

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Los Angeles

Voices of Resilience:

Mexicana / Chicana Student Experiences in a Master of Arts in Education Program

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

by

Alejandra Magaña Gamero

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

Alejandra Magaña Gamero

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2023

Professor Daniel G. Solórzano, Co-Chair

Professor David G. García, Co-Chair

Although the Mexican population is experiencing tremendous growth, they continue to lag behind the national average in, and have amongst the lowest, educational attainment levels of all Latinos/as (Pérez Huber et al., 2015). Some studies have looked at the experience of Mexicans along the K-12, undergraduate, and doctoral educational pipelines. However, the experience of master's students has gone under-examined and resulted in a gap in higher education research. In an attempt to continue filling the gap on master's education research, this dissertation focuses on the factors that influence Chicanas decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education and the sources of support that Chicanas draw from in their pursuit and attainment of the master's. Using Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) and Community Cultural Wealth

(CCW) as the theoretical foundations for this research, the method of Pláticas was instrumental to studying the experiences of 12 Chicana Master of Arts in Education students. CFE was included to strengthen the gender lens of this research and to unapologetically center Chicana identities. CCW was included to shift the research lens away from a deficit view of Chicanas and instead focus on the cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities they bring to higher education.

My analysis revealed two general findings. First, the decision to pursue a master's is not a single choice, but rather a collective of the personal, familial, and logistical. Chicanas' identity, familial relationships, graduate school exposure, values alignment, passion for area of study, mentors, and representation are factors that influence Chicanas decisions to pursue a master's. Second, Chicanas draw from unique sources of support, personal motivation, ambition, and coping skills, and engage in their own strategies of resistance to create more empowering master's experiences. With the Latino/a population on the rise and continuing shift in master's enrollment demographics, it is crucial that we understand how to intentionally support Chicano/a recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation.

The dissertation of Alejandra Magaña Gamero is approved.

Lorena I. Guillén

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Daniel G. Solórzano, Committee Co-Chair

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University of California, Los Angeles

2023

DEDICATION

Por y para mi familia

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PREFACE: COMING TO THE WORK

In 1995, my parents came to the United States from Guadalajara, Jalisco, México, in search of educational opportunities and economic advancement for their family. I was born in 1996. Though my parents only reached a middle school and high school education, growing up they always emphasized the importance of pursuing higher education. As a child I did not necessarily understand why they talked about college so often, but I knew that if they talked about it so often, then it had to be important. I was born and raised in Santa Monica, California. As a first-generation, low-income student in the Santa Monica-Malibu Unified School District (SMMUSD), a predominantly white and affluent district, my experience was different from many of my peers. Throughout elementary and middle school I received good grades, participated in magnet programs, and did as many extracurricular activities as I could to keep busy while my parents had to work. Once in high school, I learned from a counselor that I had to make myself stand out for college applications, so I joined clubs, took advanced placement classes, volunteered in my community, and played varsity soccer for four years. Despite all my involvement in various community and school spaces, when it came to college applications I was lost, as I was the first in my family to apply directly to four-year universities out of high school.

However, the summer of 2013, before my senior year of high school, I participated in a week-long summer leadership conference for high school students based in Sacramento, the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project. Little did I know that attending this conference would change my life. Throughout the week I engaged in conversations about culture, identity, leadership, policy, and college access, and for the first time I learned what I needed to apply to college, step by step. On College Day, the fourth day of the conference, there were two particular moments that I will never forget. The first is when Dr. Daniel G. Solórzano presented on the

Chicano/a educational pipeline. As he walked through the statistics at each level of the pipeline and discussed the reasons for students being pushed out at different levels of the pipeline, I remember thinking *how could it be that I am in a room of 150 smart, talented and hard-working Chicanos/as yet were not all going to “make it”?* As we went on to the next activity, meeting with college advisors, the statistics Professor Solórzano had shared still lingered in my head. At the individual advisor check-in, I sat down with a counselor from UC Davis to review my transcripts and extracurriculars. I remember the counselor was a soft spoken but very cheerful Chicana, with an ability to be caring despite having just met. At the end of our meeting, she told me she was very impressed with my grades and accomplishments and said, “You, Alejandra, are going to get very far. Come next fall you will have some tough decisions to make. I know multiple schools will be fighting for you.” As I walked out of the meeting with tears of joy and excitement, attempting to process what the counselor had told me, I found myself thinking back to the statistics professor Solórzano had shared. At that moment, I promised myself I would one day get a graduate degree. I had no idea what that meant or how I would get there, but I knew I wanted to improve those statistics Professor Solórzano had shared.

I began my higher education journey at Santa Clara University (SCU), a small liberal arts Jesuit school in the heart of Silicon Valley in Northern California. Though I was hesitant to move five hours away from home, it was the best decision for myself and my family as I had been awarded a full ride scholarship. At SCU, the predominantly white and affluent student body and professors did not reflect any similarities to the working-class home in which I grew up. Though at first I struggled to find my place, and even contemplated dropping out, it was through my experiences as an ethnic studies major that I realized my race, class, gender, and language were the vital resources that helped me navigate my journey in higher education. Then, with the

encouragement and mentorship of my professors in the ethnic studies department (Professor Fernandez, Professor Hazard, Professor Sampaio) I applied to graduate programs in education, which led me to enroll in UCLA's Master of Arts in Education, ironically with Dr. Daniel G. Solórzano as my advisor.

As a master's student I consistently found myself being drawn towards research on Chicanas in higher education because at the end of the day, research is me-search. For me, the literature on Chicanas in higher education was engaging, interesting and most importantly relatable. When I transitioned to the PhD program I found that the one area of research that I kept returning to was literature on Latinas and Chicanas in higher education. However, after approaching the work with a more critical eye, I noticed that there was a lack of literature documenting the experience of Chicanas / Mexicanas in master's programs and knew that this would be my area of research. Because of that gap in the literature and because of my own experiences, I decided that I wanted to know more about the factors, experiences and relationships that influence Chicanas/Mexicanas decisions to pursue a Master of Arts in education and the sources of support that Chicanas draw from for their degree attainment. This dissertation proposal is an attempt to answer some of those questions.

VITA

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University of California Los Angeles, Los Angeles, CA
Master of Arts, Social Sciences and Comparative Education 2019

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PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Excelencia in Education

Institutional Engagement Manager November 2022 – Present

- Manage the development and growth of a network of 175 higher education institutions across the United States; and
- Implement weekly programming that supports Latino/a success in higher education via evidence-based practices.

Latinas Talk Dinero

- Co-Founder* November 2020 – Present
- Build relationships with diverse stakeholders, such as non-profits, higher education institutions, corporate businesses, and K-12 schools and create hyper specialized financial literacy curriculum for each client’s needs; and
 - Track key information to support development of short and long term goals, objectives and operating procedures.

UCLA Student Loan Services & Collections, Financial Wellness Program

- Consultant* September 2020 – November 2022
- Planned and facilitated 20 weekly hours of one-on-one financial literacy coaching via a learner-centric approach; and
 - Developed and managed financial literacy campus learning programs for student organizations.

UCLA Center for Critical Race Studies in Education

- Research Associate* January 2020 – December 2022
- Carried out project design and research plans, that included literature reviews, data collection, data analysis, theoretical frameworks, and methodology to develop research briefs and conference presentations; and
 - Provided ongoing analyses and synthesis of multiple data sets and synthesized information into quarterly reports.

Center for Transformation of Schools, University of California Los Angeles

- Graduate Student Researcher* November 2018 – September 2021
- Mentee with Faculty Advisor Pedro Noguera, PhD;
 - Managed IRB application and qualitative data collection for 2-year National Science Foundation grant; and
 - Coordinated annual STEM conference for 150 Black/Latinx students and led partnerships with 20 businesses.

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project, California

- Peer Counselor, Comcast Fellowship Facilitator, Volunteer* July 2013 – Present
- **Peer Counselor:** Facilitated discussions for youth to incentivize leadership development, emphasize higher education, and discussed social, economic and educational barriers, affecting their goals.
 - **Comcast Fellowship Facilitator:** Supported the creation of a leadership curriculum that included a focus on the inner workings of CA government, and the factors influencing policymakers in California
 - **Volunteer:** Assist with logistics and planning of four annual leadership conferences

Santa Clara University Ignatian Center, Santa Clara, CA

- Thriving Neighbors Initiative Program Assistant* September 2015 – September 2018
- Co-lead classes that promoted self-care and woman empowerment through meditation, yoga, and zumba
 - Encouraged high-impact, community-engaged practices that enhanced research and learning in the community.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Latino/as comprise the largest ethnic group in the United States, representing 19% of the total U.S. population (Pew Research Center, 2020). The United States Census (2018) projects that by 2060 Latinos/as will reach 111 million people (See Appendix A), and of the Latino/a population, Mexicans account for 63% (Pew Research Center, 2017). Although the Mexican population is experiencing tremendous growth, they continue to lag behind the national average in, and have amongst the lowest, educational attainment levels of all Latinos/as¹ (Covarrubias, 2011; Pérez Huber et al., 2015; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

In 2006, Yosso and Solórzano (Figure 1.1) found that of 100 Chicanas/os who begin elementary school in the United States, only 46 go on to graduate from high school while 54 are pushed out. Of the 46 who graduate, about 26 continue their postsecondary education, with 17 enrolling in community college and 9 enrolling at four-year institutions. Only one student from the 17 enrolled in a community college will transfer and of the 9 students who enrolled at a four-year institution, only 8 will graduate with a baccalaureate degree. Then, only 2 students will go on to earn a professional or graduate degree and less than one from that original 100 will earn a doctorate degree (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006).

¹ Where no research or disaggregate data specific to Mexicanos/as is found, I will use research on Latinos/as.

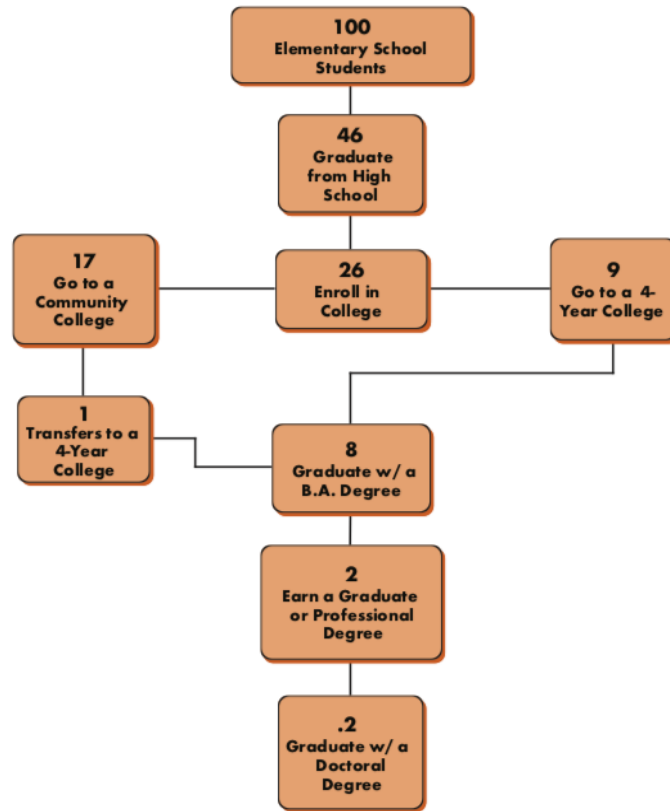


Figure 1.1. Chicanas and Chicanos Academic Outcomes Along the Educational Pipeline in 2000.

Source: Yosso & Solórzano (2006).

An updated analysis of the Chicana/o educational pipeline by Alejandro Covarrubias in 2011 (see Appendix B) and another by Pérez Huber et al. in 2015 (see Appendix C) demonstrates that despite a small improvement, Chicanas/os continue to be failed by educational institutions at all levels of the academic pipeline. While there is still much to learn about these disparate educational outcomes and how to address them, some studies have looked at the experience of Mexicans along the K-12, undergraduate, and doctoral educational pipelines in an effort to get a better understanding of their experience (Castellanos & Orozco, 2005; Ceja, 2004; Cuádriz, 1997; De Loera, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Gándara, 1993, 1995; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Solórzano, 1998; Valencia & Black, 2002). However, the

experience of master's students has gone underexamined and resulted in a gap in higher education research. Though more research is needed on Mexicano/a student experiences in general, this dissertation focuses on the experiences of Mexicanas² in a Master of Arts (MA) in Education program.³ In this chapter, I begin by outlining how I am defining key terms⁴ that are relevant to my dissertation. Next, I will provide the significance of the study and provide a larger justification for why I am focusing on Mexicanas, education, master's education, and why the Master of Arts in particular. Then, I present my research questions and the purpose of my study. I end by providing a road map for this dissertation.

Key Terms

Latina/Latino: Latina/o⁵ refers to both female and male individuals of Latin American origin or descent residing in the United States, regardless of immigration status.

² I am intentionally not italicizing Spanish words to push back against the hegemony of the English language.

³ I primarily chose to focus on Masters of Arts in Education programs in an effort to address the concerns brought up in the preface. I want to learn more about the nuances of this particular degree as it relates to Mexicana experiences. In an effort to continue filling the gaps in the literature on master's students and Mexicanas, future work post-dissertation will explore the experiences of Mexicanas in other masters programs such as master of education, master of science in education, master of arts in teaching, etc. Further justification for why education will be provided in later sections of this proposal.

⁴ With respect to how different generations identify, research contributors will be asked to self-identify rather than imposing labels on them.

⁵ Recognizing that *Latinx* is a term that attempts to disrupt binary notions of gender, as a researcher my goal is to understand the gender differences in Mexicanos/as educational attainment, therefore I choose to not use this term as the term is frequently used, "without an in-depth examination of its usage and its implications" (Salinas, 2020, p. 165).

Mexican/Mexicano/a: Mexican/Mexicano/a refers to individuals of Mexican origin or descent residing in the United States, regardless of immigration status.

Chicano/a: In this study this term will be used synonymously with Mexican/Mexicano/a. This is due to the fact that in higher education literature Chicano/a is the term more frequently used and I also personally use the terms interchangeably. However, where collaborators identify a specific way, terms will not be imposed. Lastly, it important to note that the term Chicano/a also denotes a political connotation because of its link to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s.⁶

Master's: Master's will be used throughout this dissertation to refer to Master of Arts in education.

Significance of Study

Currently, one in five women in the U.S. is a Latina and by 2060, Latinas are estimated to account for nearly a third of all women in the United States (Gándara, 2015). Although Latinas are going to college in record numbers, they are the least likely of all women to complete a college degree, at just 19 percent compared to nearly 44 percent of white women (Gándara, 2015a). Though Latinas tend to graduate high school and college at somewhat higher rates than their male counterparts (Gándara et al., 2013), and enroll in college at higher rates than Latinos (Zarate & Burciaga, 2010) Latinas continue to fare more poorly than their female counterparts. In regard to degree attainment for Latinas, statistics indicate that 22.1% obtain a bachelor's degree, 10.4% earn a master's degree, 1.2% earn a professional degree, and 1.6% earn a doctoral degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). It is also important to note that compared to African

⁶ The Chicano Movement was a social and political movement inspired by prior acts of resistance among people of Mexican descent, and the Black Power movement, that worked to embrace a Chicano/a identity and worldview that combated structural racism, encouraged cultural revitalization, and achieved community empowerment by rejecting assimilation. It consisted of three major goals which were rights for farm workers, restoration of land, and education reform (Rodriguez, 2014).

American, white, and Asian American women, Latinas have the lowest levels of attainment at every stage of the educational pipeline (Watford et al., 2006).

If Latinas are estimated to account for one-third of all women in the United States by 2060, then degree attainment statistics should also be increasing and reflecting this demographic change. This is important as, “Latinas are the linchpin of the next generation...If the cycle of under education is to be broken for the Latino population, it is highly dependent on changing the fortunes of young women” (Gándara et al., 2013, p. 5). With Mexicans representing the largest subgroup of the Latina/o population (Yosso, 2006) in the United States, it is clear that the educational opportunities presented to this population will have long lasting impacts in the coming decades. Therefore, bringing attention to the educational attainment levels of Mexicanas is key in shaping educational attainment in the United States.

As mentioned, previous literature has explored the trajectories of Mexicanas in K-12, as well as some segments of higher education, undergraduate and doctoral programs (Castellanos & Orozco, 2005; Ceja, 2004; Cuádriz, 1997; De Loera, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Gándara, 1993, 1995; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Solórzano, 1998; Valencia & Black, 2002). However, there is a paucity of literature on Mexicanas at the master’s level. This study expands on the literature related to Mexicanas in higher education in the United States and begins to fill the gap of research on master’s students by focusing on a particular segment, Master of Arts in Education programs. It is imperative that researchers give more attention to this segment of the Latino/a educational pipeline as research indicates that more students in the United States are increasingly pursuing master’s degrees (Palacios, 2016). Additionally, given that master’s programs are becoming more diverse (Fain, 2018) it is crucial to provide conditions that will ensure Mexicanas educational success and degree attainment.

As Chicanas transition into higher education, graduate education in particular, they also encounter unique challenges such as familial obligations, unsupportive school climates, social stereotypes, financial concerns, racism, microaggressions, etc. (Acereda et al., 2018; Achor & Morales, 1990; Cuádriz, 1996, 2005; Gándara, 1995; Kiyama et al., 2015; McKenna & Ortiz, 1988; Pérez Huber et al., 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Rodriguez et al., 2000; Vasquez, 1982). This study will aid us in further understanding how Chicanas create their own spaces of resistance and how to create more supportive environments by talking to Mexicana students directly and letting them share how they believe they can best be supported in their educational experience.

Given the opportunities that can emerge from master's programs it is imperative that we learn more about the complexity of these experiences. Ultimately, this research add to the literature by (a) Addressing the scarcity of research on Mexicanas and the scarcity of research at the master's level, (b) Expanding on the literature that views Mexicanas from as asset-based framework as well as the literature on Mexicanas in sociology and ethnic studies, and (c) Providing a framework to understand Mexicana experiences at the master's level and how to best support them. Based on the current and predicted growth of the Chicana student population, and their potential to enroll in higher education, this research is of extreme importance (Contreras, 2011). Therefore, in order to reach a clearer understanding of my dissertation topic, my inquiry is guided by the questions below.

Research Questions

- 1) What factors, experiences and/or relationships influence Mexicanas/Chicanas decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education?

- 2) What sources of support do Mexicanas/Chicanas draw from in their pursuit and attainment of the Master of Arts in Education?

Why Mexicanas/Chicanas?

Mexicanas continue to have the lowest education attainment rates amongst Latinas (Burciaga et al., 2010; Cuádriz, 1997; Gándara, 1995; Kena et al., 2015). An examination of studies of Chicanas in higher education from the 1960s to the present reveal the vast underrepresentation of Chicanas at all levels of higher education in the United States (Achor & Morales, 1990; Castellanos & Orozco, 2005; Chamarro, 2004; Chapa & De La Rosa, 2006; Cuádriz, 2005; Leon & Navirez, 2007; Luna & Prieto, 2009; Martinez, 2012). Because Mexicanas are often absent from the literature due to being subsumed within the category of Latinas or the category of women (Cuádriz, 1997), there is a lack of a data set that highlights Mexicana master's completion rates. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), the U.S Department of Education, and the American Council on Education (ACE), amongst others, have data on degree attainment for "Hispanic/Latinx," "female," or "Hispanic/Latinx Females," but no data that is specific to Mexican women only. Given the growth of the Mexican population in the United States, and the varying ways in which gender plays a role in how we experience education (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Díaz & Bui, 2017), the conditions that challenge or support Mexicanas educational attainment and overall success is a major concern.

Why Master's?

According to the U.S Department of Education, National Postsecondary Student Study (2016) approximately 80% of Latinos/as enrolled in graduate school are in master's programs (see appendix D). Despite that, most studies in higher education (Antony, 2002; Castellanos & Orozco, 2005; Cuádriz, 1997; De Loera, 2018; Gándara, 1982, 1993, 1995; González, 2006; Muñoz, 1986; Yosso et al., 2009) have explored the experience of undergraduate and doctoral

students. Few have focused on master's students, and the cause for this neglect is not well known (Cohen, 2012). While the U.S Department of Education (2012) tracks 6-year graduation rates at 55.9% for undergraduate students and 47–64% for doctoral students, depending on field of study, no national database tracks degree completion for master's students. Other than the findings of some scholars (Borchert, 1994; Cohen, 2012; Glazer, 1986; Glazer-Raymo, 2005; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Leyva, 2011; Malaney, 1987; Mertz et al., 2012; Olson, 1992; Pooch & Love, 2001; Portnoi & Kwong, 2011; Talbot et al., 1996), little is known about master's degree education in the United States, and even less about Mexicanas in master's programs in the United States.

It is important that researchers give attention to this segment of the educational pipeline as jobs that require a master's degree at entry-level were projected to be the fastest growing segment of the workforce between 2014 and 2024 (Council of Graduate Schools, 2017). Additionally, master's programs have been shown to be important for advancement in one's career, acceptance to a doctoral program (Cohen, 2012), as well as increasing one's individual earning potential. This is clear in the U.S census data, that shows that students who have earned a master's degree earn substantially more over their lifetime than those who have only obtained a baccalaureate or high school degree (Torpey & Terrell, 2015). My dissertation study focuses solely on Master of Arts in Education students to begin to unpack and attempt to understand master's student experiences, with the intention to continue researching master's education upon completion of the dissertation.

Why Education? Historicizing the Chicano/a Educational Experience

My decision to focus on education undoubtedly derives from my own experience as a master's student in the department of Education at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). However, I also chose to focus on education due to Chicanos/as legacy of resistance

within U.S. schools. For Chicanos/as schools have often been sites of political, racial and linguistic conflict. From the moment they began to attend schools in the United States, Chicano/a students were racialized (Menchaca, 1995). Through the creation of “Mexican Schools,” students were placed in substandard institutions with poor instruction and a lack of opportunities (Montejano, 1987). Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, schools “defined Mexican children as intellectually inferior and placed them in segregated and inferior facilities where instructors schooled them primarily on vocational subjects” (Gonzalez, 2013, p. 66). Students were taught from a cultural deficit framework, encouraged to become “americanized,” and punished for speaking Spanish (García et al., 2012). In these classrooms American ideals and values were painted as superior to those of Mexican students. For a long time, this “instruction continued a legacy of removing Mexican culture from a position of worth in schools in favor of an Anglocentric curriculum” (Mares-Tamayo & Solórzano, 2018, p. 4).

Despite the continued oppression, blatant racism and discrimination in schools, Chicano/a students, families and communities have always found ways to resist racism and other forms of oppression in schools, and fought for a more equitable education (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Valencia, 2008; Valencia & Black, 2002). Via litigation (i.e., *Mendez v. Westminster*, 1947), organizational advocacy, individual and group activism, political demonstrations (Valencia, 2008), and community efforts, Mexicanos have always pushed back against the structural inequalities in their communities and schools.

In higher education, similar barriers (culturally deficit teaching, racism, discrimination, sexism) to those in the K-12 segment were, and still are, experienced. Chicano/a students shared stories of encountering microaggressions from peers and professors, and often find a lack of institutional support as they strive to adjust, fit in, and heal from racist attacks (Solórzano, 1998;

Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). However, it is important to highlight that just as students and families have resisted racism in K-12 schools, Chicano/a students have also fought, and continue fighting, to create space for themselves and find a sense of belonging on college campuses that were created without them in mind (Mares-Tamayo & Solórzano, 2018). Students draw from their pedagogies of the home as well as the wisdom and knowledge passed down from their parents (Delgado Bernal et al., 2006), to highlight their intersectional identities, build counter spaces, and resist the pressure to assimilate to the dominant culture (Solórzano et al., 2000). This dissertation study continues to add to this body of literature by highlighting the sources of support that Chicanas draw from in their attainment of the Master of Arts in Education.

Why Master of Arts in Education?

The decision to focus on the Master of Arts in Education was primarily motivated by my personal master's experience. I decided to exclude other education degrees such as the MEd, or M.S in education as I wanted to avoid generalizing the experience of the individuals within each of these programs. My interest in Mexicanas's, master's degrees, and education was fueled even further after looking at the trends of master's degrees conferred each year in the United States (see Table 1.1). Although the statistics are not broken down by type of education degree (MA, MEd, MEd) or racial/ethnic subgroups (Mexican, Salvadoran, Honduran, etc.), from the table one can see that from 2013 to 2018, of all graduate degrees awarded to Latinas, more than 86% were master's degrees. From the 86% of master's degrees awarded to Latinas, 26%-29% of those were in education. Through this data, it became evident that the plurality of master's degrees conferred to Latinas each year were in education.

Table 1.1

Master’s Degrees Conferred to Latinas in Education out of total Graduate Degrees from 2013 to 2018

| Year | Total Graduate Degrees ⁷ Conferred to Latinas | Total Master's Degrees Conferred to Latinas (as % of total graduate degrees) | Total Master’s Degrees ⁸ Conferred to Latinas in Education (as % of total master’s degrees) |
|-------|--|---|--|
| 13–14 | 41,274 | 35,397 (86%) | 29% |
| 14–15 | 43,620 | 37,368 (86%) | 28% |
| 15–16 | 46,970 | 40,311 (86%) | 28% |
| 16–17 | 50,349 | 43,277 (86%) | 28% |
| 17–18 | 54,612 | 47,215 (86%) | 26% |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2018)

After exploring other educational databases, I found that the University of California provided a further breakdown by racial/ethnic sub-group. With the data from the UC system, I was able to find that in the last seven years Mexicanas have accounted for over 60% of master’s degree recipients in the University of California system (see Table 1.2), and education degrees have accounted for the plurality of degrees awarded (Table 1.3).

⁷ This includes bachelors, master’s, doctoral, and professional degrees.

⁸ These percentages include all master’s of education.

Table 1.2

Total Mexicana Master's Degree Recipients out of Total Latina Master's Degree Recipients in The University of California System from 2014 to 2020.

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|--|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Total Latina Masters Degree Recipients | 562 | 569 | 649 | 742 | 788 | 838 | 887 |
| Total Mexicana Masters Degree Recipients (as % of total Latina recipients) | 346 (61%) | 349 (61%) | 414 (64%) | 475 (64%) | 522 (66%) | 554 (66%) | 611 (69%) |

Source: University of California

Table 1.3

Total Master's Degrees in Education Conferred to Mexicanas out of all Master's Degrees Conferred to Latinas in the University of California System from 2014 to 2020

| | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Total Latina Masters Degree Recipients | 562 | 569 | 649 | 742 | 788 | 838 | 887 |
| Total Master's Degrees in Education Conferred to Latinas (as % of total awarded to Latinas) | 124 (22%) | 128 (23%) | 183 (28%) | 237 (32%) | 215 (27%) | 186 (22%) | 233 (26%) |
| Total Master's Degrees in Education Conferred to Mexicanas ⁹ (as % of education degrees conferred to Latinas) | 76 (61%) | 78 (61%) | 117 (64%) | 152 (64%) | 142 (66%) | 123 (66%) | 161 (69%) |

Source: University of California

⁹ Though the exact numbers for total master's degrees in education conferred to Mexicanas was not provided this inference was made based on the numbers provided on Mexicana master's degree recipients

Again, the emphasis on Master of Arts in education stems from my personal experience paired with the existing data that shows Mexicanas are increasingly pursuing this particular degree. I am intentionally starting narrow and focusing solely on Master of Arts in Education programs with the goal of finding some preliminary themes in the experience of master's students and later, post-dissertation, expanding this work to various types of master's degree programs and student populations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and begin to understand Chicana master's student experiences and further expand on the works of the trailblazers that led the way in moving beyond deficit-based frameworks when examining Mexicana student experiences (Cuádras, 1997; Gándara, 1982, 1995; Vasquez, 1982). This study utilizes asset-based qualitative methods to allow for an in-depth examination of Chicana experiences and to capture the richness and complexities of Chicana voices. The ultimate goal is to understand (a) The factors that play a role in Chicana students' decision to pursue a Master's of Arts in Education degree and (b) The sources of support that Chicanas draw from in their degree attainment. Building on the scholarship of those who have pushed back and paved the way for literature that focuses on the strengths of Chicanas (Hernandez, 1973; Ramirez & Castañeda, 1974; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso, 2006; Yosso et al., 2009), I hope the stories of Chicana master's students will provide a deeper understanding of the challenges they encounter as well as the promise they represent (Gándara et al., 2013).

Conclusion

In this chapter I began to introduce the current state of Mexicanas in higher education. I intentionally highlight the lack of literature on master's student experiences and particularly

literature on Mexicanas in master's programs to draw attention to the need for this work. In the following chapter I provide a review of relevant scholarly literature. In Chapter Two, I delve into the literature on Chicanas in higher education and focus on the experience of Chicanas in graduate school. I describe the origins of Chicanas in higher education as a field and detail the evolution of the field throughout the years. I also provide an overview of the history of master's programs and how they have come to evolve and end with the existing literature on master's programs. Chapter Three outlines the theoretical frameworks that shaped my research process, Chicana Feminist Epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) and Community Cultural Wealth (Yosso, 2001). In Chapter Four I detail the qualitative methods and methodology of pláticas¹⁰ that drove this research and centered the voices of Mexicanas. Chapter Five, *Deciding to Pursue a Master of Arts in Education* provides a closer look at the factors, experiences, and relationships that influenced Chicanas / Mexicanas decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education. Chapter Six, *Attainment of the Master of Arts in Education*, begins with a brief overview of some of the challenges my research collaborators experienced during their master's program, and ends by focusing on the sources of support that Chicanas draw from in order to persist despite the challenges faced. Lastly, Chapter Seven provides a summary of the findings, discusses the implications of the research, provides suggestions for future research, and I share some concluding statements.

