings. Overall, the data presented significant themes about the Chicanas participating in this mentorship program and how it has impacted their higher education experience. Since this is an iterative process, the arrows in the illustration above are double arrows, allowing the researcher to repeat steps to ensure the data is coded thoroughly.The researcher would go back to between steps to capture codes that were not captured the first time they coded the data.

Summary

This research study aimed to understand how the relationship between Chicana Mentors and Mentees impacts their retention at higher education institutions. This study used a qualitative methodological approach using survey data and testimonios to share the personal narrative of the participants in this study. This also highlighted the story of the Chicanas involved in the mentorship program, their experiences navigating higher education, and how their partnership in this program has impacted their experience. This study contributes to the scarce research that has been conducted surrounding Mujerista Mentorship.

This study recognized the impacts of Mujerista Mentorship, and if so, why does this relationship impact these participants? This research study aims to highlight how higher education institutions, especially Hispanic Serving Institutions, recognize that specific populations like Chicana need specific support through their higher education journey. This is not limited to the Chicana undergraduate but also the Chicana staff and faculty. This study highlighted the importance of intentional mentorship and how this can support Chicana

undergraduate retention. It also highlighted how this specific Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship program is only effective if Chicana staff and faculty are represented. This study also provides higher education institutions with suggestions on how to serve the Chicana student population.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Overview of the Research Study

This study examined how and why Mujerista Mentorship relationships impact those involved through relationship building and serve as a motivation to persist. It investigated the experiences of the Chicana students, staff, and faculty involved in the Mujerista Mentorship program at Southern California Eucalyptus University and how and why it directly impacts their retention. The study contributes to research surrounding Mujerista Mentorship and its impacts on our Chicana students, staff, and faculty in higher education.

The researcher interviewed eight participants (four Mentor/Mentee pairs) from the Mujerista Mentorship Program at Southern California Eucalyptus University. The researcher had an open recruitment process where they emailed the Mujersita Mentorship program to participate in a qualitative case study. Essentially, the researcher participants were paired with each other as Mentors and Mentees in the mentorship program. To explain further, the Mentors who participated in this mentorship program were paired with the Mentees who participated in this mentorship program. The importance of this is to explore the relationship between the Mentors and Mentees who participate in this mentorship program throughout the academic year and, at this point, have a relationship with one another. In this next section, the researcher will talk about the participants.

Research Questions

As a reminder, the research study focused on the following research questions:

1. What perceived institutional support and barriers impact the persistence and retention of Chicana undergraduate students, staff, and faculty?

2. Does the relationship between the Chicana staff, faculty Mentors, and Chicana undergraduate students' Mentees participating in this mentorship program affect student persistence/retention? If so, how?

3. Does the relationship between the Chicana staff and faculty Mentors and Chicana undergraduate students' Mentees participating in this mentorship program affect staff persistence/retention? If so, how?

Introducing Mentorship Pairs

The researcher has highlighted the general makeup of the research participants. All of the research participants identify as Chicana and are members of the Mujerista Mentorship Program. The students who participated had varying majors and were at different points in their Academic years. The staff members who participated have varying positions at Southern California Eucalyptus University. Table 1 shares more information about those who participated in the research study.

Table 1. Description of Mentorship Pairs

Group Mentor Number	Name	Title	Identity
Mentor - Group 1	Marisol	Undergraduate Advisor	Chicana- Mexican American
Mentee - Group 1	Violeta	Transfer 4th Student Year- Psychology	Chicana- Mexican American
Mentor- Group 2	Jessica	Adjunct Faculty and Graduate Research Assistant	Chicana- Latina
Mentee- Group 2	Dulce	Transfer 4th Student Year- Sociology	Chicana- Mexican American
Mentor- Group 3	Sarah	Program Coordinator	Chicana- Mexican American
Mentee- Group 3	Jackie	3rd Year Student- Psychology	Chicana- Mexican American
Mentor- Group 4	Maria	Assistant Director- Alumni Association	Chicana- Mexican American
Mentee- Group 4	Lola	4th Year Student- Media	Chicana & Peruvian

The researcher previously mentioned who the participants of this study were; however, they will now provide more insight into those involved in this program and how long they have navigated this mentorship relationship.

Violeta (Mentee) and Marisol (Mentor)

Group One comprises Mentor Marisol and Mentee Violeta, who both identify as Chicana and first-generation students. Mentor Marisol and Mentee Violeta grew up in the same city in Southern California, another commonality aside from both identifying as Chicana and first-

generation. They have both been involved in this mentorship program for one academic year. Mentor Marisol and Mentee Violeta meet twice monthly and communicate regularly via text message and email. These two described their relationship as both professional and personal as they communicate about things outside of school, employment, and personal. They mentioned that some ways they support each other is by celebrating each other for their accomplishments and encouraging each other to go for opportunities they may not have considered. They also mentioned how they share resources with each other that they may not have known about up until this point.

Mentor Marisol described herself as very family-oriented and rooted in her Mexican culture. She described herself as the oldest of two siblings and the first to attend college. She described her family as very supportive of her academic endeavors, but like most first-generation families, she described them as unfamiliar with navigating this journey. Even so, she explained how she learned the importance of ethnic homogenous mentorship early on in her undergraduate experience and described her Mentors and her family as being her biggest motivators to persist through the hardships she experienced in academia. Mentor Marisol completed her bachelor's at an institution in California and shortly after completed her master's at a different Southern California institution. Mentor Marisol has worked for Southern California Eucalyptus University for a few years as a department advisor and aimed to participate in mentorship opportunities to serve students who may need additional support.

Mentee Violeta is a transfer student at Southern California Eucalyptus University and described her experience as nontraditional as a first-generation college student. She stated how her family serves as her source of motivation to pursue higher education. Mentee Violeta talked about how few people in her community pursued a higher education, motivating her to persist.

Her passion lies in mental health and increasing conversation about mental health in the Latino community. Eventually, she aims to have a mental health-focused resource or facility back home and give back to her community. She mentioned how she learned about this mentorship program through her student employer as she was helping to distribute flyers to other students. She mentioned how, at this point at this institution, she had yet to meet many students who looked like her. She jumped at the opportunity and felt instantly connected to Marisol, not only because they both are Chicana but because they grew up in the same neighborhood and considered themselves family-oriented.

As the researcher interviewed each participant, they learned how much they valued each other and formed a connection with each other quickly. The Mentor and Mentee expressed deep gratitude and emotion for each other in the paired interviews. They both described this experience as accessible and relatable to one another because they had so much in common. It was also apparent that their relationship was a partnership rather than a hierarchy between Mentor and Mentee. For example, Mentor Marisol has supported Mentee Violeta through recommendations of courses and sharing resources on how Violeta can navigate this journey at a four-year institution. MenteeVioleta is also invested in Mentor Marisol's academic journey and professional growth; she encouraged and suggested programs while we conducted the interview.

Dulce (Mentee) and Jessica (Mentor)

Group Two is composed of Mentor Jessica and Mentee Dulce have been involved in this mentorship program for one academic year. Jessica and Dulce were also from the same neighborhood in Southern California, identified as Chicana, first-generation students, and shared similar socioeconomic status growing up. Jessica mentioned her challenging experience growing up and her relationship to education. Her mother made her understand the importance of

education even though she did not have the means to do so herself. Jessica mentioned how her mother wanted her to be successful and not be a statistic. After high school, Jessica attended a community college and eventually transferred to a four-year institution where she met her first Mentor through her undergraduate experience. Jessica expressed with so much emotion about how important it is for students to experience mentorship and, more importantly, ethnic homogenous relationships with those in positions of leadership and faculty. She mentioned how the first time she witnessed a Chicana as a professor, she exclaimed with tears, "We are out here…my people are out here". There was minimal representation, and there still is not much representation of Chicanas in higher education. This is why Jessica has continued to serve as a resource for other Chicanas navigating higher education.

Like Jessica, Dulce grew up in a similar household, and her parents encouraged the importance of education. She also attended a community college and transferred to Southern California Eucalyptus University. Dulce has a passion for immigration and is pursuing a career in immigration because of her family's experience navigating immigration challenges. Dulce shared that the recent loss of her father angered her and encouraged her to pursue a career in immigration. She mentioned how she has found mentorship to be encouraging for her to persist in higher education and inspired by Chicanas like Jessica, who serve as a reminder that it is possible. She is currently applying to graduate school to pursue a doctoral degree and aims to focus her research on immigration.

Jessica and Dulce communicate via email and text and meet occasionally. Something both Jessica and Dulce stated is that they decided that their relationship could be built with each other through communication and not necessarily seeing each other regularly. Part of that communication is essential because they mentioned that they both are busy individuals and value

any time they can provide to each other, even if it is not in person. Overall, even though they mentioned how they did not meet in person as often, they were still in each other's lives and developed a relationship with each other and their methods of communication. They also mentioned that they felt their relationship could progress because of the expectations they set for each other and the fact that they had so much in common. Both Jessica and Dulce discussed how they both were there for each other by being able to talk and work through the barriers they have faced by being Chicana's in higher education. They also were able to be there for each other when it came to similar family dynamics and how it plays into their educational experience. Jessica mentioned in the paired interview that she applauded whoever conducted the matching process because they could relate to each other on many different levels. Overall they mentioned that they support each other by sharing resources with each other that they feel would benefit their educational endeavors in the future.

Jackie(Mentee) and Sarah (Mentor)

Group Three is composed of Mentor Sarah and Mentee Jackie. They both identify themselves as Chicana and first-generation students. Sarah and Jackie described themselves as family-oriented and connected to their cultural roots.

Jackie is an undergraduate student who considers herself very involved at Southern California Eucalyptus University. She mentioned how she grew up in a city in Northern California from the University but is extremely close to her family. Her parents immigrated to the United States from Mexico and had to endure immigration status for a long time. She has other siblings who are currently navigating higher education together. She describes her family as a significant source of motivation growing up and for her academic success thus far.