¹⁰ Pláticas is a methodological approach grounded on Chicana Feminist Theory that allow for open, guided conversations with participants.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The underrepresentation of Chicanas in higher education is particularly severe, and despite Chicanas being one of the fastest growing populations in the United States they have the lowest education attainment rates of all Latino/as (Pérez Huber et al., 2014). In spite of this underrepresentation, not enough research has focused on Chicanas in higher education. Though some research (Aguirre & Martinez, 1993; Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; Castellanos et al., 2006; Ceja, 2004; Cuádras, 1997; De Loera, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Gándara, 1999; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Pino et al., 2012; Rendón, 1992; Solórzano et al., 2005; Solórzano, 1993; Villaseñor et al., 2013) has explored specific areas such as college access, retention, graduation, and campus climate, Mexicanas progress has been minimal (Cuádras, 2005). Additionally, it is difficult to find research or statistics that does not merge Mexicanas with other Latino/a females or with Mexican American males (Cuádras, 2005). Because Chicanas continue to be underrepresented at all levels of the educational pipeline, and even more so in graduate school, (Pérez Huber et al., 2014) it is crucial to understand their experiences in order to create more supportive environments and a more supportive educational experience overall.

Through this research I intend to bring attention to one particular segment of the Chicano/a education pipeline, Mexicanas in a Master of Arts in Education programs. In this chapter, I describe the origins of Chicanas in higher education as a field; this section addresses how the field emerged, as well as its roots in social justice and activism. This is followed by the foundations of Chicanas in higher education, where the work of various Chicana feminists is explored. Next, I describe the evolution of the field and the research of pivotal scholars. Later, I provide an overview of Mexicana experiences in higher education with a brief mention of the unique challenges faced, and instead focus on their ability to persist despite challenges. I end

with an overview of the history of master's programs, why and how master's programs are unique, master's programs enrollment trends, and themes from existing research. Throughout the literature I intentionally highlight the lack of literature on Mexicana master's student experiences to draw attention to the need for this work.

Origins of Chicanas in Higher Education as a Field

Since the 1960s, Chicana students, scholars, activists, and others have asserted and fought for the need to study Chicanas and their experiences in institutions of higher education (Cuádriz, 2005). The origins of Chicanas in Higher Education closely mirrors the development of Chicana Studies (Cuádriz, 2005) and emerged from two social movements: the Chicano movement and the feminist movement. During the 1960s, there was a strong desire for Chicanas to be acknowledged and recognized within the Chicano movement (García, 1989). Despite Chicanas actively participating in the struggles of the Chicano movement, as they began to “investigate the forces shaping their own experience as women of color” (García, 1989, p. 218), they realized their gender identity was not being acknowledged, and even oppressed, within the Chicano movement. Similarly, Chicanas felt that the mainstream white feminist movement failed to include a broad perspective that took into account the multidimensionality of identities for women of colors (García, 1989). The white feminist movement failed to move beyond gender, a constant critique of Chicanas, and other women of color, who argued that “feminism involved more than an analysis of gender because, as women of color, they were affected by both race and class in their everyday lives” (García, 1989, p. 229). Therefore, Chicanas found it necessary to push for a movement that intentionally carved out space for them, as well as addressed their own political agendas, and the various intersecting forms of oppression they experienced in education (García, 1989; Chapa, 1990; Delgado Bernal, 1999; Donato, 1997).

The field of Chicanas in higher education has its origins in activism, social justice and a struggle for educational equity based on the articulation of a Chicana consciousness (Cuádras, 2005). Though before 1976, the federal government did not keep college enrollment statistics by ethnicity and gender, making it difficult to track Chicano/a student enrollment in higher education, since the inception of the field Chicanas have used their lived experience to theorize and discuss issues impacting the broader Chicana community (Cuádras, 2005). From the initial and current literature it is clear that the field “(a) continues to use the autobiographical voice, notably in the form of testimonio and autohistoria; (b) reflects a continuation of activism on the part of Chicanas with respect to their status in institutions of higher education; and (c) is characterized by the unique combination of traditional scholarship, lived experience, and a legacy of activism” (Cuádras, 2005, p. 217). Hence, to clearly understand the development and origins of Chicanas in Higher Education as a field is to acknowledge the presence of the elements mentioned (Cuádras, 2005).

The Foundations of Chicanas in Higher Education - 1970s to 1990s

In an essay titled *Higher Education y la Chicana?*, Corinne Sanchez (1973) declared that “colleges and universities across the United States exclude the Chicana from participating on their campuses. The exclusion of both the Chicano and *la mujer* in education begins in the first years of education and continues through college” (p. 27). Anna Nieto Gomez de Lazarin (1973) in a famous document, *Chicana Perspectives in Education*, pushed for courses on Chicanos/as to become a core part of the required curriculum at her institution. Similarly, in 1976, in an essay titled *La Raza Habla*, Iris Blanco fought for Chicanas to “become critical of the role of the university and aware of the role they want us to play” (p. 2). Throughout the 1970s, more Chicanas continued to be outspoken about the tensions faced in higher education and found

themselves refuting the cultural deficit model and pushing for more work that examined the discriminatory practices within institutions. Through these examples it is evident that “individually, their voices broke ground, and together they were the pioneer voices of the field of Chicanas and higher education” (Cuádriz, 2005, p. 219).

Meanwhile as more Chicano/a students entered into higher education, the Chicano/a professoriate found themselves having to respond to scholarship that viewed Chicano/a students from a deficit lens or blamed Chicano/a culture and their families for their low educational attainment (Cuellar, 1976). One of the earliest studies that focused on the experiences of Chicana college students was conducted by María Chacón, Elizabeth Cohen and Sharon Strover at the Center for Research on Women at Stanford University (Chacón, 1980; Chacón & Cohen, 1982; Chacón et al., 1986). In this study Chacón et al. (1986) were interested in documenting the heterogeneity and complexity of the Chicana population and the variation in their educational experiences, with the goal of identifying the barriers to progress for Chicanas at five different institutions in California. The study consisted of both interviews and surveys, along with demographic information related to the particular institution each Chicana was attending. The study garnered significant findings as authors found that Chicanas progress in school was hindered by “the hours they spent on domestic labor, less parental support from their mothers when compared to Chicano men, greater stress factors than Chicano men and the mediation of these factors by type of institution attended” (Cuádriz, 2005, p. 220). Here, Chacón et al. (1986) suggested increasing recruitment, financial aid, academic advising, and programs specifically for Chicanas, many policy recommendations still suggested today. This study was significant as it served to legitimize and validate the experience of Chicanas in higher education as worthy of studying and researching, rather than lumping them in the broader Latino/a or female group

(Cuádras, 2005). During this decade, despite Mexican women's college completion rates being only half that of Mexican men, research showed one of the greatest increases in absolute numbers of Chicanas enrolled in college (Cuádras, 2005).

In 1982, Patricia Gándara's publication of *Passing Through the Eye of the Needle* also served to challenge the cultural deficit model and value the presence of Chicanas in higher education. In this piece she interviewed high achieving Mexican-American women from low-income backgrounds who had completed J.Ds, M.Ds, or Ph.Ds. Unlike Chacón et al.'s (1986) study who sought to identify the heterogeneity in Chicana experiences and the barriers to educational progress, Gándara's study sought to identify different factors or experiences that highly accomplished Chicana women might share. Additionally, Gándara wanted to provide some insight into the process of educational success, rather than the reasons for failure. Via a variety of demographic factors collected, and through interviews, Gándara (1982) found the following: (a) Mothers play a significant role in fostering educational drive. This finding was significant as it served to push back against the stereotype that Mexican mothers were passive, home-bound and did not motivate their Mexican daughters. (b) Compared to males, and despite the support from their mothers, the women were not sure what aspirations their parents held for them. The majority of the women saw mothers as supportive of their education but were not exactly sure what they were expected to do with it. (c) Education is seen as a vehicle to acquire well-paying jobs. And (d) Immigrant families instill the value of hard work: "Contrary to stereotype of male authoritarianism and female submission within the context of the Mexican home" (Gándara, 1982, p. 172). Findings showed parents treated their daughters and sons very similarly, instilling values of independence and self-reliance. Last, Chicanas in this study frequently mentioned how comfortable they felt navigating two worlds; their Mexican American

culture at home and Anglo culture at school. Gándara's work revealed that family was central to Chicanas emotional support to succeed in higher education and argued that it was time to rethink the stereotypical beliefs about the role of Chicanas as mothers in the home and Mexican families in general. Together, Chacón et al.'s (1986) and Gándara's (1982) work provided findings that led the way for other researchers to ask and answer similar questions related to Chicana educational success.

Also in 1982, Melba Vasquez reviewed the barriers that often hinder Mexican-American women from entering higher education. Although similar to Chacon et al.'s (1986) work, Vasquez moved beyond looking only at barriers and also addressed strategies to confront those barriers. Some of the challenges Vasquez discussed were related to low socioeconomic status and financial aid, isolation, traditional admissions criteria, and racism in the classroom. However, she also went on to argue the factors that seem to mediate the barriers that Chicanas face. There were several findings, but amongst the most significant were the following: (a) identification with one's ethnic group can fortify academic achievement; (b) personal commitment is a determinant of persistence; (c) financial aid, not in the form of loans, is crucial; (d) cultural organizations to off-set culture shock are necessary; and (e) standardized tests for admissions are not predictive of student success (Vasquez, 1982). Vasquez's work served to provide more visibility to Chicanas and shift from culturally deficit ideologies to more holistic research that accounted for the intersection of Chicanas' varying identities. It also served to affirm the experience of Chicanas and continued to refute the rhetoric that Chicanas had no personal drive. This piece built on Gándara's work by reasserting that Chicanas were smart, motivated, and capable of succeeding in higher education.

In 1988, *The Broken Web: The Educational Experiences of Hispanic American Women* was the first book to address issues related to Latinas in higher education (McKenna & Ortiz, 1988). In this book, the authors presented three main critiques. First, it discussed the paucity of usable research data and the issue of treating Latina women as a monolithic group. McKenna and Ortiz (1988) addressed the difficulty in data collection when doing research on Chicanas and reminded researchers that Chicanas were worthy of research as a stand-alone group. Second, the authors critiqued the persistent application of the cultural deficiency model to the Latino/a educational experience. Rather than blaming students, McKenna and Ortiz exposed the failure of public institutions to adequately prepare students and encourage educational attainment. Third, they discussed the lack of a conceptual model that would enable accurate interpretations of Latina women's educational experiences. *The Broken Web* was a pivotal piece of literature as it once again moved Latino/a and Chicano/a scholarship forward and pushed for theories and concepts that took into account the multidimensional experience of Students of Color. The critiques presented by the authors are still timely, as finding data that is specific to Mexicanas in higher education, and master's specifically, has been challenging.

The 1990s saw a rise in groundbreaking scholarship influenced by feminist theory, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and innovative methodological and theoretical frameworks (Cuádriz, 2005). In a study of 100 Chicana PhDs, Shirley Achor and Aida Morales (1990) focused on the high level of success these women had and the crucial elements that contributed

to their success. In the context of social reproduction theory¹¹ and a cultural ecology¹² framework, they found that Chicanas rejected and pushed back on the underlying racist messages sent to them by contesting the barriers encountered. Achor and Morales's (1990) data also supported Patricia Gándara's (1982) claims that suggested family transmitted messages related to the value of education and discussed that contrary to the stereotype that Mexican women are passive, family promoted personality traits enabled their growth, high aspirations, and success. In sum, Achor and Morales (1990) challenged culturally deficit forms of scholarship by emphasizing the support Mexicanas received from their families.

In a study on Chicanas at a prestigious university Gloria Cuádriz's (1996) findings challenged Bourdieu's assertion that one must assimilate to the dominant culture and argued that Chicanas resorted to collective action to succeed. Cuádriz's work continued to document and reveal the trends of resistance and rejection of traditional values in the Chicana educational experience. Cuádriz (1996) illustrated that "Bourdieu's image of incorporation for those from the working class who achieve scholastic cultural capital overemphasizes adaptation to and legitimation by the dominant culture" (pp. 211–212). Similarly, in *Over the Ivy Walls*, Patricia Gándara (1995) revealed how home influences and family stories become a part of Chicanas cultural capital that enables their success. Gándara explained how what was learned in the home often served as a driving force or motivational factor. During this period the literature

¹¹ Social Reproduction Theory argues that schools are not institutions of equal opportunity but mechanisms for perpetuating social inequalities (Collins, 2009). Schools function as "societal sorting machines, geared to replicate existing economic, social and political divisions" (Achor & Morales, 1990, p. 270).

¹² Cultural Ecology is similar to social reproduction theory but departs in their contention that some minorities will do well in school depending on the "type of minority" they are (Achor & Morales, 1990, p. 270).

consistently found that despite numerous obstacles and challenges, Chicanas contested inequality both individually and collectively (Cuádriz, 2005) in their respective fields and daily lives.

Seguimos Adelante—2000s and Onward

A significant and critical contribution to the field was made In *Learning and Living Pedagogies of the Home: The Mestiza Consciousness of Chicana Students*, where Dolores Delgado Bernal (2001) worked with the concept of mestiza consciousness to describe how Chicana undergraduate students processed the intersections of race, class, and gender, to successfully navigate and negotiate their experiences in higher education. More specifically, Delgado Bernal highlighted the ways in which Chicanas learned valuable lessons in their homes and drew from their biculturalism, bilingualism, commitment to their communities, and relationship to their education to thrive. Her analysis of Chicana experiences was also pivotal because it continued to use asset-based frameworks to show that the learning that occurred at home and in the community was also an important “cultural knowledge base that helps students survive and succeed within an educational system, that often excludes and silences them” (Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 623). Ultimately this piece provided a unique contribution due to the way in which Delgado Bernal encouraged and demanded universities view all qualities of Chicana students as assets (e.g., rather than view limited English as a detriment, these students could help support Spanish language tutors or serve as community liaisons for Spanish-speaking communities).

Later, in *Examining Transformational Resistance Through a Critical Race and LatCrit Theory Framework: Chicana and Chicano Students in an Urban Context*, Solórzano and Delgado Bernal (2001) brought attention to the application of Critical Race Theory to issues of Latino/a educational attainment. Focusing on two events in Chicano/a student history—the 1968

East Los Angeles school walkouts and the 1993 UCLA student struggle for Chicana and Chicano studies—Solórzano and Delgado Bernal examined the construct of student resistance via counterstorytelling. This was a significant contribution to the field as it explicitly integrated race in the conversation to examine educational inequities. It also brought to the forefront that Chicano/a students have always cared about their education and resisted against the systems that sought to silence them (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). Additionally, this piece added to our understanding of how we can understand resistance and the margin as a site of possibility and empowerment (hooks, 1990).

During this decade mainstream and traditional notions of success were also deconstructed and redefined to include multiple interpretations of identity and sexuality representative of the Chicano/a population (Hurtado, 2003). In 2003, the publication of *Voicing Chicana Feminisms* by Aida Hurtado also offered a compelling look into the varying intersections of Chicanas lives beyond high school and explored the complexity of Chicanas everyday lives while looking at issues of gender and ethnic identity as well as consciousness. Via interviews with college educated Mexican-American women between the ages of 20 and 30 years old, Hurtado (2003) explored questions related to place and language; the silencing of Chicanas in the academic world; the balancing act required by multiple identities, work, family relationships, menstruation, love and marriage; women's subordination within the Chicano community and beyond; and religion and spirituality. Specifically, Hurtado delved deep into concepts of sexuality and did not shy away from questions related to virginity, lesbianism, and sexuality in general. Hurtado also brought up the idea of "feminism with no name" (p. 203) and allowed her research collaborators to define how they identified with feminism, if at all. Ultimately, this book was critical in

continuing to raise awareness about the experience of young Chicanas, and the vast differences across their experiences.

Continuing to produce work that pushed back on deficit frames of research and stereotypes about Chicanas/os, Elenes et al. (2010) published the article, “Introduction: Chicana/Mexicana Feminist Pedagogies: Consejos, Respeto, y Educación in Everyday Life.” In their work, Elenes et al. placed cultural knowledge at the forefront of their educational research in an effort to better understand the lessons that can come from home spaces, community, and schools. In this piece they offered new ways to rethink traditional notions of education and the spaces through which learning and teaching take place (Elenes et al., 2010). They specifically highlighted how conversations about school, respect, and general advice occurred in everyday life for Chicanas, and often in the least unexpected places like the kitchen, or while doing chores. They wrote about the ways in which Chicana mothers instilled feminism values in their daughters without necessarily having the language to name it and even unintentionally offered their daughters skills to navigate through life. This piece brought a unique lens to research on Chicanas as it inserted a theoretical understanding of pedagogies that moved beyond the traditional, formal and conventional schooling, and instead challenged social inequalities and injustices within schools. Also important, was the call to completely rethink and re-imagine educational research, epistemology, and pedagogy to better understand the knowledge produced in Chicano/a communities. Elenes et al. were definitely influential for scholars that followed in being explicit and unapologetic in their demands.

Most recently the literature has shifted to highlight the ways in which Chicana students experience and respond to racism and how they engage in resistance. Drawing from Critical Race and Chicana Feminist frameworks and by utilizing validating methodologies such as

Pláticas or Testimonios, scholars seek to capture a more complete picture of how Chicanas experience racism and also engage in reflection, healing and celebration (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). Additionally, research explores the attributes of Chicanas, the knowledge, skills, and abilities they bring with them to higher education (Yosso, 2006), and the ways in which mentoring and nurturing relationships can have a positive impact in their educational trajectories (Villaseñor et al., 2013).

What is clear is that since its inception as a field much of the scholarship on Chicanas in higher education focuses on a legacy of activism, resistance, and opposition to status quo that represent dominant paradigms. Like Chicano/a studies, the field of Chicanas and Higher Education has often found itself on a defensive and often working to refute cultural deficit notions. However, it is also important to applaud Chicano/a scholars for being proactive in refuting deficit narratives and utilizing asset-based frameworks that are affirming and validating of the Chicano/a experience.

Chicanas' Ability to Persist Despite the Challenges

The literature outlines the following challenges for Chicanas in graduate school¹³: experiences with microaggressions, racism, gender stereotypes, pregnancy and parenting responsibilities, lack of financial resources, unequal treatment by professors in the classroom, and/or lower academic expectations (Achor & Morales, 1990; Cuádriz, 1997; Delgado Bernal, 2001; National Women's Law Center, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). When internalized, these stereotypes and various forms of discrimination may cause Chicanas to question their abilities, self-esteem, and in turn hinder their motivation to pursue graduate degrees (Gomez

¹³ Because of the lack of literature on Chicanas master's student experiences, some of the literature cited is in reference to undergraduate or doctoral experiences. However, research trends seem to point to similar experiences in graduate school.

Cervantes, 2010). However, Chicanas continue to thrive by pulling on their Community Cultural Wealth, relying on each other, and finding resources outside their departments (Yosso, 2005). Despite the challenges encountered, research shows their resistance, coping skills, ability for tolerance, personal motivation and ambition, support systems of self, cultural, and familial, as well as their determination to reach degree completion (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bañuelos, 2006; Berry, 1990; Celaya, 2012; Espinoza, 2010; Gándara, 1982; González, 2006; Leyva, 2011; Montas-Hunter, 2012; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso et al., 2009). Chicanas engage in strategies to persist, such as creating counterspaces, mentoring circles, relying on family support, their biculturalism, ambition and self-expectations (Carrillo & Dean, 2020). Yosso (2006) reminds us that, “to survive a history of institutional neglect...Chicana/os draw on various cultural and linguistic skills, knowledge, contacts, and abilities nurtured in their communities” (p. 2). Next, I describe five ways Chicanas persist by creating more humanizing and empowering educational experiences (Carrillo & Dean, 2020; Ceja, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Dominguez, 2013; Espinoza, 2010; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Sanchez, 2015; Valencia & Black, 2002; Vasquez, 1982; Yosso et al., 2009).

Creating Counterspaces

Counterspaces are defined as spaces that exist both inside and outside the classroom where students are able to create a sense of community, empowerment and find healing (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). Yosso et al. (2009) describes counterspaces as spaces that “enable Latina/o students to develop skills of critical navigation through multiple worlds (e.g., home and school communities) and ultimately to survive and succeed in the face of racism” (p. 678). An example of counterspaces can be seen in “Critical Race Theory, Racial Microaggressions, and Campus Racial Climate for Latina/o Undergraduates,” where Yosso et al. sought to understand incidents of racial microaggressions as experienced by Latino/a students at selective universities.

Through focus groups, Yosso et al. were able to shed light on how microaggressions shaped Latino/a students' educational experiences and how students succeeded despite a negative campus racial climate.

The research demonstrated that although they experienced hostile classroom or social environments, they fostered a sense of home outside of the classroom via student-run and student-initiated groups. In turn, "Building community in social counterspaces cultivates students' sense of home and family, which bolsters their sense of belonging and nurtures their resilience" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 677). Though the impact of microaggressions, and other negative experiences faced by Latino/a students on college campuses, are certainly harmful and hurtful, it is evident that Latino/a students continue to find ways to "respond to the *rejection* they face from a negative campus racial climate by *building communities* that represent and reflect the cultural wealth of their home communities" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 680, emphasis in the original). This particular study focused on Latino/a students, so further research is needed to increase our understanding of Chicana/Mexicana students. Master's students specifically merit attention as well.

Mentoring

Chicanas develop networks of students and professors and share experiences to challenge an educational system that has consistently failed them (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Via informal mentoring relationships Chicanas share their experiences of maneuvering through institutional barriers and provide tips for the next generations of incoming Chicana scholars (Sanchez, 2015). Villaseñor et al. (2013) discussed the importance of mentoring that bridges the academic, personal, and professional to create a meaningful framework that is attentive to the particular needs of Chicana students, which they call *Mujerista Mentoring*. What is particular about these mentoring relationships Chicanas co-create is that they offer alternative methods and

philosophies of mentoring that do not require Chicana students to assimilate to the dominant culture (Villaseñor et al., 2013). More importantly, they emphasize the need to give back to other Chicanos/as, after “making it” through the educational pipeline. Ultimately, these informal mentoring relationships provide strength, motivation, empowerment, and consejos¹⁴ to help Chicanas navigate the graduate education pipeline more smoothly (Sanchez, 2015).

Familismo

Carrillo and Dean (2020) described familismo as a “cultural value held by many Latinas that prioritizes family over individual interests; it stresses loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity” (p. 104). Research on familismo has found that family plays a central role in Chicanas education and career decisions and that Chicano/a family’s place high value on education for their children. These strong family ties and support have been linked to academic success (Carrillo & Dean, 2020). Even though Chicanas are often first-generation college students and their parents do not necessarily understand the content of their education, parents show solidarity by asking how school is going, sending care packages, or bragging to family members (Carrillo & Dean, 2020). This pushes us to consider how family can serve as a driving force in Mexicana graduate student experiences to further debunk the myth that Mexican parents do not value education. The strengths of Chicanas and their families remain unacknowledged in many environments, (Carrillo & Dean, 2020) and as they continue to enroll in higher education in larger numbers, scholars should be more intentional about conducting research that promotes an understanding of Chicana experiences and successes.

¹⁴ advice

Biculturalism

A bicultural person is defined as someone who is, “competent in two cultures (Dominguez, 2013), engages in typical behaviors of both cultures, embraces the opportunity to remain involved in practices and lifestyles of both cultures, and feels a sense of belonging for both cultural communities” (Espinoza, 2010, p. 320). Biculturalism provides Chicanas with an understanding of how to manage the different tensions that arise from traversing their two cultures, home culture and educational environment (Carrillo & Dean, 2020). The following are described as benefits of a bicultural identity: a tolerance for ambiguity, adaptability, flexibility, and enhanced coping and survival skills. Biculturalism enables Chicanas to function within the dominant culture, while also remaining critical and challenging dominant frameworks (Espinoza, 2010). The development of this bicultural identity can help Mexicana students better navigate their journey in education as they will more easily adapt to new spaces. Research on Mexicanas in master’s programs is necessary to understand how Mexicanas utilize their bicultural abilities to navigate through their graduate journeys.

Ambition and Expectations

Despite being part of an educational system that was not created with them in mind, Chicanas continue to overcome insurmountable odds (Yosso, 2006). Though Chicanas encounter financial barriers, they start thinking about college from early in their high school trajectories and are committed to earning their degree (Ceja, 2004; Vasquez, 1982). Additionally, motivation, positive self-expectations, encouragement from mothers and teachers, and positive identification with one’s language and culture have been found to mediate the barriers that many Chicanas face (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Valencia & Black, 2002; Vasquez, 1982). Research has shown Chicanas enter graduate school with high self-expectations and ambition to succeed and

institutions should nurture the attributes and experiences that Chicanas bring with them in order to facilitate their success.

By intentionally creating spaces by them and for them, and challenging the racism and discrimination they encounter, Chicanas are redefining the margins as a place of possibility instead of a place of oppression (hooks, 1990). Nevertheless, it is not Chicanas' responsibility to make up for the failure of the U.S. educational system (Yosso, 2005). Institutions should be held accountable for taking the steps necessary to recruit, retain, and support all Chicana/o students, staff, faculty, counselors, administrators, etc. (Yosso, 2006). As researchers it is important that we continue to learn more about Mexicana graduate student experiences in order to better understand and support them. It is clear from the literature that graduate institutions were not created with Mexicanas in mind (Peregrino, 2003). Despite that, they have pushed back, carved out spaces for themselves, and redefined the possibilities. In the following section, I will delve deeper into master's education and describe the rise of the master's degree throughout the years, the shift in enrollment demographics, and the overall trends on research on master's students.

Master's Education

Master's degrees were the first post baccalaureate degrees created with the intention to serve the education needs of individuals that were not being met with baccalaureate degrees (Borchert, 1994). As such, they were created to become more advanced and specialized study in a particular field (Borchert, 1994). Though the initial focus of master's degrees was more so to further educate students and advance their pedagogical and job skills to become more competitive for the job market, over time master's programs have evolved into a diverse set of academic programs offered in nearly every discipline in higher education. According to Eileen O'Brien (1992), this "transformation occurred on an institution-by-institution basis, with the

degree being adapted to offer an educational program focusing on specialization, professionalization, and career enhancement and development” (p. 4). Master’s degree programs generally fall into one of two categories: (a) a research focused, disciplined-oriented program, designed to prepare students to understand and conduct research with the aim of creating new knowledge; or (b) a practice-oriented program designed to prepare students to be directly involved, and apply the knowledge learned.¹⁵ However, master’s programs also fulfill a range of different jobs within higher education (Conrad et al., 1993), as master’s degree programs are also a thriving enterprise (Borchert, 1994).

Master’s students play a crucial role in the enrollment mix at many universities. From the perspective of the university’s mission, master’s programs serve to advance the educational needs of students. However, master’s programs provide an inexpensive workforce, through teaching assistantships, research assistantships, and contribute to the overall income generation of the university (Borchert, 1994; Cohen, 2012; Glazer, 1986; Glazer-Raymo, 2005). Because master’s students receive little to no funding they tend to be funded by the student themselves, their families, scholarships, or their employers (Borchert, 1994), resulting in more income for the institution. Most often, master’s students pay for their tuition solely out of pocket and therefore money collected from tuition and fees can be used for the institution’s financial obligations (Cohen, 2012). So, with an increase in enrollment of master’s students, comes an increase in tuition revenue for the institution.

¹⁵ With the exception of a Master of Fine Arts (MFA), which is a graduate-level degree for students studying visual and performing arts, design or creative writing.

Rise of the Master's Degree

Many are describing the master's as the new bachelor's degree for folks who want to stand out in the increasingly competitive job market. According to the Council of Graduate Schools (2017), enrollment in graduate education is likely to increase as the workforce demands more master's degrees. In 2015–2016, master's program enrollment accounted for three-quarters of students enrolled in graduate programs across the country, and almost 80% of Latinos/as enrolled in graduate school were in master's programs (Council of Graduate Schools, 2017). However, most national data sources on graduate students do not differentiate between master's and doctoral students, or by race, ethnicity, gender, and field of study, making it difficult to draw a comprehensive profile of these students.

When looking at the data on master's students collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (2018) it also becomes apparent that the number of master's degrees conferred each year is on the rise, across all racial/ethnic groups, an 150% increase in master's degrees conferred from 1976–1977 to 2016–2017 (see Table 2.1 below), compared to bachelors or doctoral programs who have seen an 114% increase and 99% increase in degrees conferred, respectively (see Appendix E & F).

For Latinos/as specifically, in 1976–1977 they earned 6,136 of 322,463 (2%) master's degrees total across all fields. Twenty-four years later in 2000–2001 Latinos/as accounted for 21,661 of 473,502 (5%) master's degrees awarded, and most recently in 2016–2017 they accounted for 67,166 of 804,684 (8%). Of the Latino/a master's completed, Latinas accounted for 2,808 of 6,136 (>1%) in 1976–1977; 13,290 of 21,661 (6%) in 2000–2001; and 43,369 of 67,166 (64%) in 2016–2017. With master's enrollment rates on the rise and the percentage of master's degrees awarded largely surpassing that of doctorate degrees and professional

certificates, for all racial/ethnic groups (see Appendix D), exploring the experiences of students in master's programs is important and necessary (Council of Graduate Schools, 2017).