Sarah went to a different institution to complete her undergraduate degree. Sarah stated her mother motivates her the most. Sarah's single mother raised four children and created her own business in the United States. She stated how she has always encouraged Sarah to take chances and take advantage of her education. Sarah has advanced her career after completing her undergraduate degree and hopes to pursue an advanced degree shortly.

This group was involved in the mentorship program for an academic year. Jackie and Sarah both mentioned how, although they do not meet frequently, they still communicate with each other via text message or email with one another. Similar to group two, they mentioned that they value the time they spend together and understand that they both have a lot on their plate; however, even though they are busy individuals, they described their relationship as easy and relational. Both Jackie and Sarah mentioned how, in the past, when they developed a mentorship relationship, it took time to feel comfortable with one another, and they appreciated that in this partnership, it was easy for both of them to relate because of these shared identities.

Lola (Mentee) and Maria (Mentor)

Group Four is composed of Mentor Maria and Mentee Lola. They have been involved in this mentorship program for a full academic year. Both Maria and Lola identify as Chicana and first-generation students. Although Lola mentioned she identifies as biracial, she stated she connects most with her Chicana side.

Maria grew up in an agricultural town in California to parents who immigrated to the United States. Maria is the oldest of four siblings and described her experience breaking into higher education as exciting. Her father was not necessarily supportive of her pursuing her degree as it did not align with traditional Mexican gender roles. Eventually, she did go to a four-year institution and shared that she lost both parents during her undergraduate journey. She took

on the role of caring for her younger siblings at a young age but was able to persist in these hardships through the care of her Mentor, family, and friends. Maria described her journey through education as an overall developmental experience.

Lola describes herself as both Chicana and Peruvian and also identifies as first-generation. Even though she mentioned that she identifies as both Chicana and Peruvian, she also stated that she felt connected to her Mexican roots. Part of that is due to the location of where she grew up and near Mexico. Lola described that her family has always encouraged her and her siblings to pursue an education. She mentioned that they always pushed for that opportunity so that she could get a job that she would enjoy. She also stated that although this mentorship program assisted in many ways, she and her family constantly pushed her to persist in her educational endeavors.

Maria and Lola regularly speak via text and often meet in person. They mentioned how they felt they could connect, not just about school but outside of school, and topics that impact them personally. It was clear that they had a very comfortable relationship with one another because of how they spoke. Lola even referred to Maria as "Mija." "The term "mija" is a Spanish term that can have several meanings but originally meant my daughter or my girl. The researcher found it endearing that this is how Lola referred to Maria and interesting that Lola, the Mentee, referred to her Mentor Maria. In this interview, it was also shared that Maria and Lola had worked together in a short capacity prior to the mentorship program through another department at this institution. Lola mentioned that she was happy she was assigned to Maria as a Mentor because she mentioned how shy she was and felt that having a surface-level relationship prior to this mentorship program made it easy for her to warm up to Maria and build a more prosperous relationship with each other.

The researcher was able to access survey data collected by the program directors for each participant and interviewed each participant individually to learn more about the person, their journey into higher education, and whether or not this mentorship program has impacted their journey so far. Then, the second interview between the Mentor and Mentee was used to learn more about the Mentor and the Mentee relationship. After these interviews, common themes and subthemes emerged from the data to summarize the experiences of those who participated in this Chicana mentorship program.

In the next section, the researcher will describe the themes that emerged from the mentorship pairs after they provided their testimonios through their interview and paired interviews. In the next section, the researcher will review the first piece of data collected from the program, which consists of the survey information that all participants in the Mujerista Mentorship program are asked to complete.

Research Findings

Themes

With the assistance of the Dedoose coding software, the researcher could input all of the transcripts from the first individual interviews and the second paired interviews. This data analysis was modeled after researcher Lindsay Perez Huber's (2009) data analysis process using three iterative steps to analyze the survey data and verbal interview testimonios. Like Huber (2009), the researcher aims to use testimonios to disrupt and inform educational research. Although the survey responses included important information, it was a required assessment from the mentorship directors used to learn more about the relationship of the pairs. Data from the participant testimonios was transcribed and analyzed on three separate occasions to generate the most common themes that emerged. The qualitative data from the participant's survey was

also entered into Dedoose. After the researcher entered the transcripts and survey results into Dedoose, the researcher conducted a first round of coding to begin the data analysis process.

Seventeen codes emerged collectively from all of the interviews. Although these codes were prevalent multiple times throughout the research, some sub-themes and themes emerged more frequently throughout the participant testimonios. The researcher then conducted a second round of coding to narrow down the most common themes that emerged versus sub-themes. Finally, the third coding round solidified the five major themes and subthemes. The following figure below, Figure 4., will show how the themes from the data and the sub-themes emerged. These themes emerged from the testimonios and survey data and are also relevant to the framework for this research study.

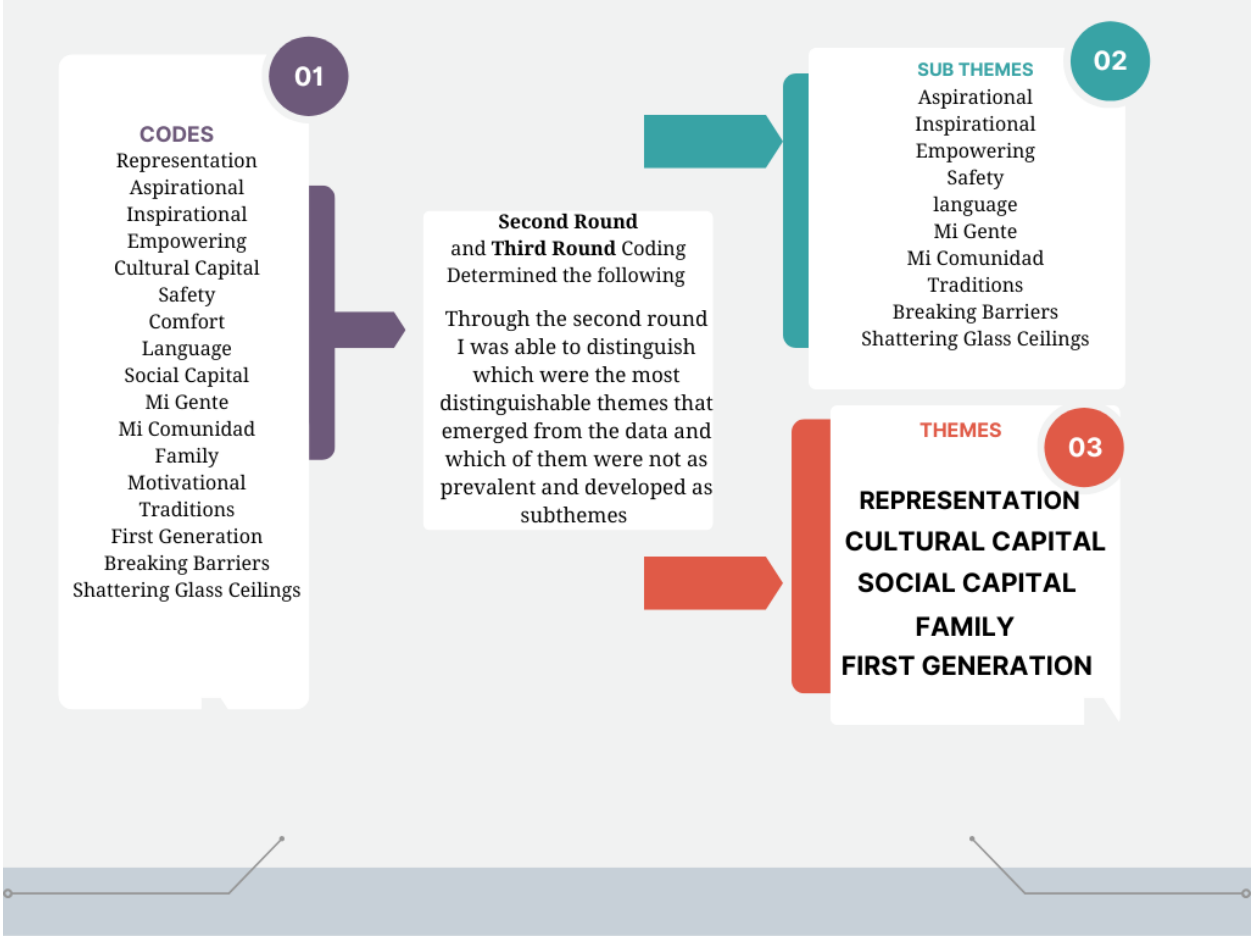

Figure 3. Data Analysis Process and Outcome

In the following section, the researcher will elaborate on the themes and subthemes that emerged from the survey data, individual and paired interviews.

Representation

The first theme that emerged from the interviews was the impact and importance of representation. As the researcher has stated in the previous chapters, there is a small number of Chicana representation in Higher Education. The number of Chicanas in higher education is attributed to the lower retention of this student population and the percentage of Chicanas pursuing advanced degrees (Contreras et al., 2022). Therefore, it is rare to find this type of

representation in staff and faculty at higher education institutions. Participants disclosed that this mentorship program officially introduced them to the Chicana community at this large research institution. Although this institution is an Emerging Hispanic Serving Institution, and statistically, more students identify as Hispanic, Chicanx, or Latinx, some participants said it was hard to find a Chicana community or "mi gente, mi comunidad." That being said, It was stated by all groups that representation mattered for both Mentors and Mentees and, interestingly enough, for similar reasons.

Mentors mentioned how they felt representation mattered because they aspire to serve people who may have similar experiences. After all, they know how hard it is to navigate a system not built for underrepresented and marginalized communities. Some participants mentioned how institutional barriers were more accessible to navigate when there were Chicana representations they could aspire to be like. However, it was also made clear that this type of representation was scarce. Mentors also mentioned how they felt empowered to be around students who identified as Chicana because they understood how it felt to be in this position when facing the obstacles that still exist today. Lastly, Mentors mentioned how these students inspired them and who would represent the next generation of Chicanas facing similar challenges as they navigate higher education. It was the mentality that moving the needle together as a group is more powerful than moving it solo.

Some of the Mentees stated similar reasons for why representation mattered to their educational journey. The following will present some of the study participants, and testimonios demonstrating the impact representation has had on their journey in higher education.

> Representation is a lot for me because other people have many privileges I do not have. I guess I grew up in a very poor community, so I did not see many people like me go to school. Even when I got here, I noticed there was not much representation here. It was not until I got an email about this mentorship program

> at my job that I felt meant to be introduced to this opportunity. Seeing someone like Marisol from the same area where I grew up and who has gone through something similar is aspirational. I can do it, too. (Violeta, 2023)

Violeta shares how, in her experience, she did not know of people who went to college from her hometown. She struggled to see the representation once she got to this institution until she applied to this mentorship program. Violeta stated that she found the experience to be aspirational. Violeta knew someone to whom she could relate so much and was able to advance to higher education. Another layer to this mentorship pairing is that not only Violeta and Marisol identify as Chicana. They grew up in the same city in Southern California. She stated she was inspired and felt she could succeed just as her Mentor, Marisol, did.

> My sisters are great motivating factors for me just trying to get them through college. As Latinas, we need to see representation. So, just becoming part of that representation too and dismantling the narrative of what others and stereotypes of what others impart onto us and telling them that that is not true and helping them navigate the world and helping them create themselves as their agents. My sisters are not the only reason why I feel representation is so important; so is Violeta and other Chicanas. (Marisol, 2023)

Marisol found motivation in others who were navigating higher education and needed representation. She mentioned that this representation served as a way to dismantle the narrative of what others think we should be. She felt that she wanted to be that form of representation for Chicanas navigating higher education. Like Violeta and Marisol, the other mentorship groups also spoke on the importance of representation and how it impacts the Chicana experience. The primary reason why representation is important is because there are few visible representations of Chicanas in higher education. However, one of our participants had a different experience and stated she had the opportunity to have Chicanx representation at her institution. She found this representation aspirational and, therefore, recognizes the importance of this representation.

> I remember taking that Chicano studies course. X University was among the first to have a Chicano studies PhD program. So I was lucky that that was accessible to

> me, the culture, the teachings. Thus, because of that, we had a faculty that was a little more representative of me. So I remember doing a summer abroad program in Queretaro, and one of the faculty members who joined us was Dra X, who wrote a lot about Mexican culture. I mean, I always just thought she was a badass. I was like, dang, this is the first female professor I had, and she is at Chicana and just incredible. Up to that point, the majority of my faculty were either white or Chicano men because there were, again, mostly men at institutions. Moreover, I remember thinking, wow, this is cool. It feels nice to see another female of color as a Mentor and professor. (Maria, 2023)

Maria served as a Mentor in this program and pointed out how, at her undergraduate institution, she could witness Chicanx representation. This was the opposite experience for other participants in this mentorship program. However, although Maria states she had a lot of Chicanx representation at her undergraduate institution, she agreed that because of this experience, she understood how important this representation was for her in her college experience, especially when there was Chicana representation. She found her Chicana Professor inspiring, and she was one of the few because it was mostly Chicano who were the faculty at her institution. It emphasizes the importance of Chicana representation in higher education and how it aspires to other Chicanas to navigate the higher education system. This was made clear when another Mentor shared how, in her experience navigating higher education, she did not visibly witness Chicanx-identified educators until she transferred to a four-year institution. According to Jessica, it inspired her to persist as she grew up in a family that experienced homelessness. Although her mother valued education, many barriers prevented Jessica from achieving her goals to persist in higher education.

> So when I transferred to the four-year institution I attended as an undergrad, I took a political science class with a Latina, and she had a Ph.D., political scientist, brown curly hair. I was like, damn, our people are here. And then, I had a Mexican professor. He was an adjunct. I did not know what an adjunct meant back then, but I was like, I knew he was in a position of power. He was pretty chill, and he was Mexican straight from Mexico, So when I met this professor, I was like, damn, we can do it. (Jessica, 2023)

Jessica shared an emotionally rich testimonio on how Mexican and Chicana representation inspired her persistence in higher education even as she navigated multiple adversities throughout her journey. Jessica continues to share that she persists in serving as a representation to other Chicanas and hopefully inspires them to navigate similar institutional barriers she experienced as an undergraduate student almost a decade ago.

Overall, the theme of representation to both Chicana Mentee and Mentor serves as a form of aspiration. Mentees mentioned how they felt that being connected to someone who worked at a higher education institution and identified as Chicana was inspirational and aspirational. Mentors mentioned how, as they navigated undergraduate, they understood the importance of representation and how it served as a form of motivation and aspiration to persist in higher education. The researcher also would like to point out that students, staff, and faculty are not only finding this representation at this institution but connecting through this identity-based mentorship program and providing opportunities to form collective power. Therefore, representation connects to the Mujerista Theology framework as it presents an opportunity to formulate collective power within institutions and challenge typical practices by encouraging Chicanas to be the authors of their own stories.

Participants continued to speak about the creation of collective power through representation and the impact of building social and cultural capital with other Chicanas.

Social and Cultural Capital

The second and third theme that emerged from the interviews of participants was the presence of social and cultural capital. Both Mentors and Mentees mentioned how building capital is essential when it comes to navigating unknown territory. However, the research also acknowledges how, in these testimonios, Mentors contributed to the Mentee's knowledge rather

than it being a mutual benefit. The researcher grouped these because they discussed how they tie the secondary guiding framework of Community Cultural Wealth to the Primary Guiding framework of Mujerista Theology with the social and cultural capital. Social and cultural capital creates opportunities for Chicanas to network and share specific community resources that support them through their education journey and are also tied to cultural values. Cultural capital also presents an opportunity to unite under-represented groups to develop their wealth of knowledge(Yosso & Garcia,2007). As the previous section discussed, participants mentioned how, although this research institution is an emerging Hispanic Serving Institution, it is easier to find this community if they seek it or are presented with an opportunity to engage in it, like this mentorship program. Although some of the participants stated that finding a specific Chicana community may have been difficult at this institution, they were grateful to build capital within this mentorship program and assist in creating their path and defining their success.

Participants in this research were asked why they wanted to participate in this program. Some of the research participants stated that they joined this mentorship program because it highlights the fact that members of this program would be connected to other Chicana-identified people at this institution. It was also made clear in the Mentor training and Mentee orientation that social and cultural capital is what the program strives to obtain through this partnership. It was also mentioned that they felt a connection to their mentorship pair and were comfortable asking questions to help build that capital. They mentioned how they learned beyond just the resources they could network with other people on campus that they would only have come in contact with if they were a part of this mentorship program.

> With Marisol, I mean, even though my family and boyfriend have helped me, Marisol has been there for me in places they could not. An example I could give you is that I was unsure what psychology course to take because most of them were packed. I did not really like this one class because it is not podcasted, and I

> am the type of person who likes to attend lectures, but I also like for it to be recorded because I guess I get distracted easily, and I want that as a backup. I use captions. So, I just put the captions on with the podcast, which helps me out. Moreover, Marisol told me about this one class. It seemed very interesting. It was with Dr. X, who is now my favorite professor and identifies as a black man, and it is just about topics in psychology. This was one of the few professors of color I had ever had. She was just pretty much describing to me that in that course, it is more about watching movies and analyzing the main characters and seeing what type of psychological effects they have going on with them, which sounded interesting to me. She also suggested someone who was a faculty of color, which I appreciated. So I was like, okay, I will try it. (Violeta, 2023)

Violeta describes the type of resource her Mentor Marisol was able to serve as she was trying to figure out academia, connect with faculty of color, and remain interested in her studies. Marisol could share information about courses that Violeta was unaware of and with a Professor who identified as part of the BIPOC community. Marisol also suggested a course that would serve Violeta's interest and connect her to the faculty of color. This serves as another example of cultural capital because Marisol is sharing academic resources to provide navigation through this Chicana-specific mentorship program. Violeta discussed in a testimonios how in her undergraduate experience, she wished she had someone to help her navigate these experiences and, unfortunately, had to navigate them on her own. However, she joined this mentorship program to help Violeta build this wealth of knowledge so that these students, like Violeta, did not have to figure out these things alone. Violeta and Marisol continued to share cultural connections and resources as they engaged in this mentorship program. They also engaged in social networking opportunities with one another and with the introduction of other campus partners, such as the faculty that Violeta mentioned.

The researcher distinguished cultural and social capital as a prevalent theme in the interviews because examples emerged from all the testimonios. The other mentorship pairs discussed how social and cultural capital has played a role in their partnership by providing

opportunities to build networks and knowledge while navigating this research institution. Navigational capital was another theme that emerged from the testimonios. Mentors and Mentees talked about how navigating an extensive four-year institution is intimidating, and there are so many things they need to be aware of upon entering. However, having someone who relates to them culturally and has insight into navigating the system is beneficial. One example of how social, cultural, and navigation capital emerged from the mentorship pairs would be through Jessica and Dulce's testimonios on their experience navigating higher education.

> For me, higher ed, in general, was new to me and my siblings, my close friends; we did not know much about how to navigate it. When I was in the mentorship program, I was eager to learn more because I wanted to do research. I wanted to get another degree but needed to figure out where to look. Do I Google it? I google it, and it still needs to make sense. So I wanted someone with experience, and it was nice to have someone who can share their knowledge, understands, and has the same cultural background as mine and is doing it in higher ed. Also, Jessica was welcoming, open, and friendly, and I felt comfortable asking questions and did not feel judged for it. I felt she understood me because we were so similar in our journey and background. Thus, for me, it helped me so much to know another person in higher ed and to know that I have a cultural connection and I had a better resource and know how I could also be part of a just join and be up there. (Dulce, 2023)

Dulce shared how she and Jessica's relationship started strong because they could relate on several levels. They grew up in the same neighborhood in San Diego County. They came from families with similar socioeconomic status, parents from Mexico, and first-generation students navigating higher education. This made it easy for them to jump into this partnership and discuss further topics because they quickly established a connection. Jessica mentions how, in her experience, she did not have a form of mentorship until later in her educational career. Therefore, she felt compelled to make connections in this mentorship program and help her Mentee build capital.