Table 2.1

Master's Degrees Conferred by Postsecondary Institutions by Race/Ethnicity and Sex of Student

from 1976–1977 to 2016–2017

| Females | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|---------|--------|----------|------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1976-77 ¹ | 149,760 | 127,360 | 13,282 | 2,808 | 1,999 | 453 | — | 3,858 |
| 1980-81 ² | 149,479 | 126,548 | 11,018 | 3,379 | 2,518 | 537 | — | 5,479 |
| 1990-91 | 182,021 | 147,934 | 10,822 | 4,964 | 5,104 | 694 | — | 12,503 |
| 1999-2000 | 267,056 | 193,769 | 24,964 | 11,641 | 12,224 | 1,418 | — | 23,040 |
| 2000-01 | 275,732 | 195,695 | 26,975 | 13,290 | 12,983 | 1,571 | — | 25,218 |
| 2002-03 | 303,527 | 210,065 | 31,926 | 15,811 | 14,788 | 1,843 | — | 29,094 |
| 2003-04 | 331,216 | 227,079 | 36,375 | 18,877 | 16,651 | 2,069 | — | 30,165 |
| 2004-05 | 342,996 | 233,170 | 39,194 | 20,138 | 17,804 | 2,143 | — | 30,547 |
| 2005-06 | 358,161 | 243,823 | 42,434 | 20,840 | 18,265 | 2,266 | — | 30,533 |
| 2006-07 | 368,490 | 249,373 | 45,099 | 22,491 | 19,731 | 2,315 | — | 29,481 |
| 2007-08 | 380,641 | 255,726 | 47,153 | 23,733 | 20,263 | 2,481 | — | 31,285 |
| 2008-09 | 398,567 | 264,850 | 50,626 | 25,253 | 21,645 | 2,428 | — | 33,765 |
| 2009-10 | 417,996 | 274,915 | 54,351 | 28,049 | 23,097 | 2,546 | — | 35,038 |
| 2010-11 | 439,242 | 285,136 | 56,996 | 29,640 | 23,564 | 2,537 | 4,057 | 37,312 |
| 2011-12 | 453,483 | 287,600 | 60,723 | 32,361 | 24,628 | 2,383 | 6,305 | 39,483 |
| 2012-13 | 450,166 | 278,688 | 61,572 | 33,550 | 24,450 | 2,413 | 7,322 | 42,171 |
| 2013-14 | 451,736 | 271,468 | 61,998 | 35,397 | 24,578 | 2,293 | 8,527 | 47,475 |
| 2014-15 | 452,189 | 264,945 | 60,993 | 37,368 | 24,912 | 2,187 | 9,190 | 52,594 |
| 2015-16 | 465,183 | 265,724 | 61,762 | 40,311 | 25,850 | 2,309 | 10,460 | 58,767 |
| 2016-17 | 477,792 | 268,906 | 62,601 | 43,369 | 27,136 | 2,246 | 11,218 | 62,316 |
| | Number of degrees conferred to U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and nonresident aliens | | | | | | | |
| Year and sex | Total | White | Black | Hispanic | Asian/Pacific Islander | American Indian/Alaska Native | Two or more races | Non-resident alien |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Total | | | | | | | | |
| 1976-77 ¹ | 322,463 | 271,402 | 21,252 | 6,136 | 5,127 | 1,018 | — | 17,528 |
| 1980-81 ² | 301,081 | 247,475 | 17,436 | 6,534 | 6,348 | 1,044 | — | 22,244 |
| 1990-91 | 342,863 | 265,927 | 17,023 | 8,981 | 11,869 | 1,189 | — | 37,874 |
| 1999-2000 | 463,185 | 324,990 | 36,606 | 19,379 | 23,523 | 2,263 | — | 56,424 |
| 2000-01 | 473,502 | 324,211 | 38,853 | 21,661 | 24,544 | 2,496 | — | 61,737 |
| 2002-03 | 518,699 | 346,003 | 45,150 | 25,200 | 27,492 | 2,886 | — | 71,968 |
| 2003-04 | 564,272 | 373,448 | 51,402 | 29,806 | 31,202 | 3,206 | — | 75,208 |
| 2004-05 | 580,151 | 383,246 | 55,330 | 31,639 | 33,042 | 3,310 | — | 73,584 |
| 2005-06 | 599,862 | 397,519 | 59,822 | 32,578 | 34,302 | 3,519 | — | 72,122 |
| 2006-07 | 610,703 | 403,623 | 63,439 | 34,962 | 36,420 | 3,590 | — | 68,669 |
| 2007-08 | 630,844 | 413,348 | 65,912 | 36,899 | 37,743 | 3,775 | — | 73,167 |
| 2008-09 | 662,082 | 427,713 | 70,772 | 39,567 | 40,510 | 3,777 | — | 79,743 |
| 2009-10 | 693,313 | 445,158 | 76,472 | 43,603 | 42,520 | 3,965 | — | 81,595 |
| 2010-11 | 730,922 | 462,922 | 80,742 | 46,823 | 43,482 | 3,946 | 6,597 | 86,410 |
| 2011-12 | 755,967 | 470,822 | 86,007 | 50,994 | 45,379 | 3,681 | 9,823 | 89,261 |
| 2012-13 | 751,718 | 455,896 | 87,989 | 52,991 | 44,906 | 3,693 | 11,794 | 94,449 |
| 2013-14 | 754,582 | 444,771 | 88,606 | 55,962 | 44,533 | 3,512 | 13,417 | 103,781 |
| 2014-15 | 758,804 | 433,096 | 87,288 | 58,752 | 44,489 | 3,410 | 14,628 | 117,141 |
| 2015-16 | 785,757 | 431,885 | 88,786 | 63,060 | 45,921 | 3,538 | 16,589 | 135,978 |
| 2016-17 | 804,684 | 433,625 | 89,577 | 67,166 | 47,841 | 3,396 | 17,668 | 145,411 |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2018).

Shift in Master's Enrollment Demographics

Beyond the changes happening in the number of master's degrees awarded each year, the enrollment demographics of master's programs are also changing. First, it is evident that master's programs are becoming more diverse; over the past two decades they continuously enrolled a larger share of students from Latino/a, Black/African American, and Asian backgrounds (Blagg, 2013). From 1996 to 2016, the share of Black and Latino/a students enrolled in master's programs nearly doubled, from 8% to 15% and 5% to 10%, respectively (Blagg, 2013). As mentioned previously, although there is no national database that tracks information on master's students related to race, ethnicity, gender, and field of study in one place, from Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1 one can draw the conclusion that as the enrollment of Latinos/as in master's programs increases, so does the enrollment of Chicanas. With the evolving landscape of master's education, this shift in enrollment trends cannot be ignored.

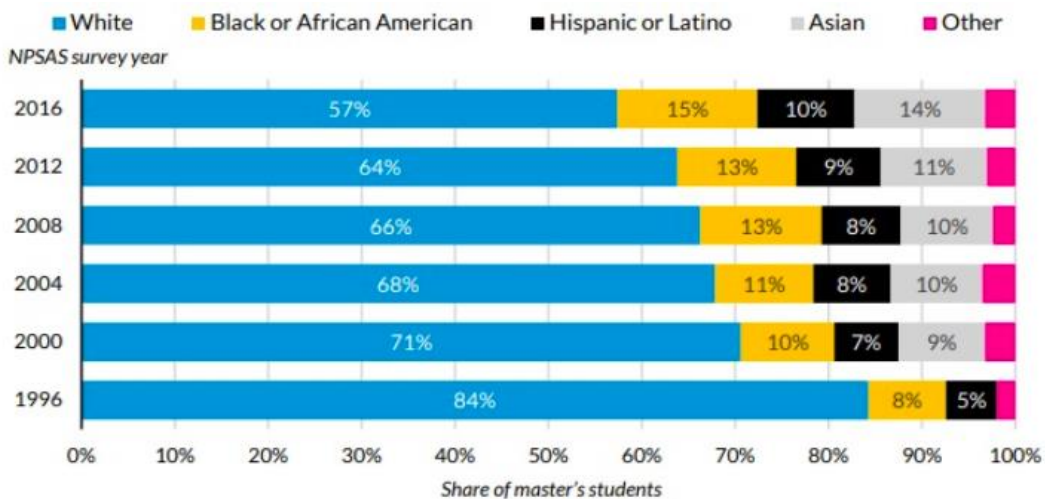


Figure 2.1. Share of Students Enrolled in Master's Programs by Race or Ethnicity. Source: Blagg (2013).

Overall Trends in Existing Research on Master's Education

Glazer-Raymo (1986) stated that the master's degree demonstrates the diversity and complexity of graduate education. She was amongst the first to call attention to the diverse and

changing nature of master's programs, postulating that the master's degree may more accurately be described as a first professional degree, "one whose content and structure are based on more utilitarian and measurable objectives" (iv). Glazer-Raymo's (1986) work tracked the development and trajectory of a range of master's programs, with a focus on the culture of professionalization and credentialism in the U.S. Her research was foundational in illustrating the changing landscape of graduate education and identifying initiatives that supported innovation in master's programs in order for them to continue being marketable throughout the years. Through her work, Glazer-Raymo also addressed questions about the purpose of master's programs and the consequences of transforming the principles of programs throughout the years to keep up with the changing demands from students. Though instrumental to the understanding of master's program structures and development, Glazer-Raymo focused more on administrative and policy issues rather than student experiences.

Then, in 1993, Conrad et al. published what would later become one of the groundbreaking books on master's students, *A Silent Success: Master's Education in The United States*. Through interviews with over 800 people (students, alumni, employers, and administrators) representing 47 master's programs in 11 fields of study, the authors were able to identify the extent to which people valued master's education. They found that although initially seen as a degree with less merit than a doctoral degree or as a "consolation prize" (Conrad et al., 1993), over time the importance, recognition, and value of master's degrees increased. This study served to paint a broad picture of the overall positive impacts and benefits of a master's education, concluding that master's programs served to refine one's analytical skills, understand differing perspectives, improve communication, and enhance professional skills. In this work Conrad et al. (1993), described the characteristics of high-quality master's programs as well as

provided a variety of recommendations for strengthening master's education (more funding, flexible leave policies, flexible academic policies, etc.). This text served to give master's degrees the recognition they very well-deserved within academia. Though a foundational text in helping us understand master's student experiences, Conrad et al. did not include a critical race-gender perspective nor centered the voices of Students of Color. My study seeks to further expand on Conrad et al.'s work by pushing researchers to think about the varying differences in experience when we factor in race, gender, and field.

Another important contribution to the field was by scholars Longfield et al. (2006), who “explored graduate students’ perspectives of how graduate school affected their participation in physical and social activities and their self-worth” (p. 282). They found “the occupation of being a graduate student affects one’s social and physical activities in a typically negative fashion, and overall sense of self-worth in a negative and positive way” (p. 291). Here, the authors revealed that the transitions graduate school imposes on students could cause detrimental shifts and jeopardize an individual’s well-being and life balance (Longfield et al., 2006). Master’s students reported having a time-consuming workload that made it difficult for them to interact with others. One student expressed “when I do have fun, sometimes you feel guilty, because you know that there is work you could be doing” (p. 285). Master’s students also discussed the high cost of graduate school, which in turn impacted the activities they could partake in with friends. They shared how difficult it was to make friends outside of their program and felt it was hard to connect with people who are not in graduate school. An important contribution of this work was the self-worth piece. Longfield et al.’s findings showed that for some, being a master’s student took a toll on self-worth. Despite being in a graduate program, students that had left a good paying job to return to graduate school found themselves comparing their income to friends or

family that were not in school. Internal conflicts then arose, making the student question if the right decision had been made. This particular study was different from previous works, in that it centered student voices and delved deep into some of the interpersonal conflicts master's students face outside of school. However, like most scholars that have conducted research on master's students, Longfield et al. also argue that further research is needed to understand the unique challenges of master's students and the ways in which we can support them.

In 2011, Portnoi and Kwong more closely focused on understanding student experience and challenges by focusing on first-generation master's students and their perceptions of their academic experience. The researchers conducted individual and group interviews with 25 students pursuing master's degrees and the following themes arose: (a) a lack of support in the application process from undergraduate professors; (b) feelings of confusion with the institutions and their advisors expectations of completing their master's degree; (c) feelings of inadequacy and impostor syndrome; (d) a desire for more guidance with regards to comprehensive exams; and (e) the challenge of managing their school identity and home identity. Generally, students shared experiences of being the first in their families to ever go through graduate school and having no idea what they had to do to graduate. One student shared, "I don't know anybody personally or relatives that have gone to grad school. I sort of have to figure things out on my own" (Portnoi & Kwong, 2011, p. 419). Another expressed not knowing what to expect in an essay paper "because I've never seen it before, I never read one before and don't know how to do it at this level" (p. 417). However, master's students also felt some of these challenges had been mediated by their passion for the subject being studied, the impact of their relationship with caring professors, the support of peers, and the motivation from family and friends. Though this study did an excellent job of looking at the experience of first-generation master's students, and

providing a framework for future research, the authors also explicitly stated at the end that further breakdown by subset of graduate student populations is necessary for a deeper understanding. They also argued that more qualitative research must be conducted to thoroughly examine the ways in which master's students navigate their studies and succeed.

More closely related to my topic, in 2011, Valeria Lester Leyva explored the experience of first-generation Mexicanas “negotiating their ethnic, cultural and professional identities” (p. 21) while pursuing their Masters of Social Work. Leyva’s work revealed the contradictions experienced in Mexicanas everyday lives and the ways in which they reconcile those differences. For example, Leyva explains that in terms of culture, Mexicanas are expected to behave one way (quiet and reserved) but expected to behave another way when they enter college (confident and outspoken). Leyva discussed the difficulty with reconciling cultural values, while also being assertive at school and explaining the challenges that come with maintaining “the positive aspects of their cultural foundations while integrating professional social work values” (p. 27). However, students coped with their challenges by creating community and sharing similar experiences. Leyva’s research is similar to mine as she conducted interviews through which she sought to bring attention to the experience of Mexicanas in Master of Social Work programs at her particular institutions. However, my dissertation will build on this work by focusing on a Master of Arts in Education program instead.

Also closely related to my work is Karina Medrano’s (2018) book-length study, *Exploring the Experiences of First-Generation College Students Pursuing Master’s Degrees*. In this study Medrano sought to learn more about first-generation college students’ overall experiences pursuing master’s degrees and the strengths that kept them going while pursuing their degrees. Via conversations with 7 master’s students of both genders and various

race/ethnicities, Medrano highlighted the ways in which challenges faced were mediated through inner strengths, personal attributes, or familial support. Through a phenomenological approach, student voices were centered to exemplify the strength of first-generation master's students (Medrano, 2018). In this work, Medrano concluded by offering recommendations based on the conversations she had with students, such as more opportunities for student and faculty engagement, more resources, more exposure to graduate school early on, and more honesty about graduate school in general. Medrano's work is most similar to the study that I seek to conduct, but my dissertation utilized a different approach by centering critical race gender epistemologies and frameworks and focusing on only Mexicana master's students.

Last, it is important to acknowledge that master's programs have also shown to be important for advancement in one's career or acceptance to a doctoral program, as many programs require at least one master's degree for admissions (Palacios, 2016). On a practical level, it has also been shown that the master's degree can increase one's individual earning potential. This is clear in the U.S Census data, which clearly shows that students who have earned a master's degree earn substantially more over their lifetime than those who have obtained only a baccalaureate or high school degree (Torpey & Terrell, 2015). Students are increasingly pursuing these degrees to gain knowledge needed for a particular job, update their skills in fields rapidly changing, and /or to qualify for higher salary. Clearly more research needs to be conducted on master's students as a whole but looking at Mexicana experiences in master's programs can serve to further clarify some of the questions that were left unanswered in previous works, hence my research questions.

Conclusion

From the literature it is evident that researchers have explored student enrollment trends for decades, but not specifically for Mexicanas in Master of Arts in Education programs. We know that master's student enrollment is important and even necessary for both increasing the economic health of the institution as well as meeting the goals of universities academic missions (Cohen, 2012). It is also known that master's programs are becoming increasingly popular for advancing careers, changing professions, or preparing for doctoral level work. However, though we know some of the *whys* behind choosing to pursue a master's degree, not much is known about *how* students make these decisions and how they experience the program itself. With the rise of Mexicanas in the overall population, and the increasingly diverse master's enrollment trends, it is necessary to explore this topic further.

CHAPTER THREE: CENTERING MEXICANA IDENTITIES THROUGH CRITICAL FRAMEWORKS

In order to further understand the experience of Chicanas in Master of Arts in Education programs, it is important to centralize their intersectional identities and their assets within my work. For that reason, this research is guided by both Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) and Community Cultural Wealth (CCW). Chicana Feminist Epistemology, will be included to strengthen the gender lens of this research and to unapologetically centralize Chicana identities. Community Cultural Wealth will serve to shift the research lens away from a deficit view of Chicanas and instead allow me to focus on the array of cultural knowledge, skills, and abilities they bring (Yosso, 2005). Each of these frameworks provides tools to understand the multifaceted experiences Chicanas bring to academia and beyond. Together CFE and CCW assist in understanding the unique experiences of Chicanas in Masters programs and can be used to continue pushing toward a critical-race gender epistemology in educational research. Most importantly, CFE and CCW provide the tools necessary to prevent the homogenization of each research contributor's experience.

In this chapter I introduce the different components of the theoretical frameworks guiding my dissertation. I begin with Chicana Feminist Epistemology, in which I discuss its foundations, its fundamental elements, key theoretical concepts, and connections to my dissertation study. Then, I discuss Community Cultural Wealth, describe its components, and describe how it complements my work. Together, these frameworks provide the foundation and tools necessary to learn from the experiences of Chicanas in master's programs.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE)

Chicana Feminism evolved between 1970 and 1980 out of the strong traditions of Black, Native American, and Chicana feminists (Delgado Bernal, 1998), due to the failure of traditional feminist methodologies and approaches that did not carefully examine the intersectionalities of race, class, gender, language, sexuality, etc. (Saavedra & Nymark, 2008). During that time there was a strong desire for Chicanas to be acknowledged and recognized within the Chicano movement of the 1960s (García, 1989). Chicanas found it necessary to introduce such a framework as it spoke, and to this day speaks, to the failures of traditional, hegemonic, patriarchal scholarship (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Via Chicana Feminism, Chicanas have been able to carve out space for themselves through which they form their own political agendas as well as address and resist the various intersecting forms of oppression they experience (García, 1989). Inspired by the foundational scholars of CFE, today, Chicana scholars and activists continue to resist and push back against racist and patriarchal structures (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015).

Foundational Works

Gloria Anzaldúa played a pivotal role in redefining Chicano/a/x and lesbian identities. Through her thought-provoking work Anzaldúa explored a variety of topics but gave much importance to the destructive effects of systems of oppression and marginalization. In *Borderlands/ La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Anzaldúa (1987) blended history with personal experience to profoundly challenge and call out the inherent patriarchal and sexist attitudes that exist within Chicano/a communities. Anzaldúa (1987) explained how through her lesbian identity she was able to challenge our traditional understanding of Chicano/a identity and emphasize the intermixing of identities through the mestiza consciousness. Additionally, Anzaldúa called for a balance between the body, mind, and spirit to be able to fully engage in

scholarship that is committed to social justice for Chicanas/Latinas (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002). Similarly, Cherrie Moraga's (1999) chapter, "Queer Aztlán: The Reformation of Chicano Tribe," challenged traditional, heteronormative ways of knowing and being by creating a "new" Chicano/a movement, one dedicated to disrupting misogynistic and sexist ideologies, while making visible the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ folks. Largely influenced by the works of Anzaldúa and Moraga, Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998) was inspired to develop Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE), a framework that is explicit in placing Chicanas as the central position in research and shifts the "analysis onto Chicanas and their race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality . . . to address the shortcomings of traditional patriarchal and liberal feminist scholarship" (p. 559). Through a CFE framework, Delgado Bernal resisted "epistemological racism" and provide an approach to research that allows for the recovery of "untold histories" (p. 556). A CFE differs from traditional euro normative ways of knowing, which have focused on white communities and are structured by white scholars, by confronting dominant ideologies (Delgado Bernal, 1998). A CFE ensures that we question whose knowledge is seen as valid and who gets to make decisions about research (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Delgado Bernal's conceptualization demonstrates that employing a CFE in research means resisting traditional methodologies and tools that often fail to see the rich legacy of Chicanas.

Fundamental Elements of Chicana Feminist Epistemology

Liberal feminist scholarship has largely focused on dismantling patriarchal structures without paying attention to the ways in which Women of Color are impacted by the effects of racism, sexism, classism, etc. (Delgado Bernal, 1998). A CFE acknowledges the unique social and cultural history faced by Chicanas to "demonstrate that our experiences as [Chicana/Latina] women are legitimate, appropriate, and effective in designing, conducting, and analyzing

educational research” (Delgado Bernal, 1998. p. 563). Employing a CFE framework requires us to wrestle with our researcher roles as activist scholars and embrace alternative ways of knowing by also making a commitment to producing anticolonial, antiracist scholarship (Delgado Bernal, 1998). According to Delgado Bernal (1998), to engage in research grounded in CFE we must (a) Take into account the intersectional identities and therefore intersectional forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, that are a part of Chicanas everyday lives, (b) Combat existing misrepresentations of Chicanas, both historically and ideologically, and (c) Invite Chicanas to participate in the formation of knowledge by viewing them as research collaborators rather than subjects (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Unlike traditional research frameworks, a CFE lens attempts to offer methods, methodologies, and analytical tools that center the body, mind, and spirit and are intentional in bringing our full selves to our research (Calderon et al., 2012).

Body, Mind, and Spirit

Inspired by Anzaldúa (1987), who views spiritual activism as an inner call to create outer change in the material world, *bodymindspirit* seeks to coalesce our body, mind, and spirit to better understand our lives and experiences (Lara, 2002). It encourages us to bring together, “the sacred and the profane in our work, the spiritual and the political in our lives, and our mind with our body” (Lara, 2002, p. 436). Contrary to Western discourse, *bodymindspirit* encourages us to holistically approach our work and bring our whole and true selves into our research (Lara, 2002). *Bodymindspirit* understands the complexities of our work and the ways in which we are connected to our own research, and therefore acknowledges that researchers are not and should not be separated from the communities they engage in (Lara, 2002). It allows for space of vulnerability and encourages us to reimagine ourselves as scholar-warriors, who engage in transformative research, recognize different forms of knowledge, and engage in spiritual activism (Calderon et al., 2012). *Bodymindspirit* allows for and encourages us to interrogate and

examine our own role as researchers in the research process, which is critical in doing anticolonial work (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Without this balance researchers are unable to fully engage in work that is truly committed to racial, social, and economic justice for Chicanas (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002).

Cultural Intuition

Another key aspect of a CFE framework is cultural intuition, which argues that Chicana/Latina researchers offer unique viewpoints and bring a unique perspective to their research. Delgado Bernal (1998) theorized cultural intuition as a “complex process that acknowledges the unique viewpoints that many Chicana/Latinas scholars bring to the research process” (p. 561). Cultural intuition allows for ways of knowing or knowledge that have not been deemed valid in traditional research and methodologies (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Delgado Bernal (1998) explained the four sources that can contribute to the cultural intuition of a Chicana/Latina: personal experience that is not separate from community memory, professional experience, scholarly knowledge from existing literature, and the analytic research process itself (Calderon et al., 2012). As Chicanas, our cultural intuition allows us to use our personal experiences to understand and relate to circumstances that may arise in our own research. It allows us to better situate the problems we encounter and enables us to reflect upon our own lives.

A CFE lens is essential in my work as it is a theory grounded in the lived experiences of Chicanas. Furthermore, it involves the research contributors in analyzing how their lives are being interpreted, documented, and reported, while acknowledging that many Chicanas lead lives with different opportunity structures than men or white women (Delgado Bernal, 1998). It also views my participants as contributors of knowledge and encourages me to engage in critical reflexivity and reciprocity to create meaningful, intentional, and transformative relationships with my research collaborators (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Employing this framework served to

amplify Chicana voices and demand that they be heard. It informed how I developed and enacted my research process, from the questions I asked, to the analysis of my findings, to the ethical and political considerations I made (Calderon et al., 2012). A CFE framework required me to grapple with my activist-scholar role and demanded that I confront the research process with my total self, including my grief, my fears, and my desires (Calderon et al., 2012). A Chicana Feminist Epistemology is a raced and race-gendered epistemology that is necessary to challenge and push back on traditional forms of research inquiries, frameworks, and methodologies. This framework allowed me to set up my dissertation study in a way that views my research contributors as “creators of knowledge, who have much to offer to transform educational research and practice” (Delgado Bernal, 2002, p. 108). Last, a CFE lens urged me to engage in a study that is able to inform research, epistemologies, pedagogy, and a critical race praxis (Yosso, 2006).

Community Cultural Wealth (CCW)

Mexicanas in Master of Arts in Education programs bring with them a strong sense of family, community, language, resilience, and passion for education (Sanchez, 2015). Beyond overcoming barriers throughout the course of their educational trajectories, they draw on their various strengths and persevere against institutional barriers to excel in their respective fields. I draw on Yosso’s (2005) concept of Community Cultural Wealth, to challenge “traditional interpretations of Bourdieuan cultural capital theory (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), and demonstrate that Chicanas utilize their knowledge, skills, and abilities to navigate through their master’s education, and resist macro and micro forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005).

Foundations of Community Cultural Wealth

It is first important to acknowledge that scholars have “outlined deficit thinking as foundational to the project of racism and colonialism” (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016, p. 1). As mentioned, Community Cultural Wealth directly challenges deficit notions of Bourdieu and

cultural capital theory, whose work has often been used to discuss social and racial inequity, and to explain why Students of Color perform at different rates than Whites (Yosso, 2005).

According to Bourdieu, cultural capital referred to the knowledge, skills and abilities held only by privileged individuals in society. He asserted that social capital (i.e., social networks, connections), cultural capital (i.e., education, language), and economic capital (i.e., money) could only be acquired through one's family or via formal schooling. This meant the privileged always held the power as access to these various forms of capital was limited (Yosso, 2005).

Though Bourdieu's work was influential in providing frameworks to critique social and cultural reproduction, his theories have also been used to argue that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor. "This interpretation of Bourdieu exposes White, middle class culture as the standard, and therefore all other forms and expressions of 'culture' are judged in comparison to this 'norm'" (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). Essentially, cultural capital refers to specific forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are valued by the privileged or elite groups in society. For example, a middle-class student may have access to a computer and therefore will arrive at school with various technology and computer-related skills that are seen as valuable in a school setting. On the other hand, a Chicana student whose parents work as farm workers might arrive to the classroom with various vocabulary, bilingual, and translating skills. These forms of knowledge are considered important to the Chicano family, but not in the school setting. It is clear from Yosso's (2005) critique that there are various forms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that marginalized groups offer that traditional cultural capital does not recognize (Yosso, 2005). Informed by Critical Race Theory, CCW demands that we view communities of color in a "critical historical light" (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016, p. 2), and examine the multifaceted assets that communities of color offer. Below I provide Yosso's (2005)

model of Community Cultural Wealth and describe each of the forms of capital included within CCW; aspirational capital, navigational capital, social capital, linguistic capital, familial capital and resistant capital.

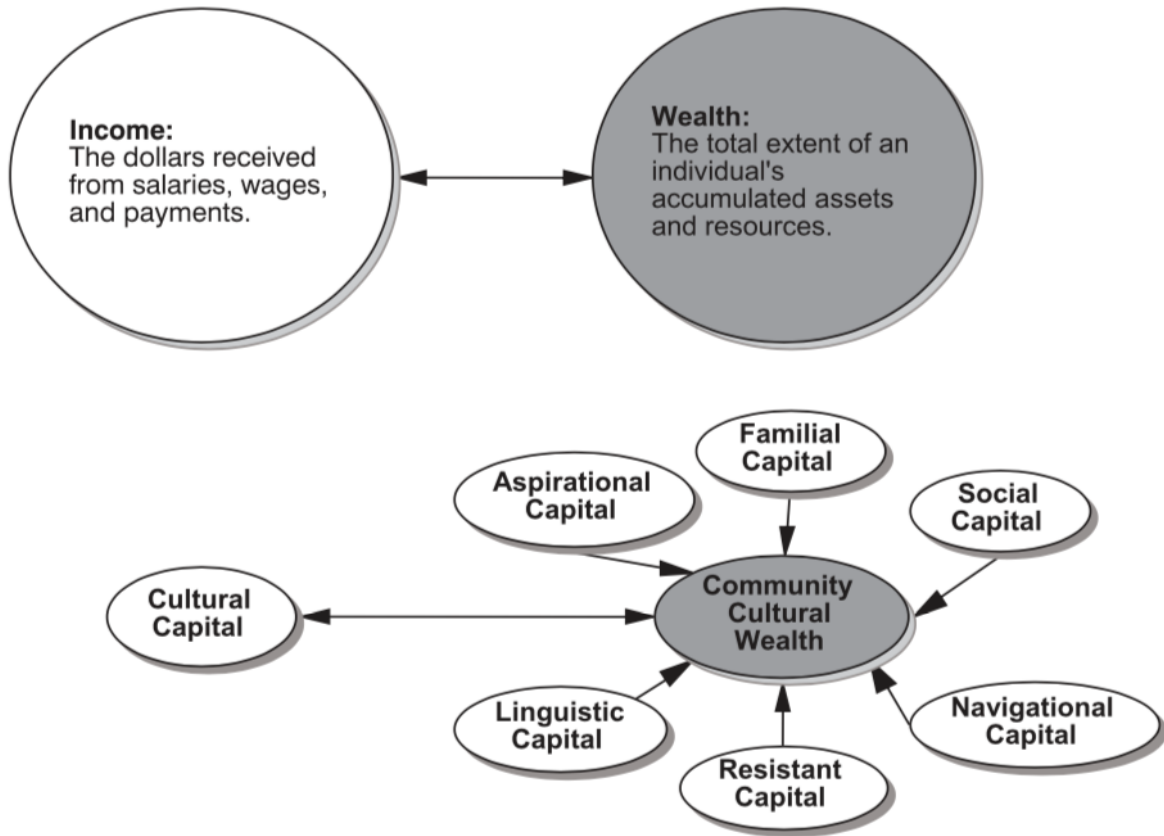


Figure 3.1. Tara J. Yosso's (2005) Model of Community Cultural Wealth.

- Aspirational Capital:** The ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future even when in the face of barriers. This resilience can be seen in those who dream of possibilities beyond their current circumstance despite not having the tools to attain those goals. For example, Gándara's (1995) research revealed that though Chicanos/as have some of the lowest educational outcomes, they maintain high aspirations for their children's future (Solórzano, 1992). This tenet allowed me to gain insight into how Chicanas maintained their hopes and dreams to attain a master's degree despite the challenges.