> I did not have mentorship until I was in the master's program. It was a very lonesome process at the community college. Different policies existed back then,

> and now there has been much more effort to make the pathway from community college to the university. However, still, it is not where it should be. However, I did not have mentorship until I reached the master's program after all these challenges, and I felt that giving back was important. As Dulce mentioned, having somebody from a similar background, having somebody that could understand the path, provide resources, relate to their cultural experiences, or also how do you know what you do not know? Providing insight into these questions. Even if you go online, it is like much capital is passed on socially, and there are things people might not know, especially when they are first-generation. So if their parents did not have an education, my parents only did both in junior high school. (Jessica, 2023)

The researcher uses Jessica's testimony to highlight how, in her experience, she used the lack of mentorship to assist others through their journey, especially first-generation students, because she understands the importance of how capital and knowledge are essential to moving forward. Jessica highlights how it is more challenging when they do not have the resources to support them through their journey because they do not know what they do not know. Therefore, she felt that providing Dulce with personal tools to build social capital and sharing cultural capital is a way we succeed through a system not created for historically marginalized students.

Other pairs, such as Jacky and Sarah, also discuss how they have connected not only on similar cultural backgrounds of being Chicana but studying abroad in Milan, Italy. Sarah studied abroad during her undergraduate experience, and Jacky plans to do so later this year. Coincidentally, it is the same study abroad program Sarah did a year prior and provided insight on navigating this new experience and tips on traveling overseas without family or friends for the first time in her life.

> We talked a lot about studying abroad because it is such a huge, important experiential learning opportunity that many first-generation students do not get to experience. Alternatively, they do not know a lot of the resources available to fund this opportunity, which can feel daunting. That is a huge celebration, and it is something that we bonded about right away and built capital surrounding that journey. Moreover, part of that comes from that knowledge that it is like, whoa, I did that, and it took much work. Moreover, it is often many uncertainties, perhaps because of our socioeconomic stance and what it means to go away from home

> already going into college rather than what it means to go home away from our home country or the country we reside in. So I think those are all large steps, something that we have celebrated in a way, me and Jackie. (Sarah,2023)

Sarah discussed how she felt that she and Jackie talked about the study abroad experience and knowledge about this process. They engaged in conversations about this process, the resources connected to this experience, and the similarities they experienced culturally, seeing as they both traveled overseas for the first time without their family. As they mentioned, they are family-oriented, and studying abroad became something they gravitated toward when it came to topics of conversation. They talked about ways to cope or manage being away and far away from family for an extended period. They discussed how being Chicana helped them understand and relate to this topic and created a sense of knowledge on how to navigate this new life experience.

The researcher also discovered that Mentors felt that Mentees and this mentorship program, in particular, helped keep them connected to campus and build their capital. Some of the Mentors in this program were new to this University and needed to learn more about it. The Mentors that may have been there longer still felt they learned things from the Mentees themselves because of how significant this institution is. Sarah talked about how being a new staff member and finding community at this institution is challenging. She claims that she has trouble navigating this system herself and found that although she feels identity is essential to this connection, the difficulty navigating the system is something she and Jackie have in common.

> We just understand each other, and it makes it easier to have a cultural connection from the start. I am not saying that we all have the same experience, but just being able to be empathetic to one another. It is just that it is easier. I will say, though, that I am not sure if it is all because of our identity or I think it is partly because of the system. I think as a Mentor and staff it has been difficult, in that sense, to build those relationships; even in my own experience, I have not felt very supportive as Latinx staff at this institution. It has been quite a difficult transition into this position a lot of the time. However, I think it is important to do so when

> you have the opportunity to connect with someone; it is just not easy to find it. I was lucky I was able to put myself in this program. (Sarah,2023)

Sarah mentioned that although identity is essential, she recognizes that the struggles of navigating the system also brought these two together into this mentorship program. She mentioned that she pursued this mentorship program to seek community and connection with other Latinx individuals. As she also mentioned, it took work to do that alone. As a staff member, Sarah was seeking her form of cultural, social, and navigational capital. This was also the case for Mentors Jessica, Marisol, and Maria.

The mentorship pairs shared on multiple occasions how they built social, cultural, and navigational capital with one another through various experiences and shared a wealth of knowledge for the individual to build this cultural capital.

Family

Every mentorship pair described the family's value and impact on their educational journey. Even though all of the participants in this research study identified as first-generation, they named family the reason they pursued higher education. A few of the reasons behind the importance of family differed from each other but shared similarities in why this mattered. Participants share that some of the reasons they felt family played a role in their journey in higher education came from serving as a point of motivation for them, especially if their parents could not pursue higher education themselves. Some other themes that emerged were the need to give back to their parents as they contributed to their educational journey through support and encouragement. Both Mentors and Mentees shared similar sentiments about how the family has motivated them and continues to do so even after their higher education journey. In the following paragraphs, the readers will see direct quotations that support these themes.

Giving Back

Mentorship Group One continued to discuss the importance of family and how, even though they identify as first-generation, they felt their family was a source of motivation, gratitude, and persistence. This motivation to persist was shaped into forms of gratitude, as participants spoke about how they wanted to give back to their parents for sacrificing what they did to give them a better opportunity and life. Marisol described the importance of her family, how it has impacted her experiences, and how it shows up while navigating this institution.

> The biggest motivator is my family, and a lot of it is that they made me who I am and continue to motivate me. Moreover, more importantly, as I navigate the nuances of my next chapter of life, they keep me grounded. Moreover, I think especially when we are talking about values in your professional work or going somewhere that validates you and values you as a human, I always remember that if I ever feel like I am losing my sense of self in a position or in a new concept of what I am navigating, I always take myself back and am I still going back to the values that my family taught me? Furthermore, that always keeps me grounded. And not many people can and can get that. So I feel so lucky to have a family that does that for me. (Marisol, 2023)

Marisol states how much of an impact family has on her experience in education and what has got her to this point. She clarifies that even though she was the first to ever go to college and her parents have not experienced higher education, they have been supportive. She also mentions how her parents have sacrificed a lot for her and her siblings to have this opportunity to pursue her education. Like Marisol, every Mentor and Mentee has highlighted their family in some way or another as a source of motivation and support. The Mentors and Mentees often spoke to the point that they felt empowered and fueled to make their immigrant parents proud and to provide for them as they did for them. This motivation also connected to why finding an ethnic homogenous community and this cultural relevance at this institution was vital as it tied back to their family and traditions. Mentors and Mentees understood the need and drive to give back to their families. This theme of giving back and being in a community with others who understand this creates a sense of belonging and community. In some of these

interviews, the researcher learned that family has served as a source of motivation but in different ways.

Expectations

Lola described how education has always been emphasized growing up in her family. Lola also mentioned that although her parents did not attend a four-year institution or graduate with a college degree, there was pressure to obtain a degree and have job security. Lola stated the following about her experience.

> My mom's Mexican, and my dad's Peruvian. They both moved here to the States. Growing up, I would spend time predominantly with my mom's side of the family. So, if you were to ask me, do you feel more Peruvian or Mexican? I feel more Mexican because I would hang out with that family more. Let me see, oh, I'm first generation. Three of my siblings graduated from San Diego State with their bachelor's, and my oldest sister got her master's at Boston University. And yeah, I've just been surrounded by education and constantly reminded that school's important. My parents always reminded me of this importance so that I would get a good job and not end up working at McDonald's or something.(Lola,2023)

Although Lola is on the pathway to obtaining her Bachelor's and aiming to get another bachelor's shortly after graduating, she did feel that the family served as a form of motivation to obtain a degree; however, it was not necessarily a positive source of motivation. In some ways, Maria was able to relate to Lola. Maria mentioned how they could relate to the family challenges that came along with navigating higher education and tied to family and cultural traditions.

Through this interview, the researcher learned more about how Maria and Lola used these challenges as a form of motivation to persevere. In Maria's interview, she described how her mother supported her pursuit of a higher education and had to navigate through her father's traditional values. She described him as being against her leaving their home. Maria's mother convinced her father it was a positive experience for her. Maria eventually went through her

undergraduate experience with various challenges but learned the value of relationships and family and using them as a form of motivation.

> A lot of it has to do with growing up culturally; I definitely learned the value of family, connectedness, and love, and so that carried over into the relationships I make today. So definitely giving, loving, very kind. So that is what I seek and create in personal relationships, both at work and with students.(Maria, 2023)

This testimonio emphasizes how Maria's family has impacted her educational journey both in a supportive and challenging way. She then uses it as motivation to persist and influence others like Lola. Maria and Lola emphasized how sharing similarities in culture and its a family relationship was able to serve as motivation and deepen their relationship.

> I think this relationship, it's easy. I think it's nice that Maria is Mexican because she can relate to some stuff I tell her. So I remember one time I was talking about my family and how a certain situation was challenging, and it was nice not to have to explain every little detail just already understood. She's like, oh yeah, you mean this. I'm like, yeah, exactly. And it's just for me; it's comforting talking to someone who shares the same culture and the struggles that come with it. (Lola, 2023)

> Yeah, I agree. That's what led to it becoming such a deep relationship because we have a shared cultural background, and that closeness and challenges with family easily translated to the closeness in our mentorship relationship, which was nice. Yeah, I also think not having enough brown people around was nice to have designated time with her, but it was at least going to get my daily dose of brown; otherwise, I wouldn't see another brown person on campus that day. (Maria, 2023)

Several other mentorship groups described the importance family has played in their role in education either as a student, staff, or even both. They also connected the family to ethnic homogenous mentorship. These testimonios described how having strong family relationships is tied to culture. Chicanx is a very community and collectivist culture (Rinderle & Montoya,2008). There is also a sense of understanding about family dynamics when individuals share similar cultures. Mentorship pairs discussed how this also creates comfort from others who understand

each other. Mentors and Mentees shared the importance family played in their experience and how it continues to impact their relationships with others.