- **Familial Capital:** Cultural knowledge nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition. This form of cultural wealth minimizes isolation as it expands the concept of family to a broader understanding that includes community, schools, or other social community settings. Familial capital engages a commitment to community and involves lessons of caring, coping, and education. This is an important component to acknowledge in my study as it will allow for an understanding of the different individuals that played a role in Chicanas educational trajectories.
- **Social Capital:** Networks of people and community resources that provide social, emotional or instrumental support. For example, a first-generation college student may turn to community resources to understand how the college application process works. These networks help the student apply but also provide emotional support to reassure the student that they are not alone. Scholars have noted that historically Chicanas/os have utilized their social capital to maneuver their way through systems and then turn around and give that information back to their social networks. Social capital provides the space for Chicanas to talk about the friends, professors, community members, or organizations they have sought support from and how they influenced their pursuit and attainment of a Master of Arts in Education.
- **Navigational Capital:** Skills of maneuvering through social institutions. It acknowledges that individuals have agency even though their actions and decisions take place within constraints. For example, Chicano/a student's navigate hostile university environments, yet demonstrate high achievement and resilience. Navigational capital is our ability to make our way through social institutions created without Chicanas/os in mind. This form

of cultural wealth will allow me to demonstrate how Chicanas draw on various skills to maneuver through their master's programs.

- **Linguistic Capital:** Intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. Linguistic capital emphasizes that Students of Color arrive at school with a variety of language and communication skills. Traditions of storytelling, dichos, and pláticas allow kids to learn vocabulary, memorization, and how to pay attention to detail. Linguistic capital will allow Chicanas to describe how their bilingual abilities provided them with skills (cross-cultural awareness, metalinguistic awareness, tutoring skills, familial responsibility, etc.) that facilitated their master's journey.
- **Resistant Capital:** Knowledge and skills cultivated through behavior that challenges inequality. Resistant capital stresses the importance of passing down our community cultural wealth to learn how to recognize structures of racism, and work towards transforming them. This form of capital can often be seen in the values passed down by parents of color who teach their children to engage in behaviors that challenge inequality. Resistant capital will reveal the different strategies Chicana students employed to challenge the systems they were a part of, and how they passed this knowledge onto other Chicanas.

The lens through which Yosso looks at the CCW of People of Color is important because it allows for a reframing of culture as a resource rather than as a detriment (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992). I build off of Yosso's (2005) model, as well as Acevedo and Solórzano's (2021) model,¹⁶

¹⁶ Acevedo and Solórzano (2021) present Community Cultural Wealth as a protective factor to disrupt everyday racism.

and utilize CCW as the framework to conceptualize my research collaborators experiences in their attainment of a Master of Arts in Education degree. I do so by asking the question: What sources of support do Mexicanas/Chicanas draw from in their pursuit and attainment of the Master of Arts in Education?

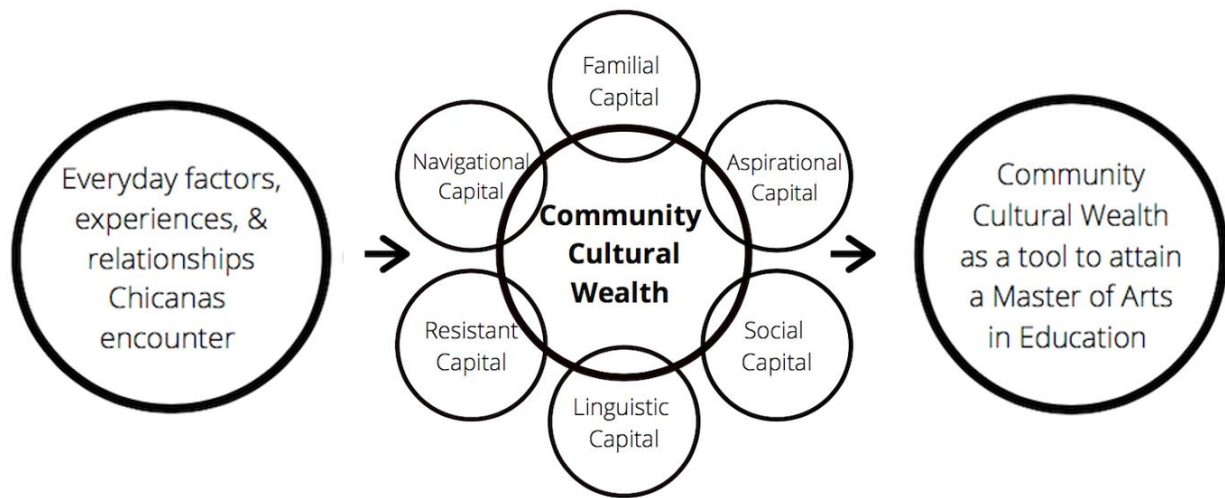


Figure 3.2. Community Cultural Wealth’s Role in Master’s Degree Attainment for Chicanas.

Community Cultural Wealth is an important and necessary conceptual framework to help us understand the experiences of Mexican women in Master of Arts in education programs in several ways. First, the aspirational capital can help us understand the goals and aspirations that Mexicanas bring with them to these programs. Second, linguistic and familial capital can help us understand the linguistic and cultural resources that Mexicanas bring with them to their program. Chicanas often bring valuable linguistic and cultural knowledge that is not traditionally incorporated into the classroom but could be used to enhance the educational experiences of all students. Third, social capital can help us understand the networks and connections that Mexicanas have with their communities. These networks and connections may provide important sources of support and resources that can help Mexican women navigate the challenges they may face in Master of Arts in education programs. Fourth, the navigational capital can help us

understand the ways in which Mexican women are able to navigate systems of power and oppression within the educational system. For a long time, Chicanas have developed strategies and tactics for resisting and challenging systemic inequalities, and these strategies can be valuable in creating more equitable and just educational environments. Finally, the resistant capital can help us understand the ways in which Chicanas have resisted and challenged systems of oppression in their communities and in the educational system. This resistance can be a source of strength and resilience for them as they navigate the challenges of master's programs.

Figure 3.2 demonstrates that by using Community Cultural Wealth as a conceptual framework, we can gain a deeper understanding of the strengths and resources that Mexicanas bring with them to master's programs and visualize how CCW is utilized as a protective factor in their everyday experiences (Acevedo & Solórzano, 2021). This understanding can then be utilized to create more inclusive and equitable educational environments.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the frameworks of Chicana Feminist Epistemology and Community Cultural Wealth. Utilizing Chicana Feminist Epistemology as the framework through which I conceptualize Community Cultural Wealth allows me to unapologetically center the lives of Chicanas and acknowledge their multifaceted experiences as a unique standpoint to understand master's student experiences. With these frameworks, I can better understand the complex identities and responses of Chicanas in Master of Arts in Education programs and the various factors, relationships and experiences that play a role in their journeys. These frameworks are “not merely for abstract analysis,” but part of a “larger struggle to survive and resist racism” (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016, p. 1), by demonstrating that Chicana/o students have been thriving and passing down their histories despite the historical efforts of erasure. Guided by

Chicana Feminist Epistemology and Community Cultural Wealth, in the following chapter I outline my research design to collect and analyze my data.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed overview of how the study was conducted and how the data was analyzed using a qualitative research design. First, I explain who my research collaborators were, followed by my recruitment strategies and the tools used to collect the data. Next, I describe my data analysis and interpretation techniques. Within the description of the data collection tools, I also discuss the methodological underpinnings, and how they were utilized in this research. I end by providing a roadmap for my finding's chapters.

Research Collaborators

To answer my research questions, I utilized a qualitative approach and worked with 12 Mexicanas/ Chicanas who had earned a Master of Arts in Education degree by the time I interviewed them. Guided by Chicana Feminist Epistemology, I use the term research collaborators instead of participants to highlight the active role of each individual in my research. Additionally, engaging in this practice reinforces that Women of Color bring with them a range of experiential knowledge that has a lot to contribute to academic research. It also serves as a reminder that the contributions of my research collaborators are at the center of my work and the driving force behind the research process. Furthermore, utilizing this term serves to challenge the research/participant hierarchy, and instead views the research collaborators as co-creators of knowledge.

The research collaborators were selected based on the criteria of identifying as Mexicana,¹⁷ and having completed a Master of Arts in Education at the specific research setting I describe next. A broad spectrum of lived experiences were collected which allowed me to

¹⁷ Mexican/Mexicano/a refers to individuals of Mexican origin or descent residing in the United States, regardless of immigration status.

compare, and bring attention to, the similarities and differences within their different experiences. It is important to note that the aim of this research was not to speak for the experience of all Mexicanas in master’s programs, but rather to continue uncovering Mexicana student experiences via the narratives of these 12 women.

Table 4.1

Summary of Research Collaborators

| Pseudonym | Race / Ethnicity | M.A Graduation Year | Bachelor’s Institution | First - Generation |
|------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Daniela | Mexican(a) - Panameña | 2004 | Private | YES |
| Sofia | Mexican(a) / Chicana | 2005 | UC | YES |
| Giselle | Mexicana - Salvadoreña | 2011 | UC / Transfer | YES |
| Nancy | Mexican(a) / Chicana | 2011 | Private | YES |
| Ariana | Mexican(a) / Chicana | 2014 | UC | YES |
| Fernanda | Mexican(a) / Chicana | 2014 | UC | YES |
| Jessica | Mexicana - Salvadoreña | 2018 | UC | YES |
| Lucia | Mexicana - Salvadoreña | 2018 | CSU | YES |
| Carla | Mexican(a) / Chicana | 2018 | Private - CSU | YES |
| Karen | Mexican(a) | 2019 | Private | YES |
| Erika | Mexican(a) / Chicana | 2022 | UC | NO |
| Miriam | Mexican - Filipina | 2022 | Private | NO |

The race / ethnicity column reveals how my collaborators chose to self-identity. In the sections where it says Mexican, followed by (a), those collaborators identified as both Mexican

and Mexicana. Additionally, where there is a slash, collaborators identified as either descriptor. However, where there is a hyphen, collaborators were explicit that both identities were equally as important. In the next column, M.A. Graduation year, we see when they graduated from their masters program. Evidently, a wide range of experiences was captured, ranging from 2004 to 2022. Next you can see what type of bachelor's institution my collaborators attended, and if they were a community college transfer student, and the last column reveals if they are a first-generation college student. Although pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity, the description of my research collaborators is important to provide context to their experiences.

Research Setting

My research setting was limited to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), a single large, public, four-year institution in Southern California which offers bachelors, master's, doctoral, professional and some online degrees. In the 2021–2022 academic school year, graduate enrollment consisted of 13,994 students, with 49% female, and 50% male. 6,931 students had a master's degree objective, accounting for 50% of graduate enrollment. White students accounted for 40% of enrollment, Asian students 29%, Latino/a student's 17%, Black students 10%, and American Indian and Native Hawaiian less than 1% each.

In the last six years, UCLA's Master of Arts in Education program has been the top producer of master's in education¹⁸ for Latinos/as amongst the Universities of California (UCs). Furthermore, in the last seven years the plurality of master's degrees conferred have been in education and more than half of master's degrees conferred in education have been to Mexicanas (see Table 1.3 in Introduction). Additionally, during the 2019–2020 academic school year, of the 369 students who were enrolled in a master's program in this particular school of education 75%

¹⁸ This includes the various types of Master's in education (MA, MEd, MS).

were female and 41% were Latino/a. Though the data provided by the UC website does not break down the percentage of degrees in education by racial/ethnic subgroup, utilizing Table 1.2 we can infer that more than half of the degrees in education awarded at UCLA are to Mexicanas.

Recruitment Strategies

Recruitment for my study happened via snowball sampling and purposeful sampling, a form of recruitment that involved locating a few participants that met the criteria, who then assisted in recruiting others to participate (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative snowball sampling was utilized by asking collaborators to provide names of friends or colleagues who meet the required criteria. In addition, a recruitment flier (see Appendix G) was used. I asked the Office of Student Success (OSS) at my institution for permission to send out a mass email to students, reached out to my personal and professional networks and utilized social media to share my flier. Chicanas who reached out to me to participate were sent the consent form outlining the requirements of the study and a Google form to ensure they met the criteria (see Appendix H).

The google form asked for the following information: (a) Name, (b) Institution, (c) Type of Master's—MA or MEd or MS? (d) Year of Completion, (e) Self-identification of race/ethnicity, and (f) Contact information (email or phone number). In the intake form I also ask them to respond to the following questions (g) What factors, experiences or relationships were important in your decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education?, (h) Who or what played a role in your attainment of the master's? And (i) Would you be comfortable talking about these experiences individually, as a group, or both?

This intake form assisted me with selecting the research collaborators, whom I reached out to via a follow-up email to confirm their willingness to participate and availability. After receipt of the consent form, time was arranged for a virtual plática. Collaborators were

compensated for their time with a Starbucks gift card and were invited to participate in the analysis process to the extent that they pleased. Although the research setting where the study took place is openly named throughout this dissertation, for the sake of safety and anonymity, all of my collaborator's names were changed.

Data-Gathering Tools

Guided by Chicana Feminist Epistemology I utilized pláticas as my main data-gathering tool. Each collaborator participated in a 1- to 2-hour individual plática, where although I went into the conversation with a set of predetermined questions I was flexible and allowed my research collaborators to guide the conversation. Despite the pláticas taking place virtually via Zoom, by relying on reciprocity, vulnerability, and researcher reflexivity (Delgado Bernal & Fierros, 2016) I was able to ensure trust and a safe space. As I engaged in each individual plática, I began to see some initial trends and overarching themes amongst my collaborator's experiences, which I will delve deeper into in my finding's chapters. First, however, it is important to explain the methodological underpinnings of pláticas, and how they were utilized in my study.

Pláticas

Engaging in research through a Chicana Feminist Epistemological lens contends that we must engage in methodologies that “challenge objectivity, call for reciprocity, merge the *bodymindspirit*, and inject a sense of political urgency to address educational inequities in Chican[x] communities” (Calderon et al., 2012, p. 525). Among these methodologies is Pláticas, a qualitative methodology designed as conversations that take place in one-on-one or group spaces. The Spanish word plática means to talk or to be in conversation. A plática is different from an interview (structured or unstructured) because it is built around open conversations

between the researcher and research collaborators. It is unlike an interview, which is structured around a one-way conversation to gather as much information as possible from the interviewee (Delgado Bernal & Fierros, 2016).

Pláticas serve as a, “way to gather family and cultural knowledge through communication of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations” (Delgado Bernal & Fierros, 2016, p. 108). They steer away from fixed interview protocols and encourage a collaborative conversation. Contrary to a structured interview where the researcher asks all the questions, pláticas involve a sense of informality. Although general themes may initiate and guide the conversation there is space for the research contributor to bring up topics that are significant to them (Delgado Bernal & Fierros, 2016). Pláticas allow for the creation of a space where the researcher can allow the conversation to be guided by their cultural intuition.¹⁹ To learn from Mexicana master’s students in this research, it was important that I engaged in conversation and communication of thought to create knowledge together and give meaning to their experiences. By utilizing pláticas, I worked with my research collaborators to create intentional spaces to share and process experiences.

Delgado Bernal (2016) further described the following five principles as essential to utilizing pláticas as a methodology:

- 1) Draw from Chicana/Latina Feminist Theory and other critical theories to challenge and combat traditional, colonial research practices;

¹⁹ Delgado Bernal (1998) theorizes cultural intuition as a “complex process that acknowledges the unique viewpoints that many Chicana/Latinas scholars bring to the research process” (p. 561). Cultural intuition allows for ways of knowing or knowledge that has not been seen as valid in traditional research and methodologies.

- 2) Include a relational principle that allows participants to be co-constructors of knowledge along with the researcher, therefore honoring their lived experiences;
- 3) Encourage a holistic approach where the researcher connects their body, mind, spirit and lived experiences to the larger research inquiry;
- 4) Provide a potential space for healing; and
- 5) Involve vulnerability, reciprocity, and reflexivity.

To fully engage in this methodology required embedding the aforementioned principles within the utilization of pláticas. Various components of my research on Mexicanas in Master of Arts in Education programs fall within each of the five contours of pláticas.

The first contour, *centers Chicana Feminist Theory and other critical theoretical frameworks*, was addressed by my use of Chicana Feminist Epistemology in this research. This framework assisted in understanding the unique experience of Chicanas in master's programs, and was used to continue pushing toward a critical-race gender epistemology in educational research. The second contour of pláticas, *honors participants as co-constructors of knowledge*, is a central theme throughout my dissertation and more importantly in my methodology. I view my research collaborators as the most important component of this research, as without them this research would not be possible. I also actively engaged my collaborators by doing member checks throughout the data collection and analytical process. I shared all transcripts and most importantly compensated them for their time. The third contour of pláticas, *connecting the holistic lived experiences of the research collaborators to the research inquiry*, recognizes that social identities cannot exist in isolation from one another. In this study I tried my best to build a space of trust where research collaborators felt comfortable to be themselves and speak to all aspects of their identity. Furthermore, I always brought my whole and true self to the work to

create authentic relationships. The fourth contour, *provides a potential space for healing*, further humanizes the research process. Delgado Bernal and Fierros (2016) warned that “. . . pláticas flow from past stories of pain and trauma, current negotiations, and future hopes” (p. 17). They go on to explain that pláticas could result in arguments and crying as they can be used to address deep ailments, traumas, and challenges.

In my study, pláticas provided a space to share common experiences, reflect on personal and professional trajectories, and even share laughs and tears. The fifth contour of pláticas, *relies on relationships of reciprocity and vulnerability*, emphasizes the role of trust for a humanizing approach to research. This was a critical contour to emulate as it ensured that my research collaborators asked questions throughout the entire process and even asked me to share my own experience as well. Following the principles of Chicana Feminist Epistemology, I built trust and rapport with my research collaborators by also sharing my own experiences when appropriate. Ultimately pláticas allowed for a unique approach to my work in which Mexicana master’s students were able to share both personal and academic experiences in a way that traditional methodologies do not always allow.

Data Analysis

The goal of this study was to discover emerging themes within the narratives of the Chicanas I interviewed. The data was transcribed by me and analyzed as I was collecting it to ensure the most accurate details were noted. I engaged in three phases of coding to ensure that I did not miss any important details. The first phase consisted of only reading the transcripts. Before annotating, highlighting, grouping themes I read through each of the transcripts for general understanding. In the second phase of coding, the data was analyzed using open coding (Saldaña, 2013). I read through the transcripts three times and noted anything that stood out to

me, with no particular themes or codes in mind yet. In this phase I paid more attention to context and meaning to help me identify themes during the focused coding phase (Saldaña, 2013).

To begin categorizing the data according to topics or themes, I utilized thematic coding (Saldaña, 2013). Again, I read through my transcripts and notes and started noting codes and categories, allowing them to emerge from the data. Next, I identified the themes that seemed to be connected and created umbrella codes. For example, when multiple collaborators described the role of their different family members in the decision to pursue a master's degree the theme was "Family," where every code having to do with the impact, role, or influence of "Family" was coded as such. Once I came up with a final list of codes and themes, I created a specific definition for each one. Next, I reviewed my data sets using the final list of codes and made sure to apply the definition of the codes consistently throughout each transcript. Defining my codes allowed me to add meaning to my data and provided a way to discuss my findings. Throughout this process I always kept an open mind and allowed the codes and definitions to emerge from my reading of the transcripts. All my cycles of coding were conducted with physical copies of the transcripts and annotated with different highlighter colors to note different codes.

Conclusion

In this chapter I described my research collaborators, research setting, recruitment strategies, data gathering tools, and data analysis process. The next three chapters will be centered on the findings of this dissertation. Next, I provide a roadmap for what the findings chapters will include. The findings of my dissertation are organized into four chapters. Chapter Five, *Deciding to Pursue a Master of Arts in Education* provides a closer look at the factors, experiences, and relationships that influenced Chicanas decision to pursue a Master of Arts in education. Chapter Six, *Attainment of the Master of Arts in Education* begins with a brief

overview of some of the challenges experienced within their MA programs, and closes by describing how Chicanas have found ways to persist in their master's programs, despite the obstacles faced. Chapter Seven, *Conclusion*, provides a summary of the findings, discusses the implications of the research, provides suggestions for future research, and shares some concluding statements. Although the different sections of each theme are highlighted as individual factors that influenced my collaborators decisions, it is important to note that the themes also coalesce, influence each other and are often directly connected

CHAPTER FIVE: DECIDING TO PURSUE A MASTER'S OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

An analysis of the Chicana/o educational pipeline (Covarrubias, 2011; Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015) demonstrates that despite a small improvement in educational attainment, Chicanas/os continue to be failed by educational institutions at all levels of the academic pipeline. While there is still much to learn about these disparate educational outcomes and how to address them, some studies have looked at the experience of Mexicans along the K-12, undergraduate, and doctoral educational pipelines in an effort to get a better understanding of their experience (Castellanos & Orozco, 2005; Ceja, 2004; Cuádriz, 1997; De Loera, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Gándara, 1993, 1995; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Solórzano, 1998; Valencia & Black, 2002). However, the experience of master's students has gone under-examined and resulted in a gap in higher education research.

Though it is evident that more research is needed on Mexicano/a student experiences in general, this dissertation focused on the experience of Mexicanas in a Master of Arts (MA) in Education program, in an attempt to begin filling the gap on this area of research. This qualitative research study was designed to allow for an in depth examination of Chicana experiences and to capture the richness and complexities of Chicana voices. Because Mexicanas are often absent from the literature due to being subsumed within the category of Latinas or the category of women (Cuádriz, 1997), this study was necessary to bring attention to the voices of Mexicanas specifically. The guiding questions for this dissertation were:

- 1) What factors do Mexicanas/Chicanas deem important in their decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education?
- 2) What sources of support do Mexicanas/Chicanas draw from in their pursuit and attainment of the Master of Arts in Education?

The first question of this research sought to capture how and why Chicanas made the decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education degree. The second research question centered the sources of support they drew from in their Master's degree attainment. This question is important to my research because of my aim to challenge the deficit notions on Mexicanas. By highlighting the voices of Mexicanas and how they navigate their master's experiences, this research can bring attention to resources that can better support Mexicanas in their programs.

Chapter Five, "Deciding to Pursue a Master of Arts in Education," provides a closer look at the factors, experiences, and relationships that influenced Chicanas / Mexicanas decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education. Below I share my own journey to my master's program. Then, focus on my collaborators' experiences via the following sections: Family, Identity, Why MA and Why Education, Representation & Mentors, Graduate School Exposure, and Logistics. This study captured a wide range of experiences, obstacles, and successes. I hope the stories of my collaborators will provide a deeper understanding of the challenges Chicanas encounter as well as the promise they represent (Gándara et al., 2013).

My Journey to the Master of Arts in Education

As a daughter of immigrants, and first-generation college student, the importance of getting an education was something that was always heavily emphasized by my parents. From as early as I can remember, my parents were extremely dedicated to our schooling and heavily involved in our extracurriculars. As I got older I knew that colleges and universities existed, and that it was generally the next step that individuals took after high school. However, I had no idea where to even begin. Then, the summer before my junior year I attended the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Conference (CLYLP) in Sacramento, where I learned about graduate programs and the Chicano/a educational pipeline from Dr. Daniel Solórzano. Immediately after,

I knew I would be going to college, even if that meant figuring it out at each and every step.

With the support of several teachers, counselors, and my siblings I ended up enrolling at Santa Clara University (SCU) where I majored in Psychology and Ethnic Studies.

During my time at SCU I was invited to work in the Psychology Department and Ethnic Studies Department, where I was exposed to research for the first time. Then, after attending conferences across the United States and presenting on a variety of topics, towards the end of my junior year, my mentor, Profesora Jesica Fernández asked me when and where I would be applying to graduate school. Profesora Fernández was my first unapologetically Mexicana professor. She asserted herself in the classroom in ways I had never seen and introduced me to theoretical concepts that connected with my personal lived experiences. Though she initially planted the graduate school seed it was ultimately the efforts of many that encouraged me to apply. My parents endlessly encouraged and reminded me that being the first in the family to earn a graduate degree would set a great example for the rest of my family. My siblings also constantly shared how proud of me they were and encouraged me to continue. As a low-income daughter of immigrants and first-generation college student, I also knew that this degree was not only for myself but for my community.

Therefore, without hesitation I decided to apply to programs in Education to give back to the next generation of students. I also decided on master's programs because I was applying directly out of undergrad and wanted to give myself the best opportunity to be a competitive candidate. Logistically, I decided to attend UCLA because of the proximity to home and because I had also spoken to Professor Solórzano and attended his RAC. As I sat in that space, a room full of powerful Scholars of Color, I knew I wanted to be one of them.

Through my own experience it is evident that my journey to learning about graduate school and making the decision to apply to a Master of Arts in Education was a combination of many experiences. Though my choice, I was very influenced by my family, my identity, professors, the degree objective, representation, and logistics. In the following sections I describe how particular themes emerged from my collaborators' words. The sections are the following: Family, Identity, Graduate School Exposure, Why MA and Why Education, Representation & Mentors, and Logistics.

Family

In *Passing Through the Eye of the Needle*, Patricia Gándara (1982) revealed how family is central to Chicanas emotional support to succeed in higher education. Shirley Achor and Aida Morales (1990) further emphasized that message, and argued that for Chicanas, family is pivotal in transmitting messages related to the value of education. Given that my dissertation focuses on Chicanas, inevitably, the theme of family emerged. For the purpose of this dissertation family included mother, father, siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, nephews, grandparents, and partner. This finding is similar to those described in other studies about Chicanas being successful in higher education, in which family is identified as a major influence (Cuádriz, 1997; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Gándara, 1982, 1993, 1995; Solórzano, 1993). For Chicanas in my study, the decision to pursue an MA in Education was seldom an individual choice, but rather a collective of the personal and familial.

In my pláticas, all of my research collaborators described the role and influence of family in their K-12, undergraduate, and graduate educational trajectories. I provide glimpses of the role of family within their overall schooling but draw most attention to the influence of family in their decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education. Jessica, a proud first-generation college student

and daughter of immigrants, explained how understanding the importance of education was emphasized from a young age:

My parents were very much like from a young age . . . value school and get a college degree even though they didn't really know what that meant . . . they would still emphasize that a lot . . . my mom like really encouraged me . . . my dad was very much like, every day, I swear, he would, I was the one who would take off his work boots. And he would tell me, "this is why you need to go to school, so you don't work as hard as I do. So you don't get dirty as I do . . . I want you to use your mind and not work your body like I have to."

Evidently, from a young age, college-going behavior was fostered by Jessica's parents, despite them not necessarily understanding what it took to get there. With the support of her parents, siblings, and mentors Jessica enrolled at the University of California, Santa Barbara where she pursued a Bachelor's in English and began to explore the concept of graduate school.

Jessica further described that as she debated whether or not she actually wanted to apply and pursue a graduate degree, her parents, siblings, and partner expressed unconditional support and encouragement. She described school as an opportunity to make her parents proud and an opportunity to make her parents' sacrifices of migrating to another country worth it. When talking about her husband's role in her decision to pursue a master's, Jessica explained how initially, a partial reason for applying to graduate school was so her husband would stop asking. She said:

Erick, he's always been, like, "get a master's degree, get a master's degree," and low key I applied because he kept telling me and I was gonna apply to UCLA because [I thought] they're not gonna accept me anyway. And then they accepted me, like now I have to go.

Jessica went on to explain the importance of Erick's support during the application process and described the way her partner supported her, even when he felt he did not necessarily understand what she needed help with. She recalled:

I'd send him drafts of things. And he was like, "Well, I don't know that I understand it but I'll try." And so he would help me with stuff, or even just listen to me talk out my ideas.

Jessica further explained that having witnessed her partner begin his master's program was also a motivating factor. Ultimately, she knew that pursuing a Masters of Arts felt right because she had the support of her entire family behind her. Jessica's experience is a prime example of the way in which pursuing higher education, in this case a Master's of Arts in Education, is not only a personal choice but rather a grouping of diverse factors.

Ariana shared that her aspirations to go to college began very early on in her life. She then went on to describe in detail a vivid memory of a conversation with her parents that planted that seed. She said:

So I started thinking about college really early on. And it was because of my parents . . . I still have this vivid memory of when we were on our way to one of my tia's houses, but we were making a pit stop at Gonzalez to pick up tortillas . . . My parents were having a conversation about one of my older cousins who had just started community college. And then they turn to me and my sister and they're like, "You're going to college. We don't care where, we don't care if you go to community college or whatever, but you're going to college." And I just remember thinking like, yeah, I'll do that. I'll go to college. And it was like early elementary. So in my head, it was always like, you have to do good in school, because you have to go to college. I don't know what that is. My parents don't completely know what that is. But it's gonna happen.

When Ariana went to middle school she joined Cal-Soap, a college access and readiness program meant to improve the flow of information about postsecondary education and financial aid while raising achievement levels. In this program she learned the ins and outs of the college application process and was also able to involve her parents in the weekend institutes, where they learned about the A-G requirements, the SAT, and ACT. Ariana went on to enroll at the University of California, Santa Cruz (UCSC), where she earned her Bachelor's degree in Psychology. Ariana described UCSC as a challenging place to navigate, confronting her impostor syndrome and working through the culture shock of being at a predominantly white campus and in a majority white undergraduate major. However, as a Psychology major, she had gone into her

undergraduate schooling knowing she needed a master's degree and began thinking about applying to programs in her junior year.

Ariana then took two years off in between undergrad and grad school and finally applied when she felt ready. During this conversation Ariana shared another vivid memory of her mother's support during the application season, when she went to take the GRE. She described:

I signed up for the GRE. I was in Santa Cruz, the closest location was in San Jose. I didn't have a car. I didn't have a smartphone because it was still like not everybody had one back then. And so long story short my battery died on the way to take the GRE exam. I had a breakdown because I want to do this but I'm lost in San Jose, a big ass city. No smartphone, no se donde estoy. I need to find some way to get back to Santa Cruz using public transportation. I did. But I just remember sitting in that moment.

Ariana proceeded to describe how stressed, overwhelmed, and helpless she felt in that moment. She had missed her GRE testing appointment, was alone, had no cell phone, no car, and lost in a big city she had no idea how to get around. In the midst of all the chaos, there was only one solution for Ariana—call mom. She continued:

I called my mom. And I'm like on the brink of crying or I am crying. I don't remember part of it. I blanked it out. I'm telling her, Me perdí, ya no voy a poder hacer esto . . . I think that was a breaking point. And that conversation made me decide, You know what, this happened for a reason. You're not ready right now. And that's okay. I think I just needed to hear like, it's okay si quieres tomar mas tiempo.