First-Generation

Another theme that emerged from all of the participants in this research study is that they identified as first-generation. Not only did they identify as first-generation, but they mentioned how participating in a mentorship program in the past or recent years has impacted their ability to persist.

First-generation is a person whose parents did not attend a four-year institution (University of California San Diego,2023). According to this definition, all participants, Mentors, and Mentees were first-generation. They also mentioned numerous barriers they came across because there were many things they did not know until they were living their college experience or after. Some things that the participants mentioned are that mentorship and representation influenced the persistence of their journey and a reason why Mentors decided to participate in this program in the first place. Mentees and Mentors mentioned that being first-generation, they did not know what they did not know, so finding mentorship was something they sought. All participants discussed their journey as a first-generation Chicana in higher education and how that manifested in their educational journey. For example, Jessica shared how her first-generation experience impacted her desire to support other students as a Mentor.

> I was eager to do my part in remembering my own experience and my journey going up in higher education that it was pretty much impossible now to navigate, as I've shared before, being a transfer student myself, being a first gen college student. Still, nobody in my family has a higher education degree and somehow miraculously made it to U C SD for the Ph.D., which very few of us have this opportunity. I thought, well, I don't know. I feel that I could help somebody else because I think mentorship is the only way to. It is not the only way, but it is one of the most crucial elements of expanding opportunities, especially in higher education, to others. So I thought it was a great opportunity to make this, give

> back, and continue bringing more folks into making social justice efforts and changes, especially for first-generation Chicanas. (Jessica,2023)

Jessica shared that being a first-generation Chicana was a problematic experience then and even now as she is a graduate student adjunct professor. She wanted to be able to give back to her community because she understands how difficult it is to navigate something they are unfamiliar with. Jessica felt a need to give back and help others break more glass ceilings because even though time has passed, barriers still exist when it comes to navigating the first-generation experience.

Mentees such as Sarah also mentioned the importance of being celebrated as a first-generation student. Through this mentorship partnership, she found comfort in celebrating these wins. Sarah talks about how sharing these multiple identities with her Mentor was helpful to feel she could be herself and celebrate things considered to be "just another thing you do in college.

> I liked when Sarah brought up how some celebrations may seem small to other people, and some people wouldn't celebrate, but as a first-generation and lacking that, it's something that we need to celebrate. And I think that is something to highlight because when I think about a mentorship relationship, sometimes it's like, oh, well, if I mentored someone who I thought was very successful and only talked to me about academics. I couldn't relate to them in other ways; I would maybe feel a little bit judged in the ways or like I haven't felt like I've succeeded here. But because I can relate to Sarah in many ways, being first-gen is one of them. I know I can celebrate the small wins; she will get it. For me, a win is getting into a class, getting an internship, or being recognized for something significant. And for other people, it might just be like, oh, well, that's something you do in college. But being first gen, I think it's something that I celebrate a lot more. (Jackie,2023)

In general, they could relate to each other on multiple levels, allowing both Sarah and Jackie to understand each other's needs to support one another. Being first-generation was an identity that showed up in multiple instances. Another example between the two is that Sarah studied abroad in Italy as an undergraduate, and Jackie was planning on studying abroad in the same city as Sarah. They bonded over this commonality and celebrated that only a few first-

generation students take advantage of this opportunity in college for many reasons. Violeta and Marisol also mentioned that they are both first-generation students who talk about the similar challenges they faced navigating higher education and how they continue to push boundaries to define their success. Marisol mentioned how she likes to remind Violeta that the institution does not get to define her experience or what she can handle; only Violeta can do that for herself.

> I think our meetings just as much as I hope to give you the power to know that you can navigate this university 100%. Don't let the university tell you that you can't handle this. You're a transfer student at a four-year university. I don't have that transfer experience. So I always like to remind her of that because she always gets down on herself. But yeah, there are many things we can relate to, one of them being that we are both first-generation and come from families with a myriad of factors that impact us positively and negatively. Still, we're just first-gen students trying to make it out, and you will have already done it, and you will continue to do so. (Marisol,2023)

Marisol's statement read as empowerment and encouragement as she spoke to her Mentee. It stemmed from personal experience and how she successfully navigated this journey and reminded Violeta that she could do this. Some challenges may impact this journey; however, Marisol reminds Violeta that she can overcome these challenges. Both Mentors and Mentees made similar statements. Mentors empowered and encouraged their Mentees that they understand the challenges that come with being first-generation and that there are ways to find your path and own success. Mentees spoke on how their Mentors served as a form of aspiration by their words but also existing in their roles. The Mentors and Mentees spoke about how they are impacted by each other and the persistence they have to continue in order to break glass ceilings and make it the "normal."

Mentorship Relationships

Overall, the Mentors and Mentees spoke about how these themes relate to their mentorship relationships and connections. Mentors spoke to how participating in this program

brought them to the Chicana community at Southern California Eucalyptus University. They mentioned how, being at a large institution, it is hard to find the Chicana community; they found that this program got them closer to finding students, staff, and faculty. Within this program, they not only interacted with their Mentor or Mentee but were invited to socialize with other students, staff, and faculty involved in the program. This allowed people to build a community with other Chicanas and the social, cultural, and navigational capital. Mentors also shared how they were deeply inspired and empowered by the Mentees. Mentor Jessica shared that she is constantly inspired by other Chicanas navigating this system like her Mentee because it is one more person contributing to the change and inspiring others. Mentees shared how the themes mentioned in this chapter relate to their relationship. Mentees shared how the representation of Chicana in leadership positions, such as staff or faculty, was a source of inspiration. They also mentioned how being at a large institution, it can be challenging to find their community or other Chicana, so they felt this mentorship program was able to provide that connection to this community. Not only was there an opportunity to build relationships with Chicanas in these positions at the university, but they were also able to build social, cultural, and navigational capital through this partnership. Violeta mentioned that without this program, she would not have been able to navigate many academic resources if it was not for her Mentor. She felt that Marisol played a significant role to the point that she could discover things she did not know to ask.

The researcher learned that the Mujerista mentorship program impacted both the Mentee and Mentor. Overall, the themes or reasons for how they impacted the Mentee or Mentor may have differed. The research participants shared their gratitude for this program because of this relationship. They also found a community of other Chicanas at this institution. Not only did the

Mentors and Mentees build a relationship with each other, but they were encouraged and often participated in the social and professional development opportunities that involved all Mentors and Mentees participating in this program. This opened opportunities for Mentors and Mentees to build relationships with other Chicanx people outside their Mentee or Mentor relationship. The purpose of these opportunities was to encourage community building within Chicanx affiliate spaces. The researcher connected these themes to describe these mentorship relationships' benefits and dynamics.

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher shared information about the outcomes of the research study itself, along with more information about the participants involved in the research study. They wanted to capture a part of the individual's story to capture why they decided to participate in this mentorship program and what led them to where they are now. The researcher also discovered five significant themes from the data: representation, social capital, cultural capital, family, and the first-generation student identity. This chapter described the themes from the testimonios and how they were tied to the mentorship relationship. The researcher learned that there was a relationship built from participating in this program and a community discovered at this institution through participating in this program. In the next chapter, the researcher will elaborate on how the researcher was able to answer the research questions through the data analysis process, describe limitations they faced through this research, and discuss any implications for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher will discuss the research questions and how they were answered through the survey responses and the semi-structured interviews. The researcher will also elaborate on the limitations of this research study as well as the success of this research. Finally, this chapter will share implications for future research, theory, and practice.

Addressing Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What perceived institutional support and barriers impact the persistence and retention of Chicana undergraduate students, staff, and faculty?
2. Does the relationship between the Chicana staff and faculty Mentors and Chicana undergraduate students' Mentees participating in this mentorship program affect student persistence/retention? If so, how?
3. Does the relationship between the Chicana staff and faculty Mentors and Chicana Undergraduate students' Mentors participating in this mentorship program affect staff persistence/retention? If so, how?

The researcher addressed the research questions using the data collected from the eight participants in this research study and answered the research questions through survey data and the testimonios shared in both interviews. The following section will break down each of the three research questions.

Research Question One

Research question one asked what perceived institutional support and barriers impact the persistence and retention of Chicana undergraduate students, staff, and faculty. The researcher was able to use survey data that all participants in the Mujerista mentorship program filled out.

Institutional Support

This survey asked questions regarding ways participants of this mentorship have found support through their academic journey and barriers, if any. The research wants to recognize that some participants use the overall term Latina or Latinx but sometimes use the specific term Chicana. Although the researcher is focused on the Chicana population, they also recognize that the Latina or Latinx population encompasses the Chicana population. Therefore, in the following sections, some participant responses use Latinx or Latina. The participants shared that some of the institutional support they have received is being in a community with other Latinx-identified people, such as this mentorship program and other spaces specifically for these underrepresented communities. Some of the participants and previous research discussed that community is essential, and so is the representation and retention of other Chicanas in positions of leadership (Ek et al., 2020; Villasenor et al., 2013). The researcher recognizes that this might seem like something other than an institutional initiative, seeing that these communities may be created and formed on their own. However, according to Institutional Research, this institution has had a 4.7 % increase in Hispanic/Latino(a) staff over the past four years (University of California Institutional Research, 2023). Southern California Eucalyptus University is hiring more Chicanas for these positions. Therefore, there is more room for the community to be built amongst each other and serve as this source of representation.