For so long, Ariana, a first-generation college student, and daughter of immigrants, had navigated her entire undergraduate journey and graduate application process on her own. However, despite having been away from home for 4 years for her undergraduate degree and a two more years after that, at that moment, Ariana knew her mother would be her voice of reason. Her mother immediately consoled her, reminded her that it was okay to take things slow, and encouraged her to not give up on graduate school if it was what she truly wanted.

When asked about the messaging with regards to Education in her household, Daniela, a Mexicana-Panameña, first-generation college student, shared her father's experience and influence:

I mean, it was big . . . Both my parents are not college educated. My dad ended up finishing when he immigrated to the U.S. As an adult, he finished his GED here, and then he would take a class at Pasadena City College here and there. For my dad, it was always a dream to go to college and even later in life, when he was a police officer. They would give him credit to go back to La Verne University and work toward a degree. It was always really hard for him, but he always had el deseo to go back. But for him, my mom too, but I think mostly my dad getting an education was really important because we saw him like keep trying to go back right? Keep trying to find a way.

Witnessing the commitment and tenacity her father projected, along with persistence in earning a higher education degree, allowed Daniela to begin thinking about college early on. To no surprise, Daniela attended Stanford University for her undergraduate degree, majoring in Psychology. Daniela further described her father's disciplinarian ways since elementary and shared how he always did homework with her and her sister, attended all awards ceremonies and sporting events, and consistently checked in with their teachers. Understandably so, Daniela knew college was the next step for her upon graduating from high school. Her father was also aware that graduate school was a potential opportunity and option. Daniela shared:

Yeah, I think for me growing up, it was never a question whether I would go to college. And, you know, he would always tell me, mija we're gonna figure out undergrad, whatever costs, you know, grad school may be up to you, but we'll figure it out.

Another important influence in her decision to pursue a master's degree was her younger sister. At the time of Daniela's application season, her sister was attending the University of California, Berkeley as an undergraduate. Being extremely close, Daniela felt comfort in knowing her sister was close in proximity (Daniela was at Stanford).

Next, Daniela described the support of her sister as an important factor in her decision to pursue a master's:

My sister was one of the biggest cheerleaders for me, she's one of the few people that can be really brutally honest with me, but also be incredibly supportive in the ways that feel honest and real . . . And so she was always one that pushed me and encouraged me to think about grad school. She didn't really help me with the technical parts, it was more of the aspirational components that she offered. She's my only sister. So, we got each other.

Another influential family member that Daniela highlighted was her husband, an individual who always supported her aspirations, but also provided feedback with the technical parts throughout the application process.

Daniela met her husband, then boyfriend, at 17, when she was an undergraduate student at Stanford. Daniela described that both she and her boyfriend were involved in the Chicano/Latino community on campus, and shared how different their educational trajectories were. She recounted:

He knew he wanted to be a lawyer, since he was like, five. And his path was perfect, like everything he set out to do laid out that way. So I was always a little bit frustrated, because I'm like, you don't understand . . . you always knew you wanted to go to law school . . . But our personalities are also different, I'm more talkative, he's quiet, there's something about his patience with me. And, he's an incredible writer. So when the time came . . . he helped me a lot with my essays . . . I am indebted to him . . . I relied on him to help me craft what I knew, I wanted to say . . . he was able to help me to illuminate those components of my work. And that is the *whys* for going to graduate school. So he had a technical skill that I think really helped me to feel confident [in my application].

The role of her husband, sister, and parents was an immense influence in deciding to pursue and ultimately enrolling in a Master's of Arts in Education program. Through the narratives of Jessica, Ariana, and Daniela, one can see the ways in which family is an influential factor that plays a role in deciding to pursue a master's degree and in getting through the application process. Moreover, it is also apparent how a college going mindset is often fermented early on.

Analytical Summary

For a long time researchers asserted that Mexican Americans did not value education and therefore performed badly in school (Valencia & Black, 2002). However, the myth that Mexican parents do not value education is false. If you look at history there is plenty of evidence that

points to Chicanos legacy of resistance within U.S schools, the value Mexicans place on education, and the historical and contemporary struggle for equality (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Valencia, 2008; Valencia & Black, 2002). There is also literature documenting parental involvement, organizational advocacy, individual and group activism, political demonstrations (Valencia, 2008), and community efforts. The value that Mexicans place on education can also be seen through lawsuits (i.e., *Mendez v. Westminster*, 1947), advocacy organizations (LULAC, MALDEF), organizing (Chicano Blowouts), political demonstrations, and legislation.

Research has shown that Chicano/a families place high value on education for their children from a young age. Additionally, strong family ties and support have been linked to academic success for Chicanas (Carrillo & Dean, 2020; Gándara, 1993, 1995). Scholarship also indicates that family plays a prominent role in developing a college going mindset and making decisions about college at all levels of the pipeline (e.g., Aleman et al., 2015; Alvarez, 2010; Ceja, 2004, 2006; Hernández, 2015; Kiyama et al., 2015; Kiyama & Rios-Aguilar, 2017; Mariscal, 2018; Perez & Ceja, 2015; Perez & McDonough, 2008). For a long time traditional literature excluded the role of language, social, racial, gendered, cultural, historical, and political experiences and contexts that impact college negotiations for Chicanas (Mariscal, 2018). These findings serve to reinforce that Mexican parents and family do value education and push us to consider how family can be included in Mexicana master's student experiences, and graduate school decisions overall. It is important that practitioners recognize the value and contribution of family in a way that is grounded in critical epistemologies (Acevedo-Gil, 2017; Anzaldúa, 2002; Delgado Bernal, 2002). The strengths of Chicanas and their families remain unacknowledged in many environments (Carrillo & Dean, 2020), but as they continue to enroll in higher education in

larger numbers, scholars should be more intentional about conducting research that promotes an understanding of the role that family plays in educational decision making.

Identity

Throughout the course of my educational trajectory, there have always been certain aspects of my identity that have influenced my decisions, motivation, and persistence. The most salient identities that influenced my academic trajectory are daughter of Mexican immigrants, first-generation college student, low-income, women, Mexicana, sister, and cousin. As a daughter of Mexican immigrants in a mixed-status family, there is a certain degree of pressure that I put on myself to be successful and make my family proud. Although my family is extremely supportive of all my decisions, I continuously feel that I must make my parents' sacrifices of leaving their home country worth it. When I went through the process of applying to the Masters programs, I constantly reminded myself that my degree was not only for, but also for my parents and my community. As a first-generation college student from a low-income background I also recognized the lack of resources and mentors to support Students of Color in higher education, and knew that I had to get involved.

As a woman, and more importantly a Mexicana, I was also motivated to be a part of the Mexicanas earning master's degrees to contribute to change in society. Being the first to pursue a graduate degree, as a sister and cousin, I also knew I had the ability to set an example for my relatives. Centering a Chicana Feminist Epistemology (CFE) allowed for a dissertation study that was intentional in encouraging myself and my research collaborators to bring our full and true selves to the work. As Delgado Bernal (2016) reminded us, social identities cannot exist in isolation from one another. In my study my collaborators shared many experiences with their intersectional identities and the ways in which they influenced their academic trajectory as they

made decisions about choosing to pursue or not pursue a Master's degree. Two identities stood out amongst my collaborators: (a) first-generation college student, and (b) daughter of immigrants and low-income. Next, I describe the influence of these identities on my collaborators via their own stories and narratives.

After completing her Bachelor's degree, Carla took a break from school to figure out what her next steps were. Although her parents were extremely supportive and loving, as a first-generation college student Carla constantly felt that her parents did not necessarily understand her challenges. Below Carla describes a moment where she was thinking through what master's programs she wanted to apply to. She delved into the description of this dichotomous relationship with her parents:

It was hard to and I'm sure you've heard this, you've probably experienced it, but it's really hard to communicate with your family the challenges that you're going through when you've reached this coveted opportunity that is so privileged . . . like you can't really vent, you know about how difficult things are or explain what depression is.

Carla went on to describe how her first-generation college student identity was something that was always at the forefront for her. Even before undergrad she debated applying to top tier schools, out of fear that her application was not good enough. Once the time to apply to graduate school came, once again she doubted that she would get in. In other words, Carla's impostor syndrome made her feel as though her merits were not up to par with those of schools like UCLA. As she thought through the decision to apply to the master's she knew her mental health would have to be a priority if she wanted to be successful.

As Carla reflected on her experience she consistently brought up the fact that being a first-generation college student made it difficult to communicate with her parents. At the same time, however, Carla described that being a first-generation college student consistently reminded her of what her parents had been through when they immigrated to the United States.

Without even realizing it, Carla was essentially explaining the ways her parents had an indirect influence on her decision to continue her education. What is evident through Carla's narrative is that the first-generation college student identity brought up some challenges as she made decisions regarding a master's program, but at the same time it was an identity that kept her grounded, humble, and grateful for her past and present experiences.

Ariana described the feeling of being a daughter of immigrants, and first-generation college student, as having, "a lot on your shoulders," and often not disclosing her true feelings. She shared:

You know, when you're first-gen, there's a lot on your shoulders, right? You want to succeed for yourself, you want to succeed for your parents and make them proud, but also for the rest of your family . . . I just felt a lot of pressure . . . And so, I wasn't always as transparent with my parents or like family, in terms of like, how hard it was for me.

Having taken a couple years off after completing her undergraduate degree, the process of applying to graduate school was no small feat for Ariana. As a first-generation college student, she constantly felt lost and confused, but at the same time she expressed that it was this exact identity that she felt was important and central to her deciding to pursue a master's degree.

Ariana knew that becoming the first in her family to pursue a graduate degree would have a major impact on her younger family members. When discussing the influence that being a first-generation college student had on her academic trajectory, Ariana shared that it was challenging and disclosed that most of the time she did not share her internal struggles with her family.

However, like Carla she recognized the value and importance that that identity held for her.

Jessica, also a first-generation college student and daughter of immigrants, discussed how being the youngest of five influenced her trajectory from very early on, from K-12, undergrad, and through graduate school:

I think my parents because of what had happened with my older siblings [not going to college] emphasized it a bit more for me . . . I just internalized myself that I didn't want to put my family through what my older siblings had . . . So I always felt this pressure to be a good kid. And I think school was, to some degree, my opportunity to do that.

For Jessica, despite feeling motivated by her family, she also carried a sense of guilt that it was up to her to make her parents' dreams of having a doctora in the family come true. For many of my collaborators, our plática was the first time they had sat down to critically think about the way in which their intersecting identities influenced their decision to pursue a master's degree. Overall, they expressed gratitude for having a space where they could honestly reflect and affirmed that though sometimes many of their identities resulted in facing certain challenges, they were also a major factor that was important in deciding to pursue a master's. What is evident is that for Mexicanas attending graduate school, and in this case a master's program, is that identities are intersectional and cannot be examined in isolation.

From the stories of my collaborators one can see that Chicanas navigate multiple domains and spaces with the intersection of their identities at the forefront. Though a wide range of identities were discussed during our pláticas (gender, class, sexuality, race, immigration status, amongst others), the most salient identities were first-generation college students and daughters of immigrants. Literature on these particular themes is discussed below.

Analytical Summary

Academic literature discusses that first-generation college students receive less familial support with regards to preparing for college (Acevedo-Gil, 2017). For the Chicanas in my study, though most of their parents had low educational attainment, that did not "translate into lower levels of encouragement and expectations" by their parents (Ceja, 2004, p. 340). Ceja (2004) found that parents of first-generation college students understood that education was necessary to achieve economic stability and mobility, despite not having formal education, no personal

experience with the United States educational system, and some lacking fluency in English. This finding relates to what was discovered within the narratives of my own collaborators as they all shared how their parents were one of the main motivating factors in their decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education. Also connected to the first-generation college student identity is feelings of inadequacy and not being good enough (Portnoi & Kwong, 2011). Because of these feelings and thoughts, first-generation college students often believe that they are not smart enough and hesitate to apply to programs that they are more than qualified for. In my study, Carla often questioned if she was a competitive candidate for UCLA's program and doubted she would even get in. Moreover, the first-generation college student identity also carries an immense amount of pressure and stress (O'Neal et al., 2016) to make your parents proud, make their sacrifices worth it, and to be a role model for others. If you recall, Jessica shared she felt the pressure to give her parents something her older siblings were not able to give them. First-generation college students also straddle different social fields at school and at home. Though their parents are extremely supportive, it is sometimes difficult to communicate with them (Portnoi & Kwong, 2011). In my study, Carla shared her struggles with not being able to explain to her parents what she was going through because they did not understand what mental health was. It is important to note however, that the literature also discusses that even though first-generation students' families are sometimes unable to provide such support that other families could, it is the maintenance of their first-generation identity and family relationships that remains a critical component for their retention in higher education (Ceja, 2004).

As daughters of immigrants, Chicanas educational goals and aspirations are heavily influenced by their parents (Ceja, 2004). It is through the "economic, social, and occupational struggles" (Ceja, 2004, p. 346) that Chicanas witness their parents encounter, that motivates

them to pursue a higher education. Ceja's (2004) work reminds us that because they are daughters of immigrants, Chicanas are motivated to excel in their schooling and fulfill their parents "American Dream" of pursuing higher education and succeeding. At the same time, however, this identity can also evoke a sense of pressure. If you recall, Ariana described the feeling of being a first-generation college student and daughter of immigrants as, "having so much on my shoulders." Most importantly, however, it is the strong connection that Chicanas have to their diverse identities that keep them grounded and motivated in their schooling.

By Centering a Chicana Feminist Epistemology, I was able to get a glance into the lives of my collaborators and begin to understand the impacts of the ways in which different aspects of their identities influence them. What is clear from the literature and from my own dissertation findings is that identities cannot exist in isolation (Delgado Bernal, 2016) and that while a certain aspect of our identity can bring challenges, it can also be the most fruitful and motivating aspect as well.

Why M.A. & Why Education

When I was an undergraduate student at Santa Clara University, as I was nearing my junior year, my professors in the Ethnic Studies department began to ask me what type of graduate programs I wanted to apply to. Being a first-generation college student, I had no idea how to answer that question. After expressing to my professors that I wanted to be in a profession where I could give back to my community and support students pursuing higher education, they recommended I think about a graduate degree in education. After exploring different programs in education, I quickly realized that was it. I decided on education because the field was general enough to apply in diverse fields but also specific enough to acquire the skills to support students. Although I was encouraged by my mentors to apply to both master's and

PhD programs, I decided on master's programs because I was applying straight out of undergrad. After conversations with professors in graduate programs, I quickly realized that I would be a more competitive applicant in the master's candidate pool. Below I describe the different motivations for pursuing a master's degree in Education amongst my research collaborators.

When reflecting on why she decided to pursue a master's degree, Carla shared the frustrations she encountered during her gap year.

But at that point, now, I'm rounding my first gap year and there aren't very many opportunities opening up for me. So grad school kind of felt like a survival. Like a move towards more independence and more financial security.

Carla was tired of working as a substitute teacher and knew that as a Gates Millennium Scholar she could go back to school at any time and have it paid for. Because there were not many job opportunities available, Carla decided that applying to and ultimately earning a master's degree would open up more doors for her. Then, when reflecting on why she chose an education program, Carla described how this passion started early on.

I was helping my mom with her daycare . . . ever since I was 10, I was kind of her assistant and taking care of kids that come home from school and clean diapers or do homework tutoring with the kids. So I was really into education because of that . . . I always thought, since I have this scholarship, I should go back to school and go into education, because I always felt like education was a way of giving back to my community.

For Carla, committing to a graduate degree in education highlighted that this degree was not only for her but also to support her community. Evidently, an important factor in Carla's decision to pursue a degree in education was the impact of the degree.

Another collaborator, Lucia, described how her realization that she wanted to pursue a master's degree in education came from her admiration for one of her undergraduate professors in the Chicano Studies Department. Lucia described the moment she had the realization that she wanted to be just like her mentor, a professor:

I'd never seen someone take over the classroom like her. Her voice literally boomed and it made you feel like fuck, I could change the world today every time you would walk out of that class. I'd never seen another woman with this type of power outside of my mother. That was the first time I ever thought, wow, this is what education could be like?

As Lucia reflected on her experience in this particular professor's classroom she beamed with joy. She remembered entering that class as a timid student, ashamed of her Mexicana—Centro Americana identity, but ending the quarter empowered, and proud of who she was. Despite having her own transformation as proof, Lucia was in disbelief that professors had the ability to impact students in that way. After that experience, Lucia knew she needed to pursue a graduate degree and decided that education was the means to become like her professor.

Miriam pinpointed her experience of encountering a first-gen community during undergrad as the pivotal moment in her trajectory. While attending Saint Mary's College, Miriam joined a first-generation college student program where she attended meetings regularly and got support from upperclassmen and student affairs professionals. Although she had an interest in education from a young age, her experience in this program affirmed her choice.

Miriam elaborated:

I always kind of saw myself being in educational spaces for my career . . . When I was going through the first-gen mentorship program, for the first time connecting with Student Success staff and counselors and things like that, and actually having rapport with educational professionals. I wanted to work in student affairs as well. And so that's where, like this idea of going to grad school finally had a place where it could live.

During her time in that program Miriam came to understand that if she wanted to work with students in education, just as her advisors were, the next step in her academic trajectory was to pursue a master's degree, and more specifically a master's degree in education.

Miriam went on to describe that as she grappled with the challenges that came with the application process, she constantly reminded herself that she was doing it [pursuing a master's] for her community. Miriam had heard that academia could be a toxic and non-inclusive space

and was worried about what her experience would be like. However, in those moments of anxiety and worry she reminded herself:

I did have those moments of feeling like, well I'm doing this for my community and so someone like me can be in a space like that [UCLA]. And I remember feeling this tension of, but is it actually inclusive? Do they actually stand by their mission of social justice? So that's where I was kind of conflicted about it. But at the same time, I was like no I have to do this for my people, for my community.

Analytical Summary

Although little is known about master's education in the United States, from the existing literature (Borchert, 1994; Cohen, 2012; Conrad et al., 1993; Glazer, 1986; Glazer-Raymo, 2005; Girves & Wemmerus, 1988; Leyva, 2011; Malaney, 1987; Mertz et al., 2012; Portnoi & Kwong, 2011) it is evident that often, students make the decision to pursue a master's degree to advance in their career and increase their earning potential. Amongst my own collaborators, Carla shared how as her job opportunities were becoming slim to none, pursuing a master's felt like her only move left to find more opportunities. Additionally, being a film major in undergrad, she knew a master's degree in education was a way to come into the field.

When exploring the *whys* behind picking a master's program in education, most of my collaborators were able to pinpoint a specific experience or individual that influenced their passion for education. Existing literature on mentorship from university faculty and staff reveals that mentors are often a source of inspiration, motivation and information (Valdez, 2001) for Chicana students. As Chicanas navigate undergraduate and graduate education, they are heavily influenced by professors they see as role models. Reflecting on my own collaborators' experiences both Lucia and Miriam remembered the professionals in their own lives that sparked their interest in a graduate degree in education. Lucia recalled how seeing a powerhouse Latina unapologetically take up space, was one of the most impactful experiences in her life. It was through Lucia's exposure to this professor's natural teaching abilities that she came to realize

what she could do with a graduate degree in education. For Miriam, joining a first-generation college student support program and working with student affairs professionals, allowed her to envision herself being in that same position after completing her undergraduate degree. However, she knew that to do so she had to pursue a master's degree, hence why she decided to apply.

Another important theme the literature discusses is the influence of parental engagement, regardless of whether that presence is in a formal school environment or in a more personal and informal space (Carreón et al., 2005). Although existing literature on this topic is not specific to master's degree influence, more research is needed to understand the role that parents play in these decisions. For example, Carla shared that she grew up helping her mother with her preschool, tutoring kids after school since she was 10 years old. Although her mother was not always directly involved in her school events, she made sure Carla was always keeping up with her education responsibilities. Carla shared that witnessing her mom be a kind, patient, and loving educator, led her to decide on a degree in education because she knew this was how she could give back and make a difference.

Some common phrases amongst my collaborators were, "I wanted to give back to my community," "I wanted to give back to my parents," and "I wanted to help the community I came from." Existing literature on the motivations behind pursuing higher education reveals that, for Latinos, it is often about giving back to their family and communities (Vallejo & Lee, 2009). For the Chicanas in my study, pursuing a master's degree was not only about social mobility, but rather to give back to society. Cuellar et al. (2022) found that for Latinos higher education is often about disrupting systemic inequities, helping low-income students, and learning for the sake of intellectual growth. This was also evident amongst my own collaborators who expressed

the importance of finding a degree that allowed them to contribute on a macro scale. This finding is important because it serves to disrupt the literature that says the sole purpose of education is to make more money. Ultimately what Cuellar et al. (2022) found in their study is that some students still seek purpose above financial wealth.

Although there is some research on the factors influencing the motivations behind pursuing a specific type of degree or a specific field, from my findings and from the existing literature, it becomes apparent that more research is needed on master's education. It is important that researchers give attention to this segment of the educational pipeline as jobs that require a master's degree at entry-level were projected to be the fastest growing segment of the workforce between 2014 and 2024 (Council of Graduate Schools, 2017).

Representation & Mentors

Most often, we do not aspire to become something that we have not seen. As a first-generation college student, growing up I thought I wanted to be a doctor or a lawyer. It was until I attended the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project as a junior in high school that I saw individuals who looked like me with graduate degrees. It was then that I knew I wanted to earn a master's and PhD and committed myself to that goal. During my undergraduate trajectory it was my mentors in the Ethnic Studies department that encouraged me to think about graduate school more deeply and ultimately guided me through the entire process. Having professors of color who cared about me and intentionally mentored me was pivotal to my success. During my pláticas, all of my collaborators shared stories of mentors and folks who looked like them that ultimately influenced their decision to pursue a master's degree.

Erika shared that while she was an undergraduate student at California State University Fullerton, she took a course where she came across a Latina professor for the first time. From the

moment she walked into the class, she was immediately impacted because in front of her stood a woman who looked like her, dressed like her and talked like her. Erika described:

I had a professor and her name was Dra. Gutierrez and she did undergrad to PhD. And I was like, I want to be like her. She was so young, Latina. I really loved her. She was my favorite professor. And when I found out she would talk about her experience, like going from undergrad to the Ph. D. program. I was like, that's what I want to do.

After being a student in that class, Erika knew she wanted to be like Dr. Gutierrez. Moving forward, she sought her mentorship and looked to her for advice when she began working through her applications.

Another collaborator, Lucia, shared the impact of a mentor she holds near and dear to her heart. Lucia's ethnic background is Mexicana-Centro Americana, though she grew up only saying that she was Mexican. Lucia described how she would take advantage of her white privilege and sometimes would not say she was Mexican or Central American, instead she would say she was white:

Sometimes I wouldn't say that I was either . . . just like filling out those census style questions on standardized testing, right? Picking white always seemed something that was very tempting to me. And I always felt guilty. That's the thing. I always felt like that's what I wanted to be. I never chose it. But I always felt angry that I couldn't do it.

Then, as an undergraduate student at California State University, Dominguez Hills she came across a professor that looked like her and was extremely comfortable in her identity. Lucia shared:

So it wasn't until undergrad where again, the first person, the first actual professor or teacher or educator that I ever told I was Chicana-Salvadoreña was Dra. Martinez . . . And when she introduced me to those folks, she was like, "This is Lucia, she's a Chicana Salvadoreña." And I was like oh my god that's so crazy. She did. That's so easy. I never knew I could say both like that.

A couple months after meeting, Dra. Benavidez Lopez shared with Lucia that she had applied to a conference scholarship on her behalf and encouraged her to apply to the McNair Program. As

Lucia progressed through her undergraduate trajectory, Dra. Benavidez Lopez was consistently a support system and guided Lucia through her applications. Lucia described:

Luckily, I got admitted into McNair and that was the first time I ever had like my first academic community where it was people who were legitimately pushing you to see your boundary, see your consciousness in a very different way that could offer something very wise and just to the world.

For Lucia, Dra. Martinez was the person who pushed her out of her comfort zone, introduced her to graduate school, guided her through the process, and introduced her to the person who would then become her graduate advisor. Lucia ended by sharing:

I'm very thankful for Rocio . . . because honestly, if it wasn't for her, I would not know who Francisco was . . . I wouldn't know who those people were . . . these professors are just something else, because I feel like they don't get paid enough for being like life therapists for students . . . And so that woman is literally the reason why I was motivated to pursue a master's.

Another collaborator, Sofia, described a particular experience as an undergraduate student at the University of California Irvine, where her mentor went the extra mile to support her. During her junior year, Sofia was involved in so many extracurricular activities that she was constantly asking for extensions on her assignments. Because she was a good student, professors often granted her extensions. However, when she enrolled in Profesora García's Chicano/a studies class, she quickly realized that would change. According to Sofia, Profesora García was very strict in the classroom, but extremely supportive and encouraging as well. One day, Sofia asked her for an extension on an assignment and Profe García said no. Instead of leaving it at that, Profe García asked Sofia to print out a copy of her schedule and bring it to office hours where together they examined and outlined where Sofia could study, take classes, read, and partake in extracurriculars. Sofia described that moment:

So I went to Lisa and I asked for an extension and she was like, "Ummm, no" . . . And she goes, "Let me see your schedule." What do you do? Where do you study? Where do you do this? How have you been surviving? . . . So I think from there she [Profe García]

was like, I'm going to bring this woman in and then she made me her research assistant and made me scale back on other work . . . Then there were all these other research programs that I would apply and wouldn't get in because some professors didn't like me and Lisa would go scream at them to get me in.

Rather than granting Sofia the extension and sending her off on her way, Profesora García took the time to reel her in, mentor her, and guide her through her higher education journey.

Analytical Summary

From the literature, it is clear that our educational system has consistently failed Chicana students (Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Previous studies that have explored possibilities to combat the failure of our educational system, largely agree that the presence of mentors is extremely important to the professional and academic success of Chicana/Latina women, and other ethnic/racial minorities (Ceja, 2004; Chandler, 1996; Pérez Huber et al., 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2000). The literature has also agreed that mentors are a good predictor of educational attainment (Gándara, 1995; McKenna & Ortiz, 1988; Ortiz, 1988; Vasquez, 1982; Zambrana et al., 1997) and a source of inspiration and information (Valdez, 2001). Amongst my collaborators, gaining access to mentors who looked like them inspired their educational trajectories and granted them access to a plethora of information on graduate school education.

Villaseñor et al. (2013) found that “just as there are certain barriers and challenges that are particular to Chicanas as a group, so must the mentoring offered to these students take into account their particular social, cultural and gendered contexts” (p. 2). Thus they argued for a model of *mujerista* mentoring, “a collectivist, assets-based model that values the lived experiences and multiple ways of knowing of Chicanas/Latinas, focused on the building of communities and reciprocal mentoring relationships, and challenging models of mentoring that re-inscribe hierarchies between mentors and protégés” (Villaseñor et al., 2013, p. 2). Although the language of *mujerista* mentoring was not utilized amongst my collaborators, the mentoring

relationships that were most influential for them were those which were holistic, asset-based, and reciprocal. Moreover, my collaborators described the importance and impact of mentoring relationships that allowed them to bridge the academic, personal, and professional (Villaseñor et al., 2013).

Villaseñor et al. (2013) go on to describe that what is particular about these mentoring relationships Chicanas co-create is that they offer alternative methods and philosophies of mentoring that do not require Chicana students to assimilate to the dominant culture. In my study, my collaborators described the impact of not only professors but also other graduate students and teaching assistants that offered their support and encouragement in a way that allowed them to be their full and true selves. Moreover, they described how their most memorable mentors provided the space to share personal experiences and the opportunity to establish a bridge of commonality. Overall, Chicanas rely on mentoring relationships with professors, faculty, administrators, teaching assistants, and graduate students to maneuver through institutions of higher education (Sanchez, 2015). Mentoring relationships provide strength, motivation, empowerment, and consejos to help Chicanas navigate the graduate education pipeline more smoothly (Sanchez, 2015), as shown through the lived experiences of my collaborators.

Graduate School Exposure

I was first exposed to the concept of graduate school as an incoming high school junior. The summer before high school started I attended the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project conference in Sacramento, where I sat through panels on Latinos in Higher Education, The College Application Process, and Statistics on Latino/as in Graduate School. It was during a session hosted by Dr. Daniel Solórzano, professor at the University of California, Los Angeles,

that I learned about the statistics on Latinas who earned master's and doctoral degrees. Seeing how small the numbers were was impactful, and in that moment I promised myself that I would become a part of that number and help improve the statistics. Figuring out the undergraduate application process was no small feat, but I landed at Santa Clara University where I met three of my closest mentors, Dra. Jesica S. Fernández, Dr. Anthony Q. Hazard, and Dra. Anna Sampaio. These three professors continuously shared their experience with graduate school and guided me through the entire application process. They read my essays, recommended readings, and provided motivation and support in moments where I felt like giving up. They revealed to me a hidden curriculum that I was unaware of, and they opened my eyes to a plethora of opportunities.

When we discussed exposure to graduate education, my research collaborators described the different ways in which they began to think about it. The wide range of experiences included some that knew from high school that they wanted to pursue a graduate degree but did not know what it took to get there, apply, and let alone graduate. Others had absolutely no idea what graduate school was and eventually learned through mentors or professors in undergrad.

For one collaborator, Miriam, who attended a very well-resourced private school in the Silicon Valley, higher education was always emphasized. At her school, students were encouraged to think about graduate school and explore topics and university websites for graduate programs. Through biweekly meetings with her college counselors, Miriam began to explore the thought of pursuing a graduate degree, and her curiosity continued to grow. When she mentioned it to her family, and her parents immediately supported her, she knew a graduate degree was something she would pursue. Yet, she was not sure what the logistical steps after undergrad were. She explained:

I remember looking at grad school websites and I would see like undergrad or graduate programs. I think that's what it was when I was just nerding out on the websites . . . I do

remember developing a goal to go to grad school, when I was in high school, but it also was kind of just for the sake of doing it.

Although Miriam had not yet learned the steps to apply, enroll, and succeed in graduate school, her vision was there. Though a first-generation college student herself, coming from a wealthy, private high school she had not learned much about what it meant to be a first-generation college student. While an undergraduate student at St Mary's College, feeling a lack of community, she decided to join a first-generation college student mentorship community. It was through this experience that she began to learn the ins and outs of the actual application process.