Community

As previous research surrounding Mujerista theology and mentorship has mentioned, being in community with other Latinas and Chicana works to build a bridge to their success in higher education instead of assimilating into the dominant culture and ideologies (Lopez et al.,2020; Villasenor et al.,2013). The common theme of support and empowerment emerged as participants shared while in the community with other Chicanas and women of color (Leek,2016). The researcher recognizes that some participants mentioned Chicana specifically, and some referred to the general term women of color. The participants also mentioned that they decided to use the term women of color because often there are few opportunities to be in community with other Latinas or Chicanas. Some participants mentioned that this mentorship program was the first opportunity they were given to be in a community with other Chicanas. Mentors mentioned that they were fortunate to have women of color and that type of representation in their department but understand that this is not the reality of all people who work at this institution. Participants mentioned that when they witnessed other women of color succeeding, it created a sense of empowerment and, in essence, collective power. The idea is that if one wins, we all win. This is also validated through previous research and speaking about how celebrating and witnessing other women of color's success has inspired people to advance and persist in their professional and educational attainment (Lopez et al.,2020; Viernes Turner,2007)

It was also mentioned how support was found while participating in an ethnic homogenous mentorship program (Lloyd et al., 2020; Reyes et al., 2021; Villasenor et al., 2013). As the researcher previously stated, Chicana educators found institutional support was tied to being in a community with other Latinx-identified people or other females of color at a large research institution where this specific population, although growing, is still underrepresented (Ek et al., 2010)**.** Many of the Mentees also shared examples of how they found support through

this mentorship program and were empowered by other women of color they have come in contact with at Southern California Eucalyptus University. Some Mentors discussed how they felt reconnected with their identity through this program by giving back to other Chicanas and being in a community with other Chicanas (Lopez et al.,2020). Previous research validates how ethnic homogenous mentorship opportunities create an opportunity for individuals to reflect on their identity through the experience and learning what being Chicana means to others and creating a sense of pride (Bernal et al., 2009; Lopez et al., 2020)

From the Mentee's perspective, Mentees shared how they found support through their undergraduate experience at Southern California Eucalyptus University. Similar to the Mentors as current staff and faculty, Mentees found support by being involved in communities with people that looked like them. Some examples include programs catering to low-income first-generation students, knowing that other students have similar backgrounds and identities. Over the years, research continues to validate the importance of identity-based communities or centers for underrepresented populations, and it has confirmed that these communities serve as a place of support and cultural wealth (Delgado-Guerrero & Gloria, 2013; Villasenor et al., 2013). Mentees participants also mentioned how they found support and connection through the Mujerista Mentorship program because of the emphasis on the ethnic homogenous community. Participants described how the mentorship program supported them because they felt in community with their Mentors and aspired to be like them. Not only did they reference this program as a space for community, but they also mentioned how they felt they learned ways to succeed by building their bridge to success like their Mentors did as undergraduates and continue to do so in their roles as educators. As literature has suggested, these intentional mentorship programs create an opportunity for individuals to envision themselves as part of the change and actively participate

in closing the gaps (Villasenor et al., 2013). Representation of females of color or Chicana serves as a form of support because, at a large institution where they are underrepresented, they are not always accepted in all spaces but seek comfort in these particular spaces (Flores & Garcia, 2009). The research is consistent with what was learned through the survey responses and what was learned through the interviews and each participant's testimonios.

Institutional Barriers

Mentors and Mentees faced significant challenges throughout their educational journey, and some of them attributed to navigating institutional barriers. Some of the common themes that were mentioned were inequality specifically impacting historically marginalized communities retention rates, scarcity of resources working towards Latinx retention, and lack of visible Latinx representation.

Inequity and Racism

Some Mentors and Mentees were vulnerable, expressing what they felt was a barrier while navigating higher education as a student, staff, or faculty member. There was a common theme that historical and current inequalities persist and impact the retention of historically marginalized communities retention rates not only students but also staff and faculty. The following section will describe some institutional barriers that align with most Mentors and Mentee experiences.

Mentors expressed that in their roles, they have personally endured and witnessed levels of racism towards Latinx students and faculty. It was mentioned that because there is not a large number of Latinx representation in higher education, whiteness is seen as the “norm,” which creates inequality for those who do not identify as white (Aucutt, 2022, p.42). Overall, because of the lack of representation, institutional racism, and a shortage of resources available to support

Latinx students, staff, and faculty, there is a struggle to retain them at this institution. Although other Mentors and Mentees may not have used the exact word racism, there was much discussion surrounding inequity, and there is a lack of visibility of people of color or Latinx people in roles of leadership. Previous research also suggests that not only is the representation of Latinx or people of color generally low, but ultimately, the treatment they face is what impacts their retention. It also shares how women of color often feel constant pressure to prove their worth in higher education despite having high-ranking positions (Gibson, 2006; Holmes et al., 2007; Singh et al., 1995; Tran, 2014; Turner, 2002). It is essential to recognize that the staff and faculty discuss that although representation is necessary, the focus on retention of women of color, specifically Chicana's faculty and leadership positions, is just as important, if not more.

Some of the Mentors also expressed that this institution can often feel isolated because there is a lack of visible Latina representation, specifically in the Chicana community, and, therefore, less opportunity to build connections. The Mentors also mentioned how, in general, this institution can feel decentralized and has little opportunity to make connections with other students, staff, and faculty. They expressed how they often find themselves in spaces where they are underrepresented individuals. Often, they are not met with the same warmth or sense of community as they would if they were in spaces with other people of color or Chicanas. Previous research emphasizes the importance of these community spaces as a refuge from institutional racism and inequality (Ruiz & Machado-Casa, 2013). Therefore, ethnic homogenous communities like the Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship exist to create community, resist traditional Eurocentric values, and redefine success. As previous research has mentioned, Mujerista Mentorship is designed to encourage persistence by empowering each other to break glass

ceilings, serve as motivation to future Chicana, and work towards closing that achievement gap (Villasenor et al.,2013).

These barriers named by Mentors were also named as barriers by the Mentees. This is why the Mentees also agreed that this program and community impacted their student experience. They mentioned how finding other people who look like them is hard on this campus. They found it easy to lose sight of their goals because they needed to see other Chicanas making it. Mentees took advantage of this Mentorship program because it was an opportunity to connect to their community. Mentee participants mentioned their excitement to be with other people who look like them and to have someone who wouldn't judge them for the questions they asked because they would most likely understand their experiences. Previous ethnic homogenous mentorship programs and communities expressed the opportunity to deconstruct their experiences and create capital with one another. These programs allow for the opportunity to define their success. This Mentee experience is consistent with previous research and how they pursued this experience through ethnic homogenous mentorship programs (Ek et al., 2010).

Mentors and Mentees expressed that some common barriers are institutional racism or institutions having a traditional sense of success. Previous research has also expressed how these barriers impact the retention of not only Latinx or Chicana students, staff, and faculty but also other marginalized groups (Zambrana et al.,2015). Some of the consistent institutional support participants shared that countered some of these barriers was being in a community with other Chicanas. As the researcher previously mentioned, previous literature and research have also shared that these opportunities for mentorship and community often impact the retention of Chicana students (Villasenor et al.,2013). The researcher also recognizes that although statistics

show that at Southern California Eucalyptus University, Chicana representation in some leadership positions, faculty, and students has increased, similar barriers still exist today.

Research Question Two

The researcher's second research question asked, does the relationship between the Chicana staff and faculty Mentors and Chicana undergraduate students' Mentees participating in this mentorship program affect student persistence/retention? If so, how? In the interviews, the researcher found that the relationship between Chicana Mentee and Chicana Mentor relationships did impact student persistence and retention. The researcher must also state that although most Mentee participants stated that this relationship somehow impacted their persistence, the levels and reasons for how they differed from each person.

Navigating through Shared Experiences

Most Mentees mentioned how they felt that their Mentor could provide them with resources and personal and professional connections that they learned about after engaging in this partnership. This contributed to their social, cultural, and navigational capital as they navigated their journey at Southern California Eucalyptus University. Mentees also disclosed that the most significant way they felt their Mentors impacted their persistence was through aspirations that they could do it too. Several Mentees shared that they were inspired by the fact that these Chicana graduated from their undergraduate institution; some pursued a higher education and have built their careers even through all the challenges and barriers they experienced.

Aspirations

Some of the Mentee's mentioned that even though they may not communicate with each other as frequently as other mentorship pairs, they found connection and what they needed

through this mentorship experience. This connection stemmed from learning about their Mentor's journey and their stories. Mentees expressed this as an aspirational experience; these Mentors have persisted even through all the trials and tribulations and yet have found success in their journey. Like previous research, the Chicana in these leadership positions at this institution has served as a motivational source and representation to these Chicana students (Villasenor et al.,2013). Diving even deeper into this representation, some Mentees spoke about how their Mentors serve as a source of aspiration. After all, they can relate to their Mentors because they share other identities aside from being Chicana. Half of these mentorship pairs grew up in the same neighborhoods in Southern California. They shared a similar socioeconomic status and had a similar academic journey as they navigated the transfer process into a four-year institution. Mentees expressed how sharing these identities also inspired them even further because they know how much of a challenge it can be to break out of these neighborhoods and define their success. As previous researchers have shared, representation matters to Chicana, but so does being in the Mujersita community, learning each other's stories, and creating ways to navigate academia (Ek et al., 2010; Villasenor et al.,2013). This has impacted them to pursue advanced degrees even after their undergraduate journey.

The researcher also felt it was important to note that one of the Mentees felt that they already felt a sense of pressure to be successful and complete their undergraduate degree from their family before being connected to their Mentor. However, even though they mentioned they had a sense of pressure to be successful, which was unique to what other Mentees share, they described a development of social, cultural, and navigational capital through this mentorship relationship. They described how their Mentor went above and beyond to connect them with people who could help support them through times of struggle. This particular Mentee mentioned

they felt motivated by their Mentor because their Mentor was challenged through significant moments of their life and, even so, remained a very positive and inspiring individual.