I remember I first learned about the first-gen community in undergrad . . . I remember, in that program I was finally able to connect with the upper graduate students. So at St. Mary's was the first time I started hearing people talk about applying to grad school.

For Miriam, other first-generation college students and program staff became her mentors and ultimately some of her biggest supporters. It was in this community that conversations about graduate school were consistently happening and students were being provided with the tools necessary to succeed.

Two collaborators, Sofia and Ariana, shared a similar experience about becoming aware of graduate school in high school but not knowing what to do to get there. Sofia attended the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Project annual summer conference as juniors in high school. CLYLP seeks to enhance and further develop the leadership potential of California's youth as they prepare to become the future leaders of our state by focusing on college, career, and culture. Sofia described how this was the first time counselors spoke to her like she mattered, given that at her high school students were being pulled out to be put on the college track, but not her. Similarly, Ariana was a participant in the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference, a 3-day intensive hosted by the Sal Castro Foundation. Here students learn about college, A-G requirements, testing requirements, meet with counselors, and hear from other Latino/a role

models and professionals. Ariana shared that after the 3-day intensive she still could not believe that there were so many Latino/a lawyers, doctors, attorneys, engineers, etc. Seeing so many people who looked like her, and who actually explained what they did to get to where they were, heavily influenced her, resulting in her committing to pursuing a graduate degree. After the conference, Ariana kept her participant folder and referenced it as motivation during difficult moments. Karen's and Ariana's experiences serve to show that academic outreach programs play a large role in motivating students to pursue higher education and beyond.

Fernanda shared a story about her time as an undergraduate at the University of California, Los Angeles and how she came to learn about graduate school and eventually apply. During our conversation it was evident that Fernanda was becoming emotional as she shared details about moments where she wanted to drop out. As a business major, Fernanda struggled in her math courses and felt that professors were not supportive nor did they provide substantive tutoring and help after class. It was during this time Fernanda contemplated whether being a student at UCLA was even worth it. Soon after, she enrolled in a Chicano/a Studies course, where a teaching assistant introduced her to the Chicano/a Studies major, the major that she ended up switching to. Little did Fernanda know that the impact of this teaching assistant would be tremendous. One day during office hours the teaching assistant asked if she knew what research was and brought up the Academic Advancement Program (AAP). AAP houses McNair and Research Rookies, research-based programs that prepare undergraduate students interested in pursuing graduate degrees. In these programs' students undertake a research project under the guidance of two graduate mentors and a faculty sponsor for academic credit. Fernanda was immediately interested but also recognized that participation in this program took place after 2:00pm, which was when she would head home to help her mother with her business from

2:00pm until 7:00pm. However, after talking to her mother and agreeing that they would figure it out, Fernanda decided to apply and was accepted. She shared:

That was my first hesitation like this will take time away from the store. And I don't know if I can do that . . . So those research programs, the first one is what's called Junior Scholars now known as research rookies, exposed me to research [and graduate school].

It was also through Junior Scholars that Fernanda was introduced to one of her biggest mentors.

She detailed:

I was able to work with Dr. Francisco from the beginning. And he was the one who guided me through that first project. Then he kept asking me, "Okay, where do you see this project going?" And I said, mixed status families and he's like, "Well, what about them?" And at the same time, AAP programs were telling me about the McNair Research Scholars Program, and other additional research opportunities, just in case McNair's didn't happen . . . So I said, Okay, well, I have nothing to lose. I applied. I got into McNair, working with Dr. Francisco, who kept pushing me to think about research on mixed status families and siblings.

It was in this program that Fernanda was also able to get a glimpse into the life of a teaching assistant and realized that she enjoyed sharing experiences with students and supporting their learning. With the support of McNair, and her program advisor, Dr. Francisco, Fernanda was able to learn about graduate school, research, and what she needed to succeed. Most importantly she was able to demystify the process and help others do the same. Fernanda described the support in the following way:

McNair kept me grounded and guided me. We had intense sessions of, this is what the application looks like. They walked me down the process, they reviewed my statements, they reviewed my CV, and it's a tailored program that walks you through every little step until you hit that submit button.

Four other collaborators also shared experiences of joining undergraduate research programs like Research Rookies and McNair and being exposed to graduate school for the first time. Generally speaking, the demographics of these programs are made up of Students of Color and first-generation college students. Therefore, my research collaborators described how these programs

increased their sense of belonging, helped them understand the challenges and opportunities of becoming competitive for graduate school and ultimately guided them through the entire process.

Analytical Summary

Connected to the literature on the previous theme of mentors (Chandler, 1996; Gándara, 1995; McKenna & Ortiz, 1988; Pérez Huber et al., 2006; Rodriguez et al., 2000; Vasquez, 1982; Zambrana et al., 1997), professors, older students, and teaching assistants also played a role in exposing my collaborators to graduate school. Fernanda detailed how her teaching assistant was the first one to ask her if she had thought about graduate school. Although she had no idea what pursuing a graduate degree meant, she described how comfortable she felt asking her teaching assistant questions. For Miriam, the upper division students at her undergraduate institutions became the role models she desperately needed and wanted. It was through these students that Miriam was introduced to the idea of pursuing a master's degree.

Amongst my collaborators, another important factor related to graduate school exposure were identity-based youth conferences, such as the Chicano Latino Youth Leadership Conference and the Sal Castro Chicano Youth Leadership Conference. These types of conferences have been shown to inspire students to realize their educational and professional potential through a wide range of workshops and programming (Santiago & Brown, 2004). In addition, these conferences encourage students to pursue postsecondary educational opportunities by providing them information on public and private institutions of higher education. Most importantly, they emphasize the importance of cultural and family values and have a positive effect on Latino/a student achievement (Santiago & Brown, 2004). To quantify their impact, since its inception in 1982, the CLYLP has successfully offered a week-long intensive leadership-training program in Sacramento to over 2,250 students and eighty percent of the participants have gone on to higher education (Santiago & Brown, 2004). For some of my

collaborators, it was at these conferences that they learned about the different types of graduate degrees, saw other Chicana master's and PhDs and became inspired to become one of them.

Moreover, Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Programs, like the Ronald E. McNair program, have also been shown to influence graduate school exposure. Through their range of services (academic counseling, conferences and presentations, seminars and workshops, summer internships, research activities, test preparation, tutorial assistance, and mentoring), achievement programs are able to provide the adequate resources for students to learn, apply to, and enroll in graduate school (Derk, 2007; Restad, 2013). Recently, Renbarger and Beaujean (2020) conducted an analysis of the impact of McNair programs on graduate enrollment. From their exhaustive literature review and analysis, they found that McNair program students were almost six times as likely to enroll in a graduate program as the comparison group (Renbarger & Beaujean, 2020). Although their study focused on enrollment trends, it also spoke to how McNair was often the space that introduced students to graduate school. For half of my collaborators, McNair programs had exposed them to graduate school and helped them find the guidance, mentorship, and moral support to pursue a master's degree in education.

Evidently, Chicana students learn and are exposed to graduate school in a variety of ways. However, what is apparent from the literature and from my own collaborators experiences is that identity-based youth conferences and post baccalaureate achievement programs play a huge role in shaping graduate enrollment trends for Latino/a student's generally. This is an area of research that definitely merits further attention.

Logistics

An important logistical factor that drew my research collaborators to apply to the Master of Arts in Education at UCLA was the fact that the program was only one year long. The idea of

earning a Master's in only one year was very appealing, primarily because of financial concerns. When discussing why the MA in Education at UCLA logistically sounded so appealing Fernanda shared her internal challenge of wanting to earn a graduate degree to honor her sister who was not able to finish her degree, but also needing to work to support her family. She shared:

My sister keeps being a major impact on me. So knowing that she wasn't able to, she needed to walk away from her masters at the time. For me, it was like, let me do this for us . . . kind of dedicating it to her. But at the same time, my dad was also telling me, you need to work . . . What convinced me was that one-year timeline. After the master's, I'll be done and I'll start working, and that's fine. And then we'll have the masters for my sister.

For Fernanda the final logistical factor that encouraged her to apply was the fact that the program was only a year long. With this timeline Fernande figured she could finish quickly and immediately support her family and their business after graduating her one-year program.

Miriam, also found the one-year timeline appealing and described why the program at UCLA was most appealing to her by sharing:

When they got rid of the GRE, that was the defining factor for me applying. I also did appreciate that it was a one-year program . . . I was like damn one year and you have a whole ass master's. It was shocking to me because most programs are two years long. And then I figured, this will save me money on rent and living costs.

For Carla, finances was the most important logistical concern as she navigated her decision to apply. Struggling to find a full-time job with only an undergraduate degree, Carla was a substitute teacher for a year. However, she knew she wanted more. When she finally sat down to thoroughly explore her options she realized that pursuing a master's was her best option. When Carla broke down the costs of pursuing the master's she realized that most of her expenses were covered by her scholarship. She explained:

So I didn't know anything about grad school, it was kind of just a footnote in the scholarship [The Gates Millennium] of like, by the way, you could do this if you go into these fields. So I already knew that, if I'm going to grad school, I'm not paying for it. Gates is paying for it.

Carla went on to share that earning the Gates Millennium scholarship was one of her biggest blessings, as it allowed her to pursue a bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degree almost completely debt free. Carla also disclosed that had it not been for her finances being sorted out, she likely would have not been able to pursue graduate education.

For Sofia, Daniela, Ariana, and Giselle, a very important logistical requirement was the proximity to home. Being in a familiar place, close to family, was a non-negotiable that ultimately influenced where they applied and attended for their master's degree. Ariana, who was longing returning to her hometown of Los Angeles after six years away, emotionally shared:

But also, the fact that I would be back home . . . I wanted, I needed to be back home after being six years living in Santa Cruz and feeling really disconnected.

Another important factor to highlight, that all of my collaborators brought up, was the prestige of the institution. In different words, each collaborator shared that UCLA was a place that always seemed unattainable. Once they got in, they knew they could not pass up the opportunity to attend one of the best schools in the nation, and more importantly a department with amazing faculty.

Also critical to Daniela and Miriam's decision to apply and attend the Master of Arts in Education program at UCLA was their personal alignment with the program values and faculty. Daniela described how she spent some time exploring teaching credentialing programs but did not feel motivated to apply because they lacked a philosophical perspective. With UCLA, on the other hand, she appreciated that it was a strong foundation program, rooted in social justice, something much more connected to the organizing work she was doing. When reflecting on how she chose who she wanted to work with she shared:

And somehow I landed on Francisco's page. His dissertation, and his older work, was focused on families, he did work with parents and families. And so I was like, there's a

huge connection there because that's the work I do now. I just fell in love with his profile. And so, I emailed him thinking I wouldn't get a response back and he wrote me back.

Daniela went on to describe how she ultimately felt that UCLA was the place for her because Francisco was the only professor who had responded to her emails and both their work and values aligned. Similarly, Miriam shared a story about how UCLA felt out of her reach, like just a dream. However, after the requirement to take the GRE was removed from the application process, Miriam decided to apply.

Miriam then proceeded to recount a vivid memory where she had to go to the UCLA campus and decided to walk through Moore Hall, where the School of Education is housed. As she was walking through the different floors she saw posters of Dr. Francisco, a professor she admired and read about many times during her undergraduate education. At that moment, Miriam, a fierce social justice advocate and passionate Ethnic Studies scholar, jumped in excitement. Dr. Francisco was a professor she yearned to work with, and she had no idea that he taught at one of the institutions she would be applying to! Miriam described:

As I walked through Moore Hall I saw Francisco's name on there and I found out that he was a professor there, which was really shocking to me, because I was reading his work as an ethnic studies student. And the whole world of academia is too, right? It's just kind of like academic celebrities. Like, this guy who I read his work is here. When I walked through the halls of Moore, and read through the description of the program, and its focus on critical race theory, those are things that really gravitated towards me.

Moreover, Daniela and Miriam both recall that as they were reviewing the institution's website, and while they made their campus visits, they were intentional about looking for a diverse faculty and diverse student body. They knew that going into a space with folks who looked like them would be essential to their survival and success, and despite having competing offers from other universities, Daniela and Miriam chose UCLA due to the diversity. Through Miriam and Daniela's experience we learn that, for Chicanas, alignment and connection to program values,

faculty, and students is an important factor to consider when deciding where to apply and attend for graduate school. For both Daniela and Miriam, regardless of how competitive other offers were, they committed to UCLA because they had come to visualize it as a space where they could thrive and have support from faculty and students from similar backgrounds.

Erika, who knew from day one that she would be applying to the PhD, shared that a very important logistical factor for her was how the master's program transitioned into a PhD. As Erika explored different programs she remembers emailing the student services office and asking about that transition. After student services responded and told her all the courses would transition smoothly Erika knew this would be the ideal program for her.

Analytical Summary

There are a wide range of logistical factors that Mexicanas / Chicanas considered when deciding where to apply for their Master of Arts in Education programs. Despite having offers from other institutions, my collaborators were influenced to apply to this particular program due to the length of the program (1 year), affordability (1-year program meant less tuition spent), location (proximity to home), personal alignment with program values and mission, prestige, faculty alignment, and ease of transition to a PhD.

Although there is an extensive body of literature on the college choice process for undergraduate students, the current literature on graduate students, and specifically master's students, is limited (Poock & Love, 2001). Despite such limitations, from the existing literature we can suggest that graduate school selection, or decision-making process, is one of the most stressful and time consuming processes for students (Poock & Love, 2001). As students identify the different graduate universities and programs that may be right for them, there are a wide range of critical factors that they consider before making a final decision (Malaney, 1987). Responding to the need for research on graduate education, Talbot et al. (1996) explored the

college decision process for doctoral students in student affairs. In this study they found that the most influential factors on graduate school choice were, “practical issues (financial incentives, location of program, and flexibility of program), reputation (program, institution, faculty, and graduates), and structural considerations (type of degree, core philosophy)” (p. 13). In my study my collaborators identified some of the same factors mentioned above as important to their decision. Practical issues, such as proximity to family and cost, were central to their decision. Reputation and structural consideration were also important to my collaborators, who were drawn to UCLA because of the faculty, program philosophy, research, and ability to transition to a PhD.

Another study by Olson (1992) took the graduate school choice topic further and distinguished between factors among doctoral and Master’s students. According to Mertz et al. (2012):

The five consideration factors were, in rank order: geographic location, cost, reputation of the faculty and the program, personal contact with the faculty, and a recommendation from a significant other. The six final decision factors were, in rank order: positive interaction with university personnel during the decision process, the reputation of the program, the reputation of the faculty, the cost of attending, perceptions of the marketability of the graduate degree, and speed of acceptance into the program. (p. 2)

Though multiple findings from Olson’s study also came up in my work, two heavily discussed factors amongst my collaborators were personal contact with the faculty and positive interaction with university personnel. From my collaborators, those who decided to reach out to the university described how quickly both student affairs and faculty on campus responded. The faculty and staff’s quick response rate and willingness to meet with students, reassured my collaborators that UCLA was an institution where they would feel supported, heavily influencing their decision to pick UCLA as their graduate school of choice.

While the studies described above are important contributions to the literature on factors that influence graduate school decision, and in many ways similar to my findings, they are also limited in the way in which they studied college choice. First, their reliance on survey design limits our understanding of student experience and the *whys* behind the factors explored. Second, combining master's students and doctoral students, as well as students in different graduate programs and different fields obscured possible differences by degree and field. Additionally, a majority of these studies centered the white student experience. By building on previous works, my dissertation study sought to gain a deeper understanding of the Chicana experience in Master of Arts in Education programs. However, it is evident that a lot more needs to be done when it comes to Master's education, across disciplines, race, gender, socioeconomic status, age, citizenship, etc.

Conclusion

In this chapter I began by reasserting that this dissertation study was necessary because the experience of master's students, Chicanas in particular, has gone under-examined and resulted in a gap in higher education research. I proceeded to re-state my research questions and outlined the roadmap for my three findings chapters. This chapter focused on *Deciding to Pursue a Master of Arts in Education* and provided a closer look at the factors, experiences, and relationships that influenced Chicanas decision to pursue an MA in education. In the following chapter, "Attainment of the Masters of Arts in Education," I begin with a brief overview of some of the challenges experienced within their M.A. programs, and close by focusing on how Chicanas find ways to persist in their master's programs, despite the obstacles faced.

CHAPTER SIX: ATTAINMENT OF THE MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

Chapter Six begins with my own experience earning my master's degree. Then, I share a brief overview of some of the challenges my research collaborators experienced during their master's program, and end by focusing on the sources of support that they drew from in order to persist despite the challenges faced. To understand and conceptualize the sources of support that Chicanas drew from during their master's program, a Community Cultural Wealth lens was used. Therefore, the sections of this chapter are the following: *Aspirational Capital*, *Linguistic Capital*, *Familial Capital*, *Social Capital*, *Resistant Capital*, and *Navigational Capital*. Each section describes how particular themes emerged from my collaborators' own words and is followed by an analytical summary connecting the theme to the existing bodies of literature on Chicanos in higher education. Within each of these sections I share my own narrative where appropriate.

Earning My Master's Degree

Knowing how to navigate higher education is something that has never come easy for me. As a first-generation college student, applying to graduate school was not an easy feat, let alone making my way through it and graduating. Although I was lucky to have support and mentorship from various professors at my undergraduate institution while I was applying to graduate school, once at UCLA it was completely different. I clearly remember walking into the School of Education's summer orientation and feeling like I did not belong. As I walked into the auditorium in Moore Hall, I looked around and truly felt invisible, I wanted to go home. Once classes began I felt that I could not keep up with the readings and that I was not eloquent enough, leading me to doubt my own capabilities. All that to say, the impostor syndrome was alive and well. Moreover, the isolation, microaggressions in the classroom and lack of funding made it even harder for me to do well in school.

However, despite the challenges faced, it was with and through the support of various people, spaces, and communities that I was able to thrive and ultimately succeed in my master's program. During moments where I doubted my abilities, I reminded myself of my parents' sacrifice of leaving Mexico to come to the United States and remembered the joy in their faces when they spoke to others about my academic endeavors. Because I lived at home I also felt the support from my parents in other ways; my dad always wore his UCLA hat, his car has UCLA license plates, my mom cooked for me every day, they made time for me to go out on weekends and reminded me to take breaks. With my siblings, we broke bread, worked out, watched movies, and chatted over loud soccer games and board games. Additionally, living at home allowed me to clearly delineate between my academic identity and my at home identity, making it easier to disconnect from school when I felt overwhelmed. Evidently my home, my family, and the activities and interactions we shared played a vital role in keeping my soul nourished during my year in the master's program.

Within the institution, there was also a range of sources of support that I drew from to stay motivated. First, my amigas were the most important community I created. We shared notes and consejos and reminded each other that we were more than capable of finishing our master's degree. Also important were the spaces that I was involved in such as the Research Apprenticeship (RAC) Community, Grupo Folklórico de UCLA, the Center for Transformation of Schools, the Center for Critical Race Studies in Education, and my race and ethnic studies courses. In these spaces I felt affirmed, like I could be my true self. Moreover, my community of amigas and I intentionally carved out spaces for ourselves and created our own writing groups and homework support networks that were invaluable to our success. Last, having an advisor and professors that understood the challenges I was facing was very important to my degree progress

as I knew that there were spaces within the institution where I could honestly share the challenges I was facing. Though my master's year did include tears, stress, and a range of obstacles, I was able to persist with the support of my family, friends, and broader community.

Overview of Challenges

The very fact that most Chicana and Chicano scholars have had to overcome these and other barriers to succeed in the academy is further proof of our ability to survive against high odds, and against a strong resistance to our being there. (Yosso & Solórzano, 2001, p. 488)

The quote above is an excellent way to introduce the overview of challenges that Chicanas face in higher education because it highlights our ability to grow, survive, and persist in the face of immense burden and challenges. With that said, the literature on Chicanas in higher education outlines the following as some of the challenges Chicanas face: experiences with microaggressions, racism, gender stereotypes, pregnancy and parenting responsibilities, depression, culture shock, lack of financial resources, unequal treatment by professors in the classroom, and/or lower academic expectations (Achor & Morales, 1990; Cuádriz, 1997; Delgado Bernal, 2001; National Women's Law Center, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). In addition to the challenges mentioned above, in my dissertation study, some of the challenges my research collaborators described were finances, impostor syndrome, traumatic orientation, loneliness, academic and parental expectations, commute time, problematic professors, microaggressions, hierarchy of master's and PhD students, gaslighting, stress, sexism, and more. Although it is important to name and acknowledge the aforementioned challenges, the focus of this dissertation is to approach the experiences of Chicanas in master's programs from an asset-based perspective and describe how these challenges were mitigated by drawing on their diverse forms of capital, which will be done below.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital refers to the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers. This resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals. (Yosso, 2005, p. 78)

I am the proud daughter of Mexican immigrants. My mother from Guadalajara, Jalisco, and my pa from Culiacan, Sinaloa. When they lived in Mexico, my mother was able to graduate high school and take some college courses, while my father only made it to the sixth grade. However, from as early as I can remember my parents have always told me that I can become whatever I want in life. As a child they encouraged me to dream big, shoot for the stars, and joked around *que sus hijos los iban a sacar de pobres*. As my siblings and I grew older they constantly reaffirmed that we were capable of achieving anything. I remember multiple instances where my father sat with my siblings and I in the living room and told us stories about his journey crossing from Mexico to the United States through the desert. He described moments where he had no food, no water, and had lost all communication with my mom and family. As he told these stories my mother sat next to him beaming with a sense of pride for what my father had done for his family. At the end of our conversations, they always ended by saying that what always kept them motivated in their pursuit of The American Dream was knowing that they could give their children a better life in the United States. During my master's, whenever I felt stressed or overwhelmed my father would jokingly approach me by saying that I had gotten my smarts from him and that I needed to graduate quickly to become a millionaire. Then, once my tension would ease, he would remind me that where I was, was exactly where I wanted to be five years ago. Then, he would remind me that education was our vehicle to a *better life*.

Similarly, when I went through the college application process, although my parents did not have tangible tools to support me, they did provide emotional and moral support. To this day they nurture my dreams and aspirations and remind me that I can do whatever I set my mind to. All to say, I owe who I have become and what I have accomplished to my parents. Below I describe how aspirational capital showed up amongst my research collaborators experiences.

Miriam, a Mexican-Filipina, who graduated from the M.A. program in 2022, recalls having many conversations about education with her parents. As children of immigrants those conversations happened almost daily and served to remind Miriam and her brother why education was so important. When reflecting on her parents' personal experiences with education, Miriam shared a conversation she had with her mom about college.

Both of my parents really instilled that [education] into us . . . My mom did some college but she didn't finish so she always had this gloomy cloud over her head and this regret that she didn't finish. And so she passed down this, not a pressure but excitement for education and to accomplish the things that she didn't get to.

In this conversation Miriam's mother shared that it had always been her dream to earn a college degree and that she hoped her children would be able to accomplish that one day. Her mother always held on to hope, and along with Miriam's father, both parents worked tirelessly to send their children to private schools.

When Miriam left for UCLA she struggled to find her place, missed her hometown, and was unsure if she would stay for the entirety of the master's program. Moreover, Miriam felt like she was not smart enough and discussed that it was difficult to thrive at an institution filled with systemic oppression and racism, something that she was witnessing in her own classes. However, in those moments where she felt defeated, she would call her mother for reassurance and strength.

My mom would instill in all of us, “I believe in you. You can do anything.” And so when I was like, “No, I can’t do it, I would come back to my mom and then be like, “Okay you were right I can do it.” . . . I think it’s important to mention how my mom saw that potential in me that I was not seeing for myself.

This quote reveals the way Miriam’s mother played a role in shaping her daughter’s resilience, which ultimately allowed her to get through her program at UCLA. With her father, Miriam also had similar conversations. She remembers that as she was applying to graduate school, unsure about whether or not she should leave Northern California to go to UCLA, her father would always remind her that this was what she had always dreamed of. In a very emotional conversation, her father shared that he often wondered if they had made the right decision by coming to the United States, but then would look at everything his children had accomplished and realize that yes, he did. Despite the rough moments, Miriam’s father never lost sight of his hopes for a better future. At her master’s graduation they experienced a beautiful moment, which Miriam described:

My dad would always say ever since we were little that education was the greatest tool we could ever give them [my parents]. And so it was really emotional when I graduated. I cried because I thought, “This is the gift that he wanted from us, like my whole life.” And my dad brought this little drawing that I made when I was a kid and he gave it to me.

For Miriam and her family, her master’s graduation served as a full circle moment and represented so much more than a degree. For them it represented a journey of migration, struggles, hope, dreams, tireless effort, and familial effort. Like Miriam, all of my collaborators mentioned at least one person who consistently reminded them of their potential and nurtured their aspirations throughout their master’s program.

Fernanda, a proud Mexicana/Chicana, who graduated from the master’s program in 2014, shared her many doubts and concerns about enrolling in a master’s program. Fernanda expressed that without the support and motivation of her family, she would not have made it through the

program. Fernanda shared that while she was in her master's program, she constantly worried about how she was going to support her parents financially. Moreover, because her time commitments on-campus were also becoming more intense, she was left with little to no time to help at her parents' store. Fernanda remembered how during that year she constantly went back and forth on whether this program was even worth it. At times she regretted her decision and would think about everything she would have been able to do had she not committed to this program. Then one day, while she was sitting at her desk working on a difficult assignment, she got up to take a mental break and coincidentally happened to look at a photo of her family that she held very near and dear to her heart.

My family, always and foremost, was what kept me motivated. I had this picture frame of my family, like the only one we had of all of us together from the '90s. . . . But at that time, I had that on my desk. And during those days, when I was writing those final papers I was like, why am I doing this? Why did I sign up for this? Do I really want to do this? I gotta, I owe it to them. I owe it to my siblings. We're gonna finish. We're gonna finish. So, if we're talking about drive it has always and continues to be my family.

In this particular instance, Fernanda drew from the strength of her family to keep her grounded and centered. Fernanda's family served as the drive that reminded her why she was still in school. Similarly, my collaborators described how during challenging moments, family was the first thing that came to mind as a motivator.

For Daniela, living at home during her master's program was very important to reconnect with her parents and spend more time with her family and general. Having been away in Northern California for a couple of years before returning to Pasadena, California, going back home allowed her to be in a space where she felt unconditionally supported. Daniela elaborated:

But their support obviously, was a support that sustained me that kept me balanced, that kept me grounded. That was important at the time. It gave me a sense of purpose. And it was nice to come home after several classes, and to know I could kind of create some distance between school and home and have a space for myself. For my dad, it was important for him that we always had meals together. So we always ate dinner together.

And he would tell us about how much he wanted to go to school, and how proud he was, and how he knew we would accomplish so much more together.

Though sometimes Daniela was tired after a long day of commuting, she described how important this time spent with her parents was and appreciated how strict her parents were about dinner time. It was here that Daniela's parents were able to share their pride with their daughters and remind them of the aspirations they had for them.

Other collaborators, who are also daughters of immigrants, shared how their parents often told them that regardless of the outcome of the master's program, they were still extremely proud because they had made it farther than them. Others described dreaming about college from a young age, and seeing college as a mythical place, maybe even unattainable.

Analytical Summary

Existing literature reveals that Chicanas aspirations are largely shaped by their parents, siblings, grandparents, mentors, and friends who share stories about overcoming adversity and provide moral support (Yosso, 2005). This was evident in my study as multiple collaborators described education as a way out, the journey to a better future, and as the golden ticket to provide for their parents in the future. More importantly, my collaborators shared that although multiple family members and friends played a role in shaping and maintaining their dreams and aspirations, it was primarily their parents that influenced them. This body of literature builds on the work of scholars such as Patricia Gándara (1991) who revealed that Chicanos/as had the lowest educational outcomes compared to every other group in the United States but still maintained high aspirations for their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1992, 2001; Solórzano, 1992). Also connected to aspirations is the idea that through schooling Chicanas could create "a history that would break the links between parents' current occupational status and their children's future academic attainment" (Gándara, 1995, p. 55). In my study, my collaborators' parents

expressed their hope for a better future for their children. For example, Jessica's dad, who worked in hard labor and came home with dirty boots, jeans, and calloused hands, would tell Jessica he wanted her to study so she did not have to break her back like he did. These were the messages that whether intentionally or unintentionally, Jessica held on to during her undergrad, masters and now PhD.

In his study on Chicana college aspirations and the role of parents, Ceja (2016) found that amongst his 20 participants, all of them had unique ways in which their parents had influenced their trajectories. Ceja explained:

What became clear from the responses was that the majority of these parents, despite their low levels of formal education, managed to find their own ways of instilling in their children the importance of doing well in school and going to college. The majority of these parents had no formal experience with the U.S. educational system, and many of them also lacked fluency in English. Despite these circumstances, however, these parents understood that the only way their children were going to achieve a greater sense of economic and occupational mobility was contingent on their children's ability to do well in school. (p. 345)

Ceja's findings add to existing bodies of literature and confirm the findings of my study as they reveal that in spite of challenging circumstances, Chicanas and their families maintain high hopes for their children. This is important because it reveals that although many studies in the past have explored students' decisions to attend college, not many have explicitly examined the role of parents in the development of college goals and aspirations, particularly for Chicanas. Moreover, not much time has been spent understanding how Chicanas are drawing from these stories and lessons to reach degree completion. Understanding the role of aspirational capital in Chicanas' decisions to attend college, or in this case complete a master's degree, is extremely important given the current educational statistics that reflect low levels of participation in higher education for Chicana students (Ceja, 2016). My findings of aspirational capital serve to reinforce that the full strengths of Chicanas remain unacknowledged and more research is

necessary to further understand how Chicanas aspirations can be utilized to increase educational enrollment, attainment, and overall success.