That being said, the researcher recognized that the Mentees were impacted by their relationship with their Mentor. The Mentees spoke to the fact that they were impacted by the shared identities and the stories they shared. Their relatability with one another allowed them to advance their relationship and build capital through their similar journey. Overall, most of the Mentees in their individual interviews and personal surveys felt that the relationship impacted them and their persistence.

Research Question Three

The researcher's third and final research question was: Does the relationship between the Chicana staff and faculty Mentors and Chicana undergraduate students' Mentees participating in this mentorship program affect staff persistence/retention? If so, how? Because this mentorship program is formatted to set up participants as a partnership, the researcher felt it was important to ask how this relationship impacted the Mentors. The majority of the Mentors spoke about how they felt empowered by the Mentees and their impact on future Chicanas pursuing their education.

Empowering and Inspirational

All of the Mentors spoke about how they felt a sense of empowerment because of their relationship with their Mentees. The theme of inspiration emerged regarding the Mentor experience, stating that they felt inspired by how these Chicanas navigated their journeys, especially with the multiple identities they carry and coming into such a different environment than what they experienced prior to Southern California Eucalyptus University. Mentors could relate to the intersectionalities and were empowered by the Mentees and how they navigated this

institution despite the barriers. Previous research validates this sense of empowerment that emerges from serving as a Mentor, especially those who share similar identities to you because they are celebrating their successes together and breaking glass ceilings in the process(Lopez et al.,2021). The Mentors spoke about how they felt this partnership allowed them to see Chicana representation and celebrate them. These students would eventually contribute to the change in this population and representation for the next generation.

Mentors mentioned that they felt empowered by other Chicanas in this program because of the representation of collective power. The participants mentioned how it empowered them to see that more individuals could resist institutional barriers that consistently impact Chicana retention in education. There was also a shared investment in this mentorship program because they knew that this partnership was contributing to the collective success of other Chicanas and working towards more visible representation. They also felt that the matching process through this mentorship program impacted the relationship they were able to cultivate. Some participants mentioned that they felt the matching process was conducted with thorough intentionality because they could connect with their Mentee on multiple identities. Mentors were able to see themselves as their Mentees and once again mentioned how this was another reason why they felt empowered by this representation in the current student population. Although there still is a need for more Chicana representation, this study highlighted the Mentor experience and how they were impacted to see Chicanas working towards collective change and power.

Mentors also highlighted the importance of representation and how serving as Mentors for their Mentees inspired them to serve in this program and influenced them to pursue even higher levels of education. Through some of their personal experiences, Mentors were able to share how representation made an impact on their journey. Some undergraduate institutions

mentioned had higher Latinx faculty and staff representation than others in the state. Although the Latinx staff and faculty were not the majority, they recognized how fortunate they were; being in the community and having the opportunity to learn under these individuals created a sense of admiration and aspiration. Previous research and literature validating how others serve as an example to other underrepresented communities increase completion rates, which motivates the community members to be involved (Gomez, 2018; Wassemer & Galloway,2023). Therefore, Mentors understand the significance of why this mentorship program matters because there is a sense of empowerment by non-traditional students because of her personal experience. Overall, it was stated that participating in this program empowered the Mentees to persist in their roles to represent and contribute to the success of other Chicanas navigating higher education. Mentors mentioned how, through this partnership with their Mentees, they rediscovered the power of being a Chicana and the privilege of being in their leadership positions. Some of the Mentors mentioned how this experience allowed them to accept themselves as who they are through this experience because, through this experience, they were able to reflect on their own identities. Previous literature and research suggested that the impact of being in a mentorship relationship and sharing identity with them not only serves as a source of motivation but promotes an opportunity to reflect on this identity because although there are commonalities, as the researcher previously mentioned, being a Chicana is a diverse experience (Bernal et al., 2009).

Overall, the testimonios and survey data were consistent with what has been stated in previous literature and research. Mujerista Theology was used as the primary guiding framework when it comes to the conceptual framework used in the guidance of data analysis. However, the researcher did mention supplemental guiding frameworks that they felt would emerge in the data

analysis process. Below, the research will review the conceptual framework and any changes that emerged from the findings.

Review of Conceptual Framework

The researcher wanted to review the conceptual frameworks used to analyze the data, develop emerging themes, and answer the research questions. The researcher used Mujerista Theology as the primary guiding framework for this research study's analysis; however, two other frameworks connected to Mujerista Theology and assisted with understanding the data that emerged from the testimonios. The secondary themes are Community Cultural Wealth and Latinx Critical Race theory. Mujerista Theology encourages the researcher to search for ways these participants denounce oppressive behavior and commit to liberating practice through participating in this mentorship program. Some liberating practices include creating collective power through shared capital through the mentorship partnership and defining their success as both parties navigate higher education in their own way. Their success means challenging dominant ideologies and measures of success in higher education.

Regarding the secondary frameworks, the researcher explored how two tenets of Community Cultural Wealth relate to Mujerista Theology, and that is through building Social and Cultural Capital. These forms of capital support the ways Chicanas thrive in higher education and once again support collective power and promote opportunity for information sharing. The researcher also discovered that navigational capital is significant to the Chicana higher education experience. The other secondary framework the researcher connected to Mujerista Theology is Latinx Critical Race Theory, which challenges typical euro-centric practice and identifies Chicana's measures of success through the educational experience. These conceptual frameworks overlap as they all explicitly promote how to support Chicanas

navigating higher education.

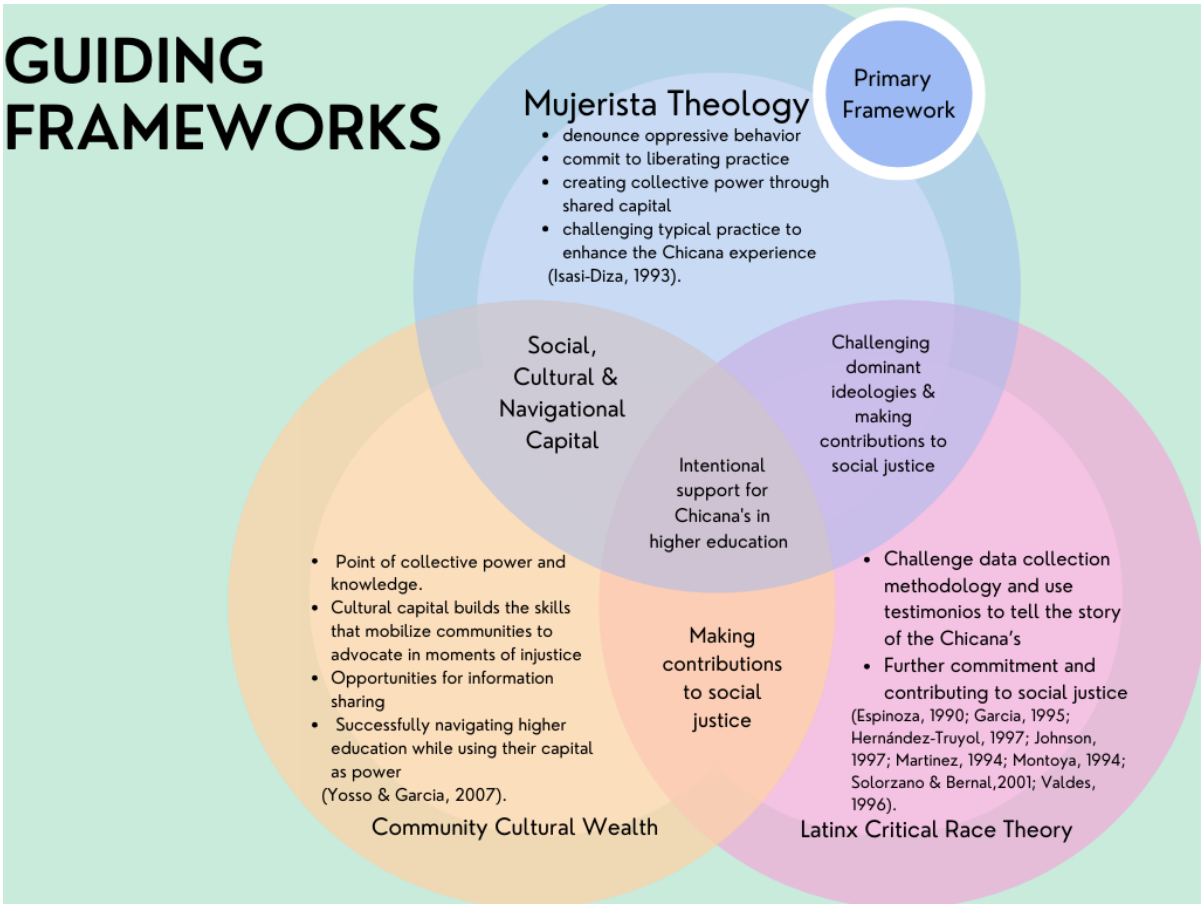

Figure 4. Review of Conceptual Frameworks

Some themes from the data were primarily tied to Mujerista Theology and how these participants committed to liberating practices, created collective power through shared capital, and challenged typical practices to enhance the Chicana experience and define their success(Isasi-Diza,1993). The definition of Mujerista theology emerged through this research. The themes and responses to the research questions speak to denouncing oppressive behavior through their liberating actions by sharing resources, creating rich capital, and creating their definition of success. Participants used mentorship to challenge typical Eurocentric practice, understand ways to navigate the educational system on their terms, and use each other as empowerment and inspiration to persist. Although this research study has highlighted valuable

information to inform research institutions on how they can support the Chicana population, the research will discuss some of the limitations of this research study.