Social Capital

Social capital can be understood as networks of people and community resources. These peer and other social contacts can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions. (Yosso 2005, p. 78)

As mentioned previously, when I first started my master's program at UCLA I was lost and uncertain of how the year would play out. I had no friends, no sense of community, and counted down the minutes until I could leave campus to go home. After the first two weeks, I knew something needed to change if I wanted to succeed in my program. First, I decided to join Grupo Folklórico de UCLA (GFU), which became my family and support system. Through GFU I was able to connect with other graduate students who were more advanced in their programs and had more knowledge on how to navigate UCLA. Additionally, GFU hosted weekly study hours, volunteering events, and community events that led to the creation of spaces rich in resources. Similarly, the Research Apprenticeship Course (RAC) community was pivotal to create a network and support system within my department and program. Peers in that space never hesitated to share materials and instead encouraged me to ask for help. The folks in the RAC provided technical assistance in working through my coursework during my master's, but more importantly provided me with emotional support when I felt like giving up. The RAC was a lift as we climb space (Yosso, 2005), where no one hesitated to help someone else. Through GFU and the RAC I was able to create a network of people and community resources that were invaluable to navigating through my time as a naive master's student. Next, I describe how social capital showed up amongst my own collaborators.

Jessica clearly recalls her first few weeks as a master's student at UCLA. As a commuter from San Diego and living away from her husband four days per week, finding community was challenging at first. Thankfully, during one of her toughest moments, a mentor who is now a dear friend, noticed. Jessica remembers that it was a Friday, and she was sitting at the student lounge in Moore Hall dreading the drive home to San Diego. Just that week she had experienced a racist and uncomfortable encounter with a professor and was doubting if she wanted to continue in the program. While sitting in the lounge, Aileen, who was also her advisor's student, walked in and said hello. Although their conversation was brief, when Jessica got home she had received a text from Aileen. Jessica shared:

I would just constantly question why am I here? Why did I do this in the first place? I don't feel like I had much of a community at first which makes sense why I was feeling lonely. But what really helped me was Aileen. I had messaged her before I accepted because she was my advisor's student and also the SSCE rep. . . . So she hit me up and straight up asked me, "Just want to check in on you. How are you doing?" So I love her so much! Then she was like let's get breakfast, let's hang out.

Jessica went on to share that Aileen's text came at the perfect moment, she needed a friend, she needed community. While texting, Aileen wanted to genuinely know how Jessica was doing and did not accept an, "Oh, I'm good. How are you?" as an answer. She delved deep and encouraged Jessica to share how she was truly feeling.

When they sat down to have breakfast, Jessica shared everything she was feeling and to her surprise Aileen, and many other Chicanas/Latinas, had gone through the same thing. Later that quarter Aileen invited her to the Research Apprenticeship Course (RAC), a course meant to support graduate students in their degree progress.

One day she was like oh you should come to RAC. And I just remember thinking, I just want to go home...But I went and it was back when they did a whole ceremony and we all held hands and everybody shared, and it was such a real space that it was the exact opposite of what I felt in the classroom space.

Initially Jessica did not want to go to the RAC meeting, because staying late on campus meant a late drive to San Diego. However, after attending her first RAC Jessica was so glad she decided to go. In the RAC space Jessica felt she could unapologetically be herself. She described the space as safe, down to earth, and critically kind. At the second RAC, her homegirl Lucia showed up and despite them not having connected much during the beginning of their master's program, they began to share more about each other's experiences, shared struggles, and feelings about graduate school. They immediately clicked and began hanging out more outside of the RAC. They shared classroom notes, course recommendations, scholarship opportunities, and edited each other's work. At the end of our conversation about RAC, Jessica ended by describing the RAC community as the reason she got through her master's program and described the network of people and resources that was established from that space as invaluable.

When talking about the network of support she created amongst professors in her department, Jessica immediately recalled three professors who were instrumental in her journey. Next, she described their impact.

With Dr. Francisco I don't even know how to describe it. He just has a way of making you feel like you're home and valuable, like you have something to offer. And even though he's not my advisor I would meet with him every now and then and he always just made me feel like I belonged. I think without that at UCLA I would have struggled more than I already did...And Dr. Monica I always say that her personality is like a big hug. She's just so soft spoken and reassuring. I could come to her with any question because I always had a million of them obviously...And then I think Jordan was the first person to make me feel seen and like my research mattered and that I had things to offer. He is so underrated and underappreciated.

Beyond being her instructors, these three professors spent time outside of office hours reviewing Jessica's research and simply listening when she was struggling. Jessica went on to share that this network of professors was extremely important to her because she had not only developed relationships with them in the classroom but also outside of the classroom. The theme of

establishing relationships and connections with professors that led to supportive spaces was also a common theme amongst my collaborators.

For another collaborator, Ariana, having a friend that was already a student at UCLA was important to navigating through the university.

Just having her there was really nice. We commuted together that first year. And for me it felt like I was supporting her and she was supporting me because it could be really isolating. . . . And you know that anxiety that you get when you're driving to campus and you see the building and it's like, well at least there's somebody who understands and can debrief with on the ride home.

For both Ariana and her friend, having a peer to commute with and also share tips and resources was important to navigate their journeys through the institution. Ariana shared that oftentimes their car rides felt like therapeutic sessions where they could openly share how they were feeling without fear of being judged. Ariana and her friend both looked forward to these car rides as this was the time they shared challenges, successes, and gave each other tips to navigate the academy. Ariana also described the support that she felt from the RAC community during moments where she felt like dropping out of the program.

But the space that Francisco creates for us is what really helped me...Just having people around me that were so supportive, and I could ask questions without feeling stupid. I could be myself.

Like Jessica, having a space where she could authentically be herself was important to remain committed and motivated in her master's degree attainment. Ariana detailed a specific memory from her master's year where she was waiting to enter another class. As she was glancing at her phone, two older students from the RAC approached her to have a conversation.

They were like how are you doing? And it wasn't one of those like how are you? Like don't just tell me you're good. How are you actually doing? And I said not good, not at all.

With a genuine how are you doing, her peers were able to learn about the struggles Ariana was facing and were able to provide emotional and academic support. At the end of the conversation the students reminded her that her work and her presence was not only important, but also necessary at UCLA and in academia in general. Ariana described this interaction as a pivotal moment that reminded her of her commitment to earn her master's degree for all the Women of Color who did not have the opportunity that she had.

In addition to creating social support networks on campus, Ariana also took matters into her own hands and looked to create a community off-campus. After spending a couple years away from her hometown Huntington Park, California, Ariana felt extremely disconnected from her community.

When I came back to my community I felt really disconnected because I was away for so long. And then I found this coffee shop a few blocks down from my house in Huntington Park. . . . And I started doing work there and it helped me feel connected . . . the people there would take working breaks to talk to each other and we would support each other.

Finding this space at the coffee shop was instrumental in helping Ariana reconnect with her community and served as a reminder for why she was doing the work she was doing. Ariana described that being in this environment helped her remain grounded and motivated in her pursuit of her master's.

Another collaborator, Miriam, shared that for her, her community of friends on campus made the program more tolerable. Like my other research collaborators, when Miriam first stepped foot on campus, she was uncertain of where she would fit in. However, she quickly found her community in her master's cohort.

And so something that was crucial to my survival was my community, the friends I made in that program. In the SSCE master's, race and ethnic studies subdivision there were only four of us and so we bonded right away . . . and so we were able to relate to each other and talk about impostor syndrome and talk about our lived experiences . . . and just validate each other like you're doing the damn thing.

With her friends, Miriam was able to share her experiences and feel validated. Together they hyped each other up and leaned on each other for support. Also important to Miriam were university faculty, teaching assistants, and professors.

You know, and I appreciated those that were coming from a decolonial lens, being real and just calling out the bullshit and allowing us to be our authentic selves. . . . That made it a much more comfortable and safe space.

Miriam discussed that her experience in academia had never revolved around decolonial, anti-racist scholarship and therefore was excited when she entered classes dedicated to exactly that. Having served as her teaching assistant for Minority Education in Cross Cultural Perspectives, I had the privilege of engaging with Miriam in an honest and vulnerable conversation around the challenges of being a Chicana graduate student. At the end of that conversation Miriam shared that she appreciated my honesty and willingness to share resources.

Another collaborator, Carla, shared the impact of when she enrolled in a race and ethnic studies course and got a chance to further develop a relationship with a professor she admired.

Then winter quarter, I took a class on race and that space changed my life. I didn't have the words for what I was trying to do. I always knew I wanted to make films to change the world, as corny as that is, but I didn't have examples of it. And I didn't have the language to do it. And I felt like Francisco bridged all those connections for me. . . . I felt like that space is where I really started to, like, look at myself, and what was possible for building community.

Carla shared that prior to enrolling in this class, she had an experience where a professor told her that her writing was not up to par with her peers, that she did not belong in a department of education due to her interest in film, and that the advisor that took her on as a master's student did not actually want her as a student. Then, as a student in the race and ethnic studies class, Professor Francisco was impressed by her work and even asked to share her final project with future students. Up until this course, Carla felt that she was in the wrong space and that maybe

her work was more of a hobby than research. After this course, however, she felt empowered to continue and finished the quarter with the best grades of her academic trajectory. For Carla, being in a class taught by a professor that validated her feelings, experiences and more importantly her research was uplifting and showed her that there were folks who truly cared about students.

Daniela also shared an uplifting experience with Professor Francisco when she had begun her master's degree program:

That the very first meeting kind of encompasses the tensions I felt. I'll never forget it. I remember feeling really nervous and I remember preparing an agenda because I'm like, okay I only got 20 minutes. I remember feeling really nervous when I walked in and Francisco saw that I was nervous. He put his hand over my agenda and was like we'll get to this eventually. But tell me about you. Where's home? And even to this day se me enchina la piel because I get emotional, just thinking that no teacher up to that point cared about who I was and where I grew up. They just didn't care to know much about me. He was the first teacher that stopped me and said, we'll get to the details later, we'll get to the academic stuff later. I want to know about you. And it was such a powerful moment. I remember what his office smelled like, what I was wearing.

Daniela shared that after having a rough undergraduate experience and taking some time off from school before going to graduate school, this interaction was the most positive way she could have begun her master's trajectory. Then, during her master's studies, when she felt stressed, she would come back to Professor Francisco's office, which she described as a sanctuary.

Analytical Summary

Through my research collaborators experiences it is evident that there were a range of individuals, locations, and communities that provided social, emotional and/or instrumental support both before and during their master's educational journey. Stanton-Salazar's (2001) work revealed that these networks and spaces play a role in helping individuals navigate through institutions that may be unfamiliar or intimidating. Amongst my research collaborators, being

able to find individuals that understood them or spaces that allowed them to be their authentic selves, was invaluable to their success. The Chicanas in my study discussed that having folks to learn from to navigate classes, ask questions, or simply check-in was something they are eternally grateful for.

Connected to this body of literature is the work that highlights that feelings of belonging are important and critical to a student's success (Maestas et al., 2007). The networks of people and community resources that the Chicanas in my study were exposed to or created for themselves, were critical to their sense of belonging. If you recall, multiple collaborators discussed attending the RAC, where they immediately felt included and confident that they could ask for help. Moreover, Ariana discussed how finding a coffee shop in her hometown allowed her to build community and create a network of resources outside academia that was also instrumental to her success. Last, the impact of a person such as a friend or an advisor was also important in helping my collaborators feel that they belonged at their institution.

It is also important to note that Students of Color and People of Color in general have utilized their social capital to push back against unequal systems and attain education, employment, and health care (Yosso, 2005). For years, communities have relied on each other to create networks that are supportive and look out for one another. Throughout my study, my research collaborators discussed the impact of having role models that were willing to help them, but also acknowledged that down the line it would be their responsibility to help the next generation of Chicana scholars. Tara J. Yosso (2005) described that social capital acknowledges that "we are not alone in our struggles," because instead, "we develop social spaces rich in information and resources" (p. 45). Having shared struggles was important for my collaborators

because they knew they had someone who understood them. But rather than letting their challenges set them back, they created spaces and networks that were conducive to their success.

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic Capital includes the intellectual and social skills learned through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style. (Yosso, 2005, p. 78)

My first language is Spanish. I speak, read and write fluently and prefer speaking Spanish when I have the option to. Thankfully, for my K-12 education, I attended a school district with a Spanish Dual Immersion program, which heavily emphasized the importance of being bilingual. When I became old enough to understand the importance of speaking another language, I was immensely grateful that my parents made sure my siblings and I grew up speaking Spanish fluently. When I went through Santa Clara University for my undergraduate degree, it was with my primary language and non-verbal cultural communication cues that I was able to connect with on-campus employees and community members that were instrumental to my success. Once at UCLA it was my language and passion for dancing Mexican folklórico that convinced me to join Grupo Folklórico de UCLA, which was pivotal to my success during my master's year. In the classroom I was able to communicate with my amigas in Spanish and share dichos and consejos to keep each other motivated. Ultimately, being bilingual allowed me to become more aware of how to communicate with different audiences and across cultures. Below I describe how linguistic capital showed up amongst my research collaborators experiences.

Nancy described her K-12 schooling experience with speaking a different language as a challenge that shaped her into the passionate social justice advocate that she is today:

I knew that I was an immigrant and I was different. Growing up, my first language is Spanish, so I remember just struggling. But also, very early on, I was very conscious of the space that I was in. I knew that I was looked at differently, I was treated differently. And I knew it was because of the lack of my language, but also because of how I looked.

Nancy recalls that although she did not have the language at the time, she was aware that speaking another language would be an important part of her identity. Though language was what initially made others look at her differently during her master's program, it was what introduced her to what would later become her community. Nancy described the moment when she walked into her first master's course, and although she was uncertain of where to sit or where she would fit in, she overheard two mujeres speaking Spanish. She took the open seat next to one of them and quietly waited for them to bring her into the conversation. Immediately they all connected and began sharing laughs. The three of them remained connected until the very end of their master's program and two of them went on to pursue their PhD. During our plática, Nancy also described that her parents utilized a lot of dichos to keep her motivated:

And you know they consistently told me a lot of things like tu puedes . . . echale ganas, cada sacrificio tiene su recompensa, todo valdrá la pena, and at the moment it was like okay I know you tell me that all the time. . . . But during moments where I really didn't know de donde sacar las fuerzas, I thought of all these things.

Nancy described that during her master's program she had the opportunity to mentor students through the Academic Advancement Program and reflecting on the conversation above she recalled how it enabled her to connect with her Spanish-speaking students when they were struggling.

Another collaborator, Fernanda, described her experience helping her parents run their sewing business. Because Fernanda's parents did not speak English, she was responsible for dealing with customers, placing orders for new material, making phone calls, and translating. She was also responsible for stocking, organizing, and making sure that orders were fulfilled on time. As a full-time student and a student employee, it was challenging to get everything done but somehow Fernanda made it work. She shared:

Okay, so I did school and then that would mean I still needed to put time in the store, I needed to get home and finish all these things. I was sleeping at one in the morning, waking up again at six. I was very tired, but echale ganas me decia mi mama. And then at the same time I had that knowledge that my parents did so much more.

In our conversation Fernanda shared how difficult it was to balance all of her responsibilities at school paired with her responsibilities at home. However, despite the lack of sleep and stressful nights, Fernanda does not regret a single thing. As a matter of fact, she is now grateful she could spend more time with her parents. In her schooling, this exposure to her parents' business allowed her to effortlessly code-switch once she went into undergrad and graduate school, and enabled her to navigate through various social spaces utilizing different forms of communication. Fernanda described this responsibility as one that brought her awareness, maturity, and a sense of commitment:

Their echale ganas was a different extreme. So if they did that, I have to keep going. I have to. So early on, it was very hard because I would bottle in all that pressure and I wouldn't say anything. But it was all worth it.

In other words, her experience working in her parents' business equipped her with academic and life skills that she would not have acquired otherwise. Though difficult, she knew she had to keep going and always reflected on her parents' consejo of echale ganas.

Another collaborator, Lucía, shared a very personal anecdote of her experience growing up bilingual. From as early as she can remember she served as the translator for her family. From school papers, health insurance documents, bills, or taxes, Lucía always stepped up to help her parents. As she grew older, her father began having a lot of different health issues that worsened over time. In addition to supporting her family, Lucía was dealing with her own mental health issues which led her down a vicious cycle of substance abuse.

And it wasn't until getting to UCLA when I started abusing substances again, for the larger portion of the program. I stopped abusing substances in March 2020. When my dad got ill again, simply because that was an urge to get it together. I couldn't be drunk when

talking to hospital officials. Because my parents really needed information. We needed to understand what it was like to get a kidney transplant and all this good stuff.

During our conversation, Lucía expressed gratitude for having a space to share her story and reflect on her life up to that particular moment. She shared that despite the challenges she faced, stepping into the role of translator enabled her to transfer into a completely different world and turn off everything else going on. Translating kept her grounded because it meant that she needed to be okay, she needed to help her parents. Lucía shared that during this same time she also received a formal diagnosis of depression and bipolar disorder which helped her feel relieved because she finally knew what was happening to her mental health wise. Lucía is an example of how language—something that granted her the ability to communicate in various ways resulted in something much deeper than an exchange of words—in many ways it was her saving grace. At the end of our conversation, Lucia connected this experience to her experience as a master’s student and shared that whenever she was feeling stressed she would remember that her parents, her father in particular, needed her to finish so she could support them.

Analytical Summary

The range of communication experiences in my collaborators’ lives, both growing up and as adults, resulted in a positive influence on their master’s degree journey. Linguistic capital acknowledges that students already arrive at school with multiple language and communication skills (Yosso, 2005), which in this particular study became evident via the narratives shared. For Nancy—someone who grew up seen as different because she spoke Spanish—upon entering her master’s program, Spanish became the tool with which she connected to other students. For Nancy, navigating two languages and worlds taught her how to communicate with different audiences and how to code-switch when necessary. To summarize, Nancy’s linguistic capital equipped her with a range of skills that were invaluable to her success.

In her work on bilingual children, Marjorie Faulstich Orellana (2003) “examines bilingual children who are often called upon to translate for their parents or other adults and finds that these youth gain multiple social tools” such as vocabulary skills, social maturity, responsibility, and cross-cultural awareness (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). In my study, Fernanda shared that working at her parent’s store equipped her with skills that made her more outspoken and willing to step out of her comfort zone. Though she had been a timid child, as Fernanda grew older, it was through her experience translating and running her parents’ business that she was able to acquire abilities that positively influenced her journey to the master’s program and her time spent in the master’s program. Similarly, Lucía shared how once again becoming the translator for her family, during her master’s program, while her father was dealing with health issues, evoked a flood of emotions that brought her a distinct kind of awareness. For both Fernanda and Lucia, language was the tool that contributed to their attainment of intellectual and social skills (Yosso, 2005) that otherwise might have not been developed. In an educational system that sees Students of Color as lacking critical knowledge, it is important to delve deeper into this work to continue building on literature that seeks to understand Chicanas/os linguistic abilities from an asset-based lens.

Familial Capital

Familial capital refers to cultural knowledge nurtured among familia (kin) that carry a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition. (Yosso, 2005, p. 78)

Although my parents always stress the importance of a formal education, they also remind me that some of the most important values cannot be taught in schools. Therefore, one of the most valuable gifts that my parents have given me is their values of honesty, integrity and hard work. I attribute my drive to succeed to the ways my parents have always showed up for me since I was a child. There are multiple examples of how my parents have made an impact on my

educational trajectory and influenced my master's pursuit, but two specific ones come to mind. First, my mother. When my mom came to the United States, she started off cleaning houses and spoke no English. However, she was determined to learn and put to use the college classes she had taken in Mexico on child development, so she enrolled at West Los Angeles College. At the time I was 3 years old and because my mother had no one to babysit me and did not drive herself; she would actually take me to school with her on her bicycle. She would mount me on the car seat, get on her bike, ride to the nearest bus station, take the bus to the closest stop to campus, and then ride the bike all the way to campus.

We then spent a couple of hours on campus and would begin our journey home in the afternoon. She did all of this with a 3-year-old! My father, on the other hand, was blessed to fairly quickly land work in a restaurant that allowed him to learn a variety of skills. He went from dishwasher, to baker, to chef. Because we were barely making ends meet, my father always volunteered to work extra shifts. During the week, he worked from 9am until 7pm and on weekends he often worked from 7am until 11pm, and when he got home, he always made sure to make the most of his time with my siblings and I. Despite the long hours, there was never a moment in my childhood where I felt that my father was not present. When I turned 14 I got my first job, under the table, at the same place where my father worked. It was then that I reflected on the sacrifices my parents had made during my youth to ensure that we grew up with the most opportunities. Moreover, while I was pursuing my master's I lived at home and my parents always made sure that I had space to study, quiet time to get assignments done, and food to keep me healthy and focused. Ultimately, my parents' experiences and sacrifices served to impart an innate drive and motivation that I always carry with me. Amongst my own collaborators there were also multiple examples of how familial capital showed up in their own experiences.

Jessica shared that while in her master's program she had to move around a lot. Her parents lived in Los Angeles, her husband lived in San Diego, and her friends resided all around Southern California. At times it was really overwhelming to try and have a social life while also getting assignments done. When she would go to her parents' house, however, she experienced a sense of peace that did not compare to other places. Her mother always had her favorite food prepared. Her father was always ready to go to the store for anything she needed. Her parents always arranged her childhood room in a different way; Jessica's parents strived to make sure that their daughter was always comfortable. After graduating from her master's program, Jessica had a conversation with her parents where they shared that they did all of that con mucho gusto because they knew it was going to help their daughter succeed. When they said that, it was as if a flood of memories came back to Jessica and she remembered all the ways her parents showed up for her throughout her education. Jessica ended by discussing that what kept her most motivated was how her parents were so excited about her accomplishments.

It's wild to me how proud my parents are. My dad has gone through like three UCLA hats and he wears it so often. He's also constantly giving out my business card and so their pride has really motivated me.

Although Jessica did not realize it at the time, looking back on her experience she saw how her parent's actions kept her on the right path to reach her master's graduation successfully.

Quite similarly, Ariana, who also lived at home during her master's year, shared how her mother provided her moral guidance with the simple act of checking in on her. When Ariana would spend long hours studying or writing a paper, eventually her mother would come into her room and ask how she was doing. When her mother noticed she was overwhelmed she would sit with her for a couple minutes, give her a big hug, and then leave. Ariana described her mother's gaze as so powerful that it would make her emotional:

I would tell her no me veas porque voy a llorar. . . . Like when I see that my mom notices that I'm stressed makes me even more stressed. I'm just like, don't even look at me. I know it comes from a good place. I know. So my parents have been super helpful.

Jessica went on to describe that although her mother looking at her made her emotional, it also provided a sense of moral guidance which she held onto throughout her master's program and beyond. Another collaborator also described the role of her mother in her experience. During our plática, Daniela recognized that multiple members of her family had played a role in shaping her morals, motivations, and aspirations.

A critical person was her mother, who refused to admit that her daughter was no longer a baby, even when she was 24 years old. Daniela recalled a moment during her master's trajectory where her mother wanted to go to the university to speak to professors about why her daughter was so stressed and tired:

She always makes sure I'm taken care of. That's my mom. I remember the first time I had to pull an all-nighter in that first quarter for my master's classes. My mom was like well, tomorrow I want to come talk to your teacher to see if you really had this much homework, go to bed. And I told her you can't, that's not how it works. But for her it was about, I rather you sleep I rather you get rest. I don't care if you don't get the best grade.

Reflecting on that conversation, Daniela discussed that although at first it felt a little bit embarrassing that her mother wanted to speak for her, it was precisely these moments that also reminded her of the importance of her mental health and well-being:

And that was kind of the balance. Like she was proud. But she also didn't want us to forget about ourselves on this [educational journey]. She wanted us to take care of ourselves.

Moreover, because Daniela lived at home her mother always made sure to cook Daniela's favorite foods and that she had all the things she needed to be successful.

I never lived by campus, I still lived at home in Pasadena. So I commuted so of course, and my mom always made sure I was fed and that I had things that I needed to be okay.

Daniela described that the simple act of running errands for her and having her food and room

ready for a long night of studying showed her how much her mother wanted to participate in her educational experience.

Closely related, Fernanda shared how important the role of her mother was in her educational trajectory. Although both of her parents were extremely important in shaping her determination and grit, she clearly remembers her mother yelling every day, “Echale ganas!” when she would head out for school. For her mother, echale ganas was her way of letting her daughter know that she cared, that she believed in her. One day when Fernanda was inundated with homework she described to her mom what echale ganas meant in the context of her schooling:

And one day my mom was like nomas echale ganas, and I said this is what that means. I have this due, and I have these readings and I have these classes. And she was like oh okay and I could see in her eyes that there was sadness. Then she said, I can’t help you with that. And I said I know you can’t and that’s fine because all I need is a hug.

As a child of immigrants and first-generation college student, Fernanda shared that navigating educational institutions on her own had always been a challenge. However, the love and care of her mother, in this case a hug, was her moral compass:

I told her, all I need is a hug when I have that hard day. I just need your words of affirmation telling me that it’s gonna be okay. Y yo le echo ganas.

To this day, echale ganas remains etched in Fernanda’s heart and reminds her of why she is on her particular journey. Another collaborator expressed how important the role of her partner was during her program. Given that English was her second language, Ariana often felt that her writing was not up to par with her peers. Therefore, when she had assignments due, she recounted how she relied upon her partner’s proofreading and support.

So I’ve been with the same person since I started the program. Writing has always been a big challenge for me that I’ve always been self-conscious about English being my second language. And so initially, every finals week, every paper I wrote, he proofread. That first year, he would proofread all of them.

Ariana described that her partner was always very willing to edit her papers and also took the time and energy to craft quiet spaces that were conducive to learning. Like Fernanda's mother, Ariana's partner sometimes sat with her in silence to process the moment and demonstrate solidarity.

Analytical Summary

Through my collaborators' experiences, it is clear that there are a wide range of teachings, lessons, and motivations that are nurtured amongst familia, that are not always acknowledged in the classroom. From the lessons of caring that our families, or kin, instill in us, "We learn the importance of maintaining a healthy connection to our community and its resources" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Amongst my collaborators, they all discussed the importance of remaining connected to their home communities and striving to earn a master's degree to give back to the place they come from. Also important to these relationships is the development of a group consciousness, or the realization that we are not alone when dealing with our problems (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). The collaborators in my study discussed moments where they helped each other find solutions, provided emotional support, and even brought meals for each other. Being able to find familia within the institution was important to remain committed to the ultimate goal of master's degree completion.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that even though Chicanas are often first-generation college students, like Jessica, and their parents do not necessarily understand the content of their education, parents show solidarity by offering support, love, and care (Carrillo & Dean, 2020). For example, take Fernanda, whose mother had no understanding of how higher education worked. However, when she saw Fernanda struggling she provided affirmations and gave her a long hug until she finally felt better. For Daniela, her mother consistently wanted to

go to the university to ask why her daughter was so tired every day and demand that less homework be assigned. Obviously, Daniela explained that this was not possible, so instead her mother showed her love and care by always having food ready when she came home, doing her laundry, and cleaning her room. Similarly, Ariana's mom would come into her room to simply ask how she was doing. Though evidently Ariana was stressed, her mother would lock eyes with her for minutes at a time and reaffirm that everything was going to be okay. When Ariana would go to school in the early mornings, her mother always had her lunch packed and ready to go. Lastly, there is Jessica's father who handed out his daughter's business cards with immense pride and went through so many UCLA hats because he wore them every day. Though not a direct form of support, the actions mentioned above provided lessons of care, emotional and moral consciousness, and reminded the Chicanas in my study that their familial knowledge is ultimately what keeps them motivated.

Chicana students bring with them a wide range of pedagogies of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2002), that are not often acknowledged or sometimes even ignored in traditional academic settings. This dissertation study is important because it helped build on the body of literature that continues to expand on and validate the importance of familial influences on the Chicana experience. Clearly more research is needed to further understand the role that familial capital plays in shaping Chicanas/os educational trajectories and decisions.

Resistant Capital

Resistant Capital refers to those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequity. (Yosso, 2005, p. 78)

I pride myself on being an independent and hardworking *mujer*, qualities that I grew into due to the upbringing my parents gave me. From a young age my parents, me enseñaron a valerme por mi misma. Although they did not have the traditional academic language to name

resistant capital, my parents taught me the power of taking up space as a woman of color in the classroom, in the workplace, and in non-traditional spaces. Because of that I am now nearing the end of my PhD, fully motivated to pursue whatever I set my mind to and more importantly unapologetically take up space. It is important to note, however, that this was not always the case. Without even realizing it, as a child my parents consciously instructed me to engage in behaviors that challenged the status quo. They encouraged me to speak Spanish when teachers told me to speak English, they encouraged me to play soccer aggressively when boys would try to push me around and taught me to not take any bull shit from teachers when I respectfully disagreed. When I learned about Community Cultural Wealth, I realized that my parents had intentionally been teaching me about existing inequalities and prepared me to be a strong and independent woman that would resist and transform oppressive structures. As a master's student there was one particular class where I was the only student the white professor would talk to in Spanish. Because my research was on identity development of Latino/a students she would say she needed to play the part. In those moments I was furious, but I decided to respond by not responding. I would stay quiet until she acknowledged me in English and after class approached her to tell her why that was not okay. In that moment, staying silent was an act of resistance for which I built up the courage for through my diverse experiences. Amongst my own collaborators, resistance was a common theme that played a role in their master's degree completion.

Closely connected to my experience, Daniela shared how from a young age her father emphasized the importance of knowing her worth and looking out for herself. When Daniela would get into conversations about social justice and transforming oppressive systems, her father would respond that they came to the United States to live out their American Dream, not to be

radical.

El plan nunca fue que fueran radicales. El plan era que fueran buenos ciudadanos y aprendieran a valorarse por sí mismas para no depender de nadie. You know, that was the message. Go to school para no depender de nadie.

This messaging was critical to shaping Daniela's experience and understanding of resistance because it allowed her to recognize her own worth and abilities, and at the same time also pushed her even further in her resistance against oppressive systems. Once a master's student at UCLA, Daniela continued to bring up conversations about racism, discrimination, microaggressions, and challenging topics that most folks were not willing to bring up. Her oppositional behavior in the classroom would sometimes get her in trouble, but her advisor reminded her that she was doing the right thing. Even her father who wanted her to be, una buena ciudadana, would tell her that he was proud.