Limitations of the Research Study

The researcher recognizes that there were some limitations to the study design. Since this study was conducted on a small group of Chicana-identified students, staff, and faculty, it is essential to note that these testimonios state the experiences of these participants and do not define the experiences of all Chicana-identified students, staff, and faculty members. Therefore, a generalization cannot be made for all Chicanas, and every person's experience is unique. The researcher also recognizes that this study will use participants from a specific mentorship program developed using the Mujerista framework. Therefore, this is a specifically structured program that participants will experience. Not all Chicana students, staff, and faculty experience this mentorship-style program. The Chicana-identified Mentors and Mentees would share this mentorship experience that does not define all Chicana Mentor and Mentee relationships.

Other concerns that may emerge from the collection of this data include ethical issues, positionality, and the role of the researcher. In the next section, the research will discuss these potential concerns in further detail.

Ethical Issues Positionality and Role of Researcher

The researcher recognizes that their role in the mentorship program may raise questions about their positionality and how this may impact this research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). First, the researcher recognizes that she is studying. She proudly identified as a first-generation Chicana who personally struggled to navigate their higher education journey. The researcher came from a low socio-economic status and an immigrant family without prior knowledge of higher education. The researcher recalls almost dropping out of college during the second year of

their undergraduate experience. However, they were fortunate to have built relationships with women of color in leadership positions and benefitted from formal and informal mentorship as a student at Southern California Eucalyptus University. The researcher also works at Southern California Eucalyptus University and coaches several Chicana undergraduate students on navigating this University that is not built for marginalized populations. The researcher also recognizes that they have participated in the mentorship process as a Mentee, a Mentor, and now the director of this mentorship program. Although the researcher identifies closely with the participants of this study, they are aware of their privilege and how they may bring these identities through the research process. The researcher feels that their past and present identities benefit the growth and development of this mentorship program and contribute to research. The researcher recognized the thoughts and biases that emerged during the data collection process. The researcher recognized the need to reflect on internal reactions and make those notes so feelings are recognized and named from the beginning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The researcher also recognized that they must manage their emotions during the interview, data collection, and data analysis process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003). In order to do that, the researcher writes reflection pieces after reviewing survey responses and conducting the interview process.

Another point the researchers needed to address is that they are recruiting research participants from the mentorship program they created and currently direct at Southern California Eucalyptus University. Although the researcher recognized that their role as the director of the mentorship program may impact the participant's responses, the program directors conduct regular assessments with Mentors and Mentees. Through this assessment process, we always ask for honest feedback to better our program and the experience of future participants.

The researcher has collected positive and critical feedback from Mentors and Mentees throughout the program without any difficulty and used it to improve the program over time. The researcher constantly reminded the participant to answer the questions openly and honestly to contribute valid research. Since participants are regularly asked to give honest feedback about their experience participating in this program, the researcher felt that their testimonios would produce authentic data. The study participants also volunteered to participate in this research because they viewed its importance and what this work's contributions have for future Chicanas in education.

It is also important to note that since the researcher is the program's director, they can use any research discovered in this research process to change the program and form it into a program that truly benefits the Chicana undergraduate students, staff, and faculty. They have direct access to make fundamental changes to this program and the ability to evolve as the incoming generations will have different support needs. In the next section, the researcher will discuss ways they validated the data they collected from this study.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness of Data

Aside from the previously listed limitations and positionality concerns, the researcher used several methods to increase the credibility of the qualitative data. The researcher used triangulation to compare multiple data sets such as surveys, interviews, observational notes, and memos (Merriam & Tisdell,2015). Triangulation aims to increase credibility and prove that the findings are developed through multiple forms of data comparison rather than a single source of data collection. Another way that the researcher validated the data is through member checking (Merriam & Tisdell,2015). After the testimonios were collected from the participants, and the transcripts are cleaned up and created, the researcher will provide the participants with the

transcript to review and provide feedback to validate the information the researcher will conduct in their data analysis process. The researcher also added another layer of member checking by letting the participants review the section. The researcher introduced the readers to the mentorship pairs and allowed them to make sure it accurately portrayed them. Through these methods, the researcher increased credibility and validity through the data analysis process.

Although there are limitations to this study, the research found ways to validate the data so that it can contribute to the current body of data that exists surrounding Mujerista Mentorship. The outcome can contribute to theory and practice for the future of education of underrepresented communities.

Implications for Theory and Practice

The outcome of this research contributes to the current research surrounding the theoretical framework of Mujerista Theology put into practice and how it is invaluable to the Chicana educational experience. As mentioned in Mujerista theology, these participants committed to liberating practices that created collective power through shared capital. They challenged typical practices to enhance the Chicana experience and define their success through participation in Mujerista Mentorship (Isasi-Diza,1993). There is not an abundance of existing research surrounding this specific work on Mujerista Mentorship; however, previous research that has been conducted highlights and validates the power of the partnership that is developed using Mujerista Mentorship. It was learned that Chicana participants felt they benefited from this program whether or not they identified as a Mentee or Mentor. The researcher hopes this data will highlight the benefit of implementing Mujerista Theology and Mentorship into practice at higher education institutions to retain Chicanas as undergraduate students, staff, and faculty. It is also important that although the researcher has seen positive reactions from Mujerista

Mentorship, Mujerista Theology can extend beyond the mentorship experience. However, the theory can be used to inform other practices that promote ethnic homogenous community building that will promote Chicana representation, social, cultural, and navigational capital, as well as highlight the strength of the first-generation experience. Overall, this research can inform institutions on the importance of some of these themes and how they impact the Chicana experience from the undergraduate experience to Chicana staff and Chicana Faculty.

The research also suggests the importance of creating intentional practice in higher education by encouraging hiring more faculty and staff from underrepresented populations. In multiple testimonios, some Mentees and Mentors were impacted when the faculty they interacted with were Chicana or identified as part of the Black Indigenous People Of Color, also known as the BIPOC community. Although this research is focused on the Chicana population, Mentors and Mentees mentioned that other underrepresented populations also impacted their experiences. However, this was often followed by saying there needed to be more representation or it was hard to find your community. Given that some of the Mentors experienced their bachelor's education more than decades prior and Mentees who are undergraduates are still stating that there is not enough Chicana or BIPOC staff and faculty, it sheds light on the fact that there is a need for change. The higher education student population has changed over the years; we see more underrepresented groups than before. Although the staff and faculty demographics have changed over time, it does not mirror the student demographics and need to catch up. Those who participated in this research represented some Chicana students, staff, and faculty; they did mention the importance of the representation of Chicana and that there needs to be more representation. In addition, when underrepresented groups are hired into these positions, other literature and this research need to show more efforts to retain staff and faculty from

underrepresented communities at higher education institutions. This research encourages hiring more staff and faculty from underrepresented communities to reflect the evolving student population at these higher education institutions. According to this research, this representation impacts students as it is an aspiration and motivation to persist. However, this research also suggests a need to focus on retaining these underrepresented staff and faculty hired.

This research also suggests that intentional higher education practices include creating more opportunities for semi-structured ethnic homogenous community building for Chicana students, staff, and faculty. The themes that emerged from this research did suggest that ethnic homogeneous communities support the retention not only for the Chicana students but also the Chicana staff and faculty. The research participants validated this by stating that the ethnic homogenous community motivated people to participate in this program. The fact that this program is marketed as a mentorship program that connects Latinx and Chicanx-identified people was a selling point. Many reasons why the Mentors and Mentees applied to this program were to find this community that they stated was hard to reach at Southern California Eucalyptus University. This research encourages the facilitation of other Chicana-identified people to be in community with one another.

Areas and Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher suggests that more research should be conducted on a larger sample of Chicanas participating in Mujerista Mentorship programs and conducted over a more extended period. The researcher recommends that this study be conducted on a larger sample size to have a variety of representation within the Chicana community. The study participants had an overall positive experience participating in this program. It would be beneficial to understand various perspectives from participating in this program to learn more about ways we can improve.

Although the director of the mentorship program receives critical feedback from those who participate through the focus groups and survey data, these opportunities could be extended for a longer period to capture more.

The researcher recommends conducting further research on Mujerista mentorship; however, conducting research over a more extended period would be beneficial. It would benefit research to witness the progression of the relationship between the Mentor and Mentee and have more time to understand the relationship between multiple mentorship pairs. Although the researcher was able to conduct multiple interviews over a short period, they could only capture themes that emerged at that particular moment of their relationship. Having a more extended period to conduct the research would allow researchers to add additional research tools, such as observational opportunities outside of interviews, such as witnessing candid moments where the Mentor and Mentee interact when they meet. This theme that emerged from this study validates previous research that has been conducted surrounding Mujerista mentorship and emphasizes understanding and supporting the Chicana population in higher education. The research implies that there are more opportunities to explore Chicana communities in higher education and what encourages their persistence through their higher education journey.

Conclusion

This research study has highlighted the importance of ethnic homogenous communities in spaces where they are typically underrepresented. At Southern California Eucalyptus University, the Chicana community is growing. Although this and previous research have confirmed that representation is essential in order to support marginalized communities like the Chicana population, this study confirmed that there is more institutions need to do in order to retain Chicanas at these research institutions. This research emphasizes the importance of intentionally

supporting Chicana students, staff, and faculty and investing in opportunities to retain them. This research study highlights the impact that intentional Mentorship opportunities such as the Chicanx Mujerista Mentorship Program have on the Mentors and Mentees involved. This research suggests opportunities for higher education institutions to reflect on the staff and faculty demographics. Although there are other ways to retain Chicana students, staff, and faculty, it is still essential to implement these opportunities and invest in the Chicana population in higher education. Mujerista Theology embodies a strategy of denouncing oppressive behavior using cultural and social capital through liberating practice and mentorship, which aims to define their future and success (Isasi-Diaz, 1993). Mujerista Theology is an opportunity to create capital surrounding ethnic, cultural, and gendered aspects of being a Chicana, challenging oppression, and being liberated by working together to combat racial injustice (Villasenor et al., 2013). Mujersita mentorship is an opportunity for Chicana-identified students, staff, and faculty to be empowered by one another and to come together to close the achievement gap for this community. This research can verify that collective power can emerge from community-centered work.

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