Nancy shared an experience of when she got a secretarial job through her for profit school, with an independent computer company in Westwood, California. Nancy described how from Day One they made her feel like less than and sometimes did not acknowledge her presence. Although this experience took place before she was a master's student at UCLA, it shaped how she viewed refusal and resistance for years to come. She recalled:

And then this guy asked me to grab him coffee and I was like nope that's not in my job description. In the description it said receptionist and troubleshooting . . . I just refused because that was not what I signed up for. I did not go to school and pay this much to serve some fucking coffee. And so I quit.

After transitioning from the job with the computer company, Nancy landed at a phone company where she worked for three years and consistently outperformed her co-workers. Despite that, she had never been promoted, which she reflected upon:

I had been there for three years. And I was training UCLA graduates that had degrees but no experience and they were earning more money than I was. That shit made me angry . . . So I quit and knew I had to go back to school . . . I have always been very critical, I just

didn't have the language to write . . . I knew that I could apply myself. I knew that I was critical, and I knew that I could do more.

As Nancy went through her master's program she came across professors who would tokenize her, ask her to speak for the entire Latino population, or just blatantly be racist. However, Nancy was never discouraged and instead spoke up for herself and her amigas who were quieter than her. She shared one particular experience where she walked into class a couple minutes late and the professor made an unnecessary comment to which she thought Nancy was not going to react.

I walked in late to her class and I went straight to apologize. I said, I want to apologize for running late this morning. I just wanted to let you know I had an emergency. And while laughing she's like, it's fine. I understand, you know, things happen. I understand if your brother gets arrested or something. And I was like excuse me, did I hear you right?

The professor's response made Nancy furious. She knew that she would not let that microaggression slide and decided to confront her professor after class. After all the students left, she explained why the comment about her brother getting arrested was not okay, how it made her feel uncomfortable, and how they should move forward if she were to remain a student in her class. Nancy explained that by the professor's reaction it was evident that she was shocked that a master's student had spoken up. Nancy recalled that her professional experiences at the computer and phone companies toughened her up and encouraged her to speak up when she knew something was not okay.

On the other hand, she also came across another interaction with a professor where rather than speaking up, her act of resistance was staying quiet. During fall quarter, there was a professor that would consistently pick on her and tear her writing apart. Nearing the end of the quarter, the professor made a comment about her research not being quantitative enough and suggested that Nancy was not PhD material. Upset, Nancy went straight to her advisor's office and shared what had just happened. Not afraid of confrontation, Nancy was aghast when her

advisor suggested the following:

I wanted to complain. It was my year in my master's program. And my advisor was like, I don't think it's a good idea for you to complain. You got to pick your battles. And I was like, no it's not fair. And he said, well she might read your application for the PhD and she might reject you because of that. So let's play it safe. And I did but man, I was angry at him for that, too, you know?

In this scenario, Nancy's act of resistance was silence. Although she did want to confront the professor to have a conversation about their behavior, she knew that if she wanted an opportunity to be considered for the PhD she had to remain calm. Overall, Nancy spoke to the ways in which she has always been someone, *que va en contra de la corriente* and frequently acknowledged that to change systems and structures we must continue to resist and be disruptors.

Another collaborator, Jessica, shared her experience in a class where a white, male professor would consistently confuse the four Chicanas in that class. Moreover, he would call them by different names and then apologize for doing so by saying that he was confused because all their names sounded very similar. To make matters worse, he would also defer to the Students of Color in the classroom to speak on the "Student of Color Experience," while having a syllabus that consisted of solely white authors. To make fun out of the situation, Jessica and her friends started presenting their weekly seminar discussions for each other, and because the professor did not know their names or even remembered what they looked like, he had no idea. Jessica recounted:

I hated that class. He was deeply problematic. My God, the things that were on the syllabus were so inappropriate. The fact that me and my homegirls did this. I didn't look like Lourdes, I did not look like Martina. I did not look like Paulina. Tell me why this white man did not recognize us when we look so different. We would present for each other and he thought we were the other person. We thought it was so funny.

Jessica shared that although at that moment presenting for each other was something that they did for fun, looking back she realizes how important that moment was. Jessica and her peers

went outside the boundaries of the classroom expectations and made room for joy in a classroom that was filled with negativity. Their actions implicitly stated their presence and called out the importance of their identities.

Another moment that is still very clear in Jessica's mind is when she took a class where a professor did not like when she challenged his theoretical and philosophical views. Respectfully so, Jessica would provide her arguments and would engage the entire classroom:

So he's the only person to give me an A minus because I used to call him out on his bullshit in class . . . Not that an A minus was bad but he was doing it because I called him out . . . He would say things that were inaccurate, like, just facts about people of color that were inaccurate, and I would always check him and he didn't like that.

During class Jessica would compare her paper with her peers to see where she could improve and also tried to take advantage of office hours to ask her professor for feedback. Despite having set office hours and being in his office he would tell Jessica he was busy and that there was nothing she could do to improve her grade. Rather than getting upset, Jessica felt in her heart that the right thing to do was to continue challenging him in the classroom to ensure that her peers were able to deconstruct some of their colonial or traditional understandings of academia. As she reflected on this interaction, Jessica described this act of resistance as empowering.

Another common narrative of resistance amongst my collaborators was the topics they chose for their master's thesis. As Women of Color, daughters of immigrants, and first-generation college students, all of my collaborators mentioned how important it was to select a master's thesis topic that was personal and impactful. Writing about scholarship that steered away from dominant or traditional understandings of literature was important to my collaborators as it kept them focused on their purpose and intentions of making a difference. One collaborator, Sofia, explained that she was raised to be a chingona and that influenced why she approached her master's thesis from a decolonial, anti-racist perspective. Sofia shared that she refused to let any

professor tell her to change her topic or to make her research more challenging. Lucía, shared that she intentionally dressed and talked like a Mexicana. When I asked her what that meant, she said she wore bright red lipstick, hoop earrings, and dark makeup on her eyebrows. Not only was this a way to make a statement in the classroom, but it was also the way she connected to fellow Mexicanas who later shared they decided to sit next to her because of what she looked like.

Analytical Summary

During our pláticas my research collaborators seemed particularly excited to share experiences where they had gone against the traditional expectations and instead shocked others by doing something completely different, or out of the norm. My collaborators frequently engaged in oppositional behavior and were able to foster diverse skills and knowledge through those experiences (Yosso, 2005). For Daniela, going against the mainstream expectations and being “radical,” as her dad described, equipped her with the confidence to stand up to her professors once she was a master’s student. Regardless of the student-professor hierarchy in the classroom, Daniela stood up for what she felt was right and deconstructed racist arguments. Moreover, Nancy immediately quit a job when they failed to see her worth and instead treated her as less than. Her refusal of serving someone coffee empowered her to confidently assert herself in all spaces and allowed her to enter her master’s program with the ability to engage in respectful confrontation. In another instance, Nancy’s silence was a strategic form of resistance, as she knew this could influence her ability to get into her PhD program.

According to Yosso (2006), “when students recognize and name the structures of oppression, and then are motivated to work toward social and racial justice—resistance takes on a transformative form” (p. 48). Jessica frequently challenged her professors’ ideologies in the classroom because she knew it was a space where students were taking in information and then applying it in the real world. Jessica was certain that if she wanted to make a difference in her

program she had to speak up and teach her peers to recognize structures of racism and oppression. This is an excellent example of how her resistance in the classroom evolved into something transformative as she was engaging her peers in their own transformation as well.

Villenas and Moreno (2001) wrote about parents who teach their daughters a *valerse por si misma* within structures of inequality and patriarchy. Among my collaborators, a common theme that was discussed was parents teaching their daughters to make something of themselves without having to rely on a male figure. In my study, Daniela's father always reminded her that the best she could do to set herself up for success was to have her own career. Daniela recalled that despite her parents not wanting her to be radical, they did want her to push back against sexist and misogynistic ideologies. All in all, Daniela's parents reinforced the importance of challenging the status quo (Yosso, 2005), which led her to become a confident and assertive master's student.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that "maintaining and passing on the multiple dimensions of community cultural wealth is also part of the knowledge base of resistant capital" (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). As I have discussed in previous sections, every single one of my collaborators brought up how important it was for them to give back to others in their program and in their community. This not only shows how they maintained and passed on the multiple dimensions of community cultural wealth, but also how the diverse forms of capitals intersect and often overlap.

Navigational Capital

Navigational capital refers to skills of maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this infers the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind. (Yosso, 2005, p. 78)

Though I have mentioned it previously, it is important for me to acknowledge the intersecting identities that have been the most salient throughout my educational trajectory and life. As a woman, daughter of immigrants, and first-generation college student from a low-income background, navigating educational and professional spheres has always been difficult, often figuring out things as I go. However, I have never let a single challenge get in the way of my success and instead learned to maneuver within these institutions that were not created with me in mind. When I applied to undergrad, I was the first in my family to attend a four-year university straight out of high school. Lost and confused about the entire process, I sought help from my siblings, teachers, and counselors. Together we were able to put the puzzle pieces together, which led me to enroll at Santa Clara University. When I applied to master's programs, once again I was the first in my family to do so and was uncertain of what I needed to do. I leaned on other first-generation college students who had gone through the same process and also reached out to my professors for support. With their guidance I got through the application process and enrolled at UCLA. While a master's student, there was so much doubt and confusion about what was expected of me as a scholar. Additionally, there was a lack of guidance on how to navigate the program and a no clear sense of direction for how to get through the program. Despite that, my amigas and I leaned on each other, our peers, professors, and TAs to navigate through the institution. More importantly, with the knowledge from our past experience and the skills acquired while in our master's program, we were able to make our own decisions, while recognizing that they also took place within constraints (Yosso, 2005).

Amongst my collaborators there were a variety of experiences shared related to navigating places and spaces connected to academia, the classroom, meetings with advisors, group meetings, etc. Closely connected to my own experience, Daniela shared how challenging it

was to be a first-generation college student at an elite institution where everyone seemed to know what they were doing.

And at the same time, there were a lot of things that were incredibly challenging to navigate, because I just didn't know, I didn't know. And I was not aware of all the things people came to this program already knowing. I had to figure it out as I went.

What is important to notice about Daniela's statement is that, despite feeling lost and coming across moments where she did not know what to do, she never gave up. She pushed through and figured things out along the way. Moreover, Daniela discussed how she navigated the contradictions, expectations, and internal challenges she faced during her master's program.

Knowing when and where to do what was a really important skill set to figure out. Like how to navigate the contradictions and what is expected of me depending on what space I'm in.

Daniela went on to share that when she walked into her very first master's class, she immediately wanted to leave. As her fellow classmates discussed theoretical and conceptual concepts, she was barely trying to figure out how to understand the language of an academic article. Then, she also described that she did know how to navigate her office hours. Was she supposed to bring a sample of writing? Did the professor actually want to see her? Though she had some experience attending office hours during her undergrad at Stanford, this was a different ball game. With the guidance of some classmates, she was able to understand what materials she needed when attending office hours and continued to share this knowledge with other students who were also confused.

For another research collaborator, Miriam, being a first-generation college student, transferred into her thinking that a graduate program was far from her reach. Miriam described that as she learned more about the master's, she thought it was something that only super smart and nerdy people could do. In her eyes, it seemed too prestigious and niche and outside of her

world. Until her student affairs mentors mentioned the idea of potentially applying for master's programs, Miriam had never envisioned herself in one. After that, she began doing more research on her own and decided that she would figure it out. Once in the master's program, she learned that she was assigned an advisor but was unclear of what that meant.

And then everybody talked so much about an advisor and I was like, I just don't understand what that means. So I called Sasha, a student who was already in the program to explain what that meant and how I got one. It was just a lot.

With the support of her friend and peer, Sasha, Miriam was able to understand what the role of an academic advisor was and felt more confident approaching her advisor to ask questions.

Through Miriam's experience one can see how it was her own quick wit that enabled her to move through her academics when things were unclear or confusing. Miriam learned that despite unfamiliar territory, asking questions and looking for resources was the way to make progress.

This experience made Miriam realize that she had a network of peers that were willing to help and show up for her when she needed guidance navigating her master's program.

Another collaborator, Fernanda, described how asking questions during her master's year was especially difficult for her, given that she has always been an extremely quiet person. From a young age, Fernanda's mother would encourage her to speak up more and made her practice ordering at restaurants. Fernanda reflected:

I've always been a more quiet and introverted person. So growing up my mom always told me, "Que no te de miedo preguntar cuando necesitas ayuda." So even though I'm pretty shy I always looked for help when I needed it, especially at UCLA.

Fernanda, who supported her parents' business in addition to going to school full time, went on to describe how navigating multiple responsibilities was very challenging. Despite that, she just kept going. She leaned on her peers and campus resources when she was feeling overwhelmed and described her resilience as something she just knew she had to do. Fernanda explained that it

was easy to maintain this mentality because she never focused on what obstacles came in her way. Instead, she focused on the long-term goal and the possibility of supporting her parents in their retirement. Having this mentality served as a benefit as Fernanda was later able to instill the same values in the undergraduate students she worked with.

Carla clearly remembers when she walked into her first set of master's classes and felt so much confusion and tension. She did not understand what it meant to be in graduate school and had never met anyone who had gone to or through graduate school. She did not know folks connected with faculty before starting their program and had never done any type of research.

Then during that first week she had an uncomfortable encounter with a professor:

I'm brand new green, green as hell. And she's like, "If you're feeling a little overwhelmed, go to office hours. Getting into a master's program is a bit much, especially if you're not familiar with the territory." So I was like, this is amazing . . . but then I got weird vibes and I went into the office hours anyway. She said "So what are your plans?" And I was like, Well, I know that this is the one year program going into the PhD. So how do I do that? And she was like, "Well, your advisor didn't actually want to take you on. You don't really belong in a program like education, but don't worry, it's a one year program."

Later that quarter, Carla submitted a research paper whose main purpose was to discuss theoretical concepts, something that Carla was still trying to understand. After submission of that assignment, the professor pulled Carla aside after class and told her that she was not an academic writer. Immediately, Carla began doubting her own knowledge and abilities and truly believed that the department had made a mistake by admitting her. Struggling to get through the program, the following quarter, Carla enrolled in a class on race and ethnic studies where she learned about educational inequities, racism, sexism, class, gender, and more. This class came at a crucial moment in her journey as it provided her the language and tools to understand her experience and more importantly strategically navigate her time in the master's program. After this course Carla felt empowered to work through the challenges she was experiencing and began

seeking support from her advisor. As Carla reflected on her experience, she described that she now understood how educational systems, and especially institutions of higher education are not built for people like her. This knowledge equipped her with the tools she needed to deconstruct the racist experiences she faced in the classroom, and ultimately led her to enroll in the PhD program.

For Daniela, also a first-generation college student, going into a master's program was completely new territory that she had to learn to navigate on her own.

I remember feeling like a fish out of water. Even reading for graduate school felt hard, it felt so unfamiliar. I remember going into a class with all doctoral students and as we reviewed the readings people talked about the authors and the main points and I didn't even remember the title . . . No one taught me the rules, no one taught me the language for graduate school or the culture of graduate school.

Daniela remembered that during those first few weeks, despite having done the course readings, when she entered her class she was filled with anxiety and would forget what she had read. Moreover, because everyone in her classes seemed to know what they were doing, Diana thought she was the only one struggling.

So my first year was a lot of tension and learning. Trying to figure out what is this thing called graduate school and how to play that game, and if you will, desiring not to play that game . . . There is no other learning experience that compares to that first year in the master's program. Because things were so challenging to navigate because. I just didn't know but I got through it.

Once Daniela reached out to her advisor, and connected with other Chicanas in her program, she came to the realization that she was not the only one experiencing these challenges and emotions. With the support of her entire network, and with her own grit and determination, Daniela was able to successfully get through her master's program.

Analytical Summary

What is most obvious from the existing literature and from my collaborators' experiences is that Chicana students are able to sustain high levels of achievement, despite the presence of

stressful events and conditions that place them at risk of doing poorly in school (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Despite the lack of direction, resources, and guidance, my research collaborators were able to excel in their programs and reach degree completion. My research collaborators demonstrated resilience in the presence of stressful events and relied on their inner resources and social competencies to navigate through their schooling (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 229). Over time, they were also able to support others dealing with similar questions that they initially had.

The literature on Mexican American women and their utilization of navigational capital to complete their higher education degrees highlights several key themes. One central theme is the importance of cultural values and community support (Gándara, 1995) in helping Mexican American women navigate the challenges of higher education. This became evident in my collaborators' experiences as they discussed the ways in which their family and broader community instilled certain ideals and values. Another theme is the role of resilience, perseverance, and determination in overcoming obstacles such as financial constraints, academic and social barriers, and cultural stereotypes (Stanton-Salazar, 2010). This is apparent in the examples where my collaborators spoke to their motivation to keep going despite the challenges encountered. The literature also highlights the need for institutional support and policies that address the unique challenges faced by Mexican American women in higher education, such as discrimination, lack of resources, and limited access to mentors and role models (Ceja, 2004). Finally, the literature emphasizes the need for a more nuanced understanding of Mexican American women's experiences in higher education, which takes into account their intersecting identities and diverse backgrounds (Villaseñor et al., 2013). Overall, the literature points to the importance of recognizing and valuing the strengths and assets that Mexican American women

bring to their educational journeys, as well as the need for more equitable and inclusive educational opportunities and support systems.

Conclusion

Although not explicitly stated throughout the narrative above, it is important to note that the various forms of capital did often overlap. As Yosso (2005) beautifully described

For example, aspirational capital is the ability to hold onto hope in the face of structured inequality and often without the means to make such dreams a reality. Yet, aspirations are developed within social and familial contexts, often through linguistic storytelling and consejos that offer specific navigational goals to challenge (resist) oppressive conditions. Therefore, aspirational capital overlaps with each of the other forms of capital, social, familial, navigational, linguistic and resistant. (p. 77)

This is important as it speaks to the ways in which Chicanas drew from their distinct capitals, simultaneously, to get through their master's program.

Overall, research shows that despite the obstacles encountered, Chicanas demonstrate their resistance, coping skills, ability for tolerance, personal motivation and ambition, and support systems: self, cultural, and familial, as well as their determination to reach degree completion (Anzaldúa, 1987; Bañuelos, 2006; Berry, 1990; Espinoza, 2010; Gándara, 1982; González, 2013; Leyva, 2011; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Yosso et al., 2009). Chicanas engage in and create their own strategies to persist such as family and community networks, counter spaces, mentoring circles, writing groups, and self-ambition (Carrillo & Dean, 2020). Moreover, Chicanas create more humanizing and empowering educational experiences to reassert that they too are capable of succeeding in higher education (Carrillo & Dean, 2020; Ceja, 2004; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Dominguez, 2013; Espinoza, 2010; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Sanchez, 2015; Valencia & Black, 2002; Vasquez, 1982; Yosso et al., 2009). In my study, my collaborators were assertive in the way they took up space, but also remembered to take care of their mental health and well-being by creating spaces where they felt safe and supported. By

intentionally creating spaces by them and for them, and challenging the racism and discrimination they encounter, Chicanas are redefining the margins as a place of possibility instead of a place of oppression (hooks, 1990). Nevertheless, it is not Chicanas' responsibility to make up for the failure of the U.S. educational system (Yosso, 2005).

In this chapter, I provided a brief overview of some of the challenges my research collaborators experienced, and then shifted to focus on the sources of support that Chicanas drew from in order to persist despite the challenges faced during their masters. The following chapter presents a summary of the findings, implications, recommendations for future research, and concluding statements.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

This qualitative research study was designed to allow for an in-depth examination of Chicana experiences at the master's level, particularly in a Master of Arts in Education program. Because Mexicanas are often absent from the literature due to being subsumed within the category of Latinas or the category of women (Cuádriz, 1997), this study was necessary to bring attention to the voices of Mexicanas specifically. Moreover, the existing literature on master's student experiences and trajectories is limited, making this study a timely one. The guiding questions for this dissertation were:

- 1) What factors do Mexicanas/Chicanas deem important in their decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education?
- 2) What sources of support do Mexicanas/Chicanas draw from in their pursuit and attainment of the Master of Arts in Education?

By focusing on the Chicana experience, this study helps gain some insight into the factors that play a role in shaping Chicanas decision to pursue a master's of arts in education. Additionally, it provides a glimpse into the sources of support that are most important for Chicanas in their degree attainment and continues to shed light on how we can best support Chicanas in master's programs. In this chapter I will provide a summary of the findings, discuss the implications of the research, provide suggestions for future research, and share some concluding statements.

Summary of Findings & Implications

The findings of this dissertation were divided into two chapters. Chapter Five described the factors that Chicanas deemed important when deciding to pursue a master's of arts in education, while Chapter Six described the sources of support that Chicanas drew from in their pursuit and attainment of the master's degree. In the following sections I summarize the findings from each chapter and discuss their implications.

Summary of Chapter Five

Family: Through my collaborators' experiences, it was evident that familial relationships, advice, commitments, circumstances, etc., were deemed important in their decision to pursue an MA in education. The conversations about family serve to counter the deficit narrative that Mexicans do not value education and instead reinforce that Mexican parents and family do value education. This finding pushes us to consider how family can be included in Mexicana master's student experiences, and graduate school decisions overall. Specifically, it pushes researchers to acknowledge the strengths of Chicanas families and the role they play in graduate decision making.

Identity: What is clear from my collaborators experiences is that identities cannot exist in isolation (Delgado Bernal, 2016). This finding pushes us to consider how, while certain aspects of our identity can bring challenges, it can also be the most fruitful and motivating aspect as well. It encourages institutions to rethink how they can nurture Chicanas strong connection to their diverse identities in a way that keeps them grounded and motivated in their schooling. Specifically, it pushes researchers to consider how Chicanas identity can serve as a component for retention in master's education and beyond.

Why MA and Why Education: Amongst my collaborators the main reasons for deciding to pursue a Master of Arts in Education degree were career advancement, social mobility, and to give back to their communities. My collaborators recognized that to be in positions where they could generate more impact, they needed to earn an advanced degree. However, although social mobility was important, my collaborators described that a degree in the field of education was chosen because they wanted to be in a meaningful field where they could help disrupt systemic inequities. This finding is critical as it adds to the limited body of

literature (Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2017) that challenges existing literature which argues that the sole purpose of education is to make more money. This finding also encourages researchers and institutions to consider how students' purpose can be utilized to create empowering educational experiences. Moreover, reframing the conversation of why students choose to pursue certain degrees, to include personal passions and motivations, can really add to the conversation of return on investment, expanding beyond the idea of monetary returns.

Representation & Mentors: It is inarguable that the presence of representation and mentors is critical to the professional and academic success of Chicana women. My collaborators discussed the importance of mentors that encouraged their attainment of the master's but also the impact of mentoring relationships that allowed them to bridge the academic, personal, and professional. My collaborators were also most drawn to mentoring relationships that allowed them to be their full selves, were holistic, and asset-based in their mentoring approach. Evidently representation and mentors provide motivation and empowerment as Chicanas navigate through the graduate education pipeline more smoothly (Sanchez, 2015). This finding provides a glimpse into the role that representation and mentors play in influencing Chicanas to pursue master's degrees, which pushes higher education institutions to reconsider what the representation on their campus looks like and rethink the structures that are in place, if any, to facilitate the development of these mentoring relationships. Moreover, most of the research on mentoring for Chicanas in higher education focuses on undergraduate and doctoral experiences and leaves a gap to fill when it comes to master's education overall.

Graduate School Exposure: Connected to the research on mentors, my research collaborators experiences revealed that professors, other students, teaching assistants and undergraduate staff play a role in exposing Chicana students to graduate school. Another

important factor amongst my collaborators were identity-based youth conferences, which shaped their understanding of graduate school and the opportunities available. Last, Post Baccalaureate Achievement Programs, like the Ronald E. McNair Scholars program, were discussed as the bridge into graduate school. These findings reveal that Chicana students learn and are exposed to graduate school in a variety of ways and pushes us to reconsider how and where master's programs are being advertised. Further research is necessary to understand how Chicanas are being funneled into graduate programs and what resources are available to support them in their educational trajectories.

Logistics: From the conversations with my collaborators and from the literature it became clear that graduate school selection, or decision making-process, is one of the most stressful and time consuming processes for students (Poock & Love, 2001). Amongst some of the factors that my collaborators deemed important were cost and funding, location, reputation, program philosophy, positive interaction with faculty, values of institution, interaction with other students, and ability to transfer to a PhD. Most important, however, was seeing faculty and students of color that looked like them; in other words, representation. This demonstrates that for Chicanas, although there are a range of logistical factors which impact their decision when picking a master's program, seeing diverse faculty and students within their departments is crucial. These findings push higher education institutions to not only reconsider the diversity within their own schools and departments, but also to re-evaluate their funding practices, program philosophies, and overall program value.

Summary of Chapter Six

Chapter Six briefly highlighted some of the challenges that Chicanas encounter throughout their master's trajectory. However the focus and purpose of Chapter Six was to steer

away from deficit narratives and instead learn from the Chicana experience through an asset-based lens. Through my collaborators' experiences, we learned about Chicanas personal motivation and ambition, resistance, coping skills, and ability for tolerance. Moreover, we learned about their support systems self, cultural, and familial, and the way they serve as sources of support and determination to reach degree completion. Utilizing a Community Cultural Wealth lens, Chapter Seven described how Chicanas drew from unique sources of support and engaged in their own strategies of resistance to create more empowering educational master's experiences. In this study, Chicanas redefined the margins as a place of possibility instead of a place of oppression (hooks, 1990). Nevertheless, it is not Chicanas' responsibility to make up for the failure of the U.S. educational system (Yosso, 2005).

These findings imply that Chicanas bring to the classroom a range of strengths, knowledge, skills, and abilities that can be leveraged as assets to empower students throughout their educational journey. In the context of master's education, these findings push higher education institutions, professors, faculty, administrators, and all individuals involved in Chicanas educational experience to be intentional about the ways in which they take into account Chicanas intersectional identities and experiences to best support Chicana students. Moreover, these findings highlight the importance of recognizing and valuing Community Cultural Wealth in educational settings. With the rise of the Latino/a population and shift in graduate enrollment demographics, it is crucial for institutions to create welcoming, and inclusive environments that celebrate diversity, promote equity and social justice, and most importantly intentionally take into account Chicano/a student identities and experiences. Suggestions to achieve the aforementioned goals include implementing policies and practices that support the success of

Chicanas, such as mentorship programs, culturally relevant curriculum, financial assistance, mental health services, and holistic advising services.

The findings of this chapter also serve to remind us that there are still a range of systemic barriers and inequalities that Chicanas face in higher education and we must work towards addressing them. This includes addressing issues such as access to resources, discrimination, microaggressions, financial support, stereotypes, unequal treatment by professors in the classroom, bias, and/or lower academic expectation. This is important to recognize because it reminds us que la lucha sigue and that there is still much to be done to support Chicana and Latino/a students. Overall, the findings in Chapter Six underscore the importance of utilizing an asset-based approach to understanding the experiences of Chicanas in higher education. By recognizing and leveraging their strengths and Community Cultural Wealth, institutions can create a more inclusive and equitable educational environment for all students, across all levels of higher education.

Recommendations for Future Research

This dissertation study was important in bringing attention to the experiences of Chicanas in Master of Arts in education programs. By speaking to 12 Chicanas, at one specific institution (UCLA) and in one specific program (MA in Education), I was able to gain more depth and detail in each of my collaborator's stories. Focusing on a small group of Chicanas allowed me to build authentic relationships and ensured that they all felt truly seen and validated. With that said, there are still various directions in which this research could evolve or be expanded on. There are three general directions in which I recommend building on this research.

Recommendation 1: Delving into the Experiences of Chicanas in Master's Programs

- 1) Conduct more research over a longer period of time with more collaborators;
- 2) Delve deeper into the role that family plays in influencing master's education decisions;

- 3) Understand Chicanas graduate educational pathways and how they are exposed to master's programs;
- 4) Explore Chicana identity as a tool for retention and degree attainment in master's programs; and
- 5) Explore the experiences of Chicanas in master's programs across different departments, fields, systems, and institutions.

Further research on the experiences of Chicanas in other master's programs is important because it can provide a broader understanding of Chicanas educational trajectories and serves to inform institutions how they can better support their students. As the Chicana population continues to grow, and is increasingly pursuing more master's degrees, this research is timely and necessary.

Recommendation 2: Conducting More Research on Master's Programs and Master's Experiences

- 1) Creating a Survey of Earned Master's that mirrors the Survey of Earned Doctorates, an annual census of all individuals receiving a research doctorate from an accredited U.S. institution in a given academic year;
- 2) Explore the experience of master's students across different institutions, fields, regions;
- 3) Explore master's student experiences across different racial and ethnic subgroups;
- 4) Continue to explore the evolution of master's programs, their growth in popularity, and the demographic shifts in enrollment; and
- 5) Understand how and where master's programs recruitment is happening.

Evidently there is a lack of research on master's program experiences. With their continued increase in popularity (*The Chronicle of Higher Education*), it is important that researchers give attention to this segment of the educational pipeline. The areas of research

suggested above can continue to shed light on how to improve master's programs, make them more accessible, improve student experiences, and most importantly continue to provide literature for future researchers to build on.

Recommendation 3: Make This Research More Accessible

- 1) Write a children's book on Chicanas in master's programs
- 2) Find innovative ways to share this work with K-12 students and engage them in research
- 3) Translate the dissertation to Spanish

From the very beginning of my doctoral program, my goal has always been to make academic research more accessible. Writing a children's book would allow Chicanas, Latinas, and other Children of Color to see themselves in a way that is not usually represented, encouraging them to dream big. Sharing this research with K-12 students would expose them to one of the many options beyond high school from very early on. Translating this work would honor my roots and make this work accessible to nearly double the amount of folks. Most importantly, I remain committed to sharing this work by expanding beyond the traditional ideas of what is acceptable within academia.

Conclusion

Of the Latino/a population, Mexicans account for 63% (Pew Research Center, 2017). Of that, 49% are women. Although the Mexican population is experiencing tremendous growth, they continue to lag behind the national average in, and have amongst the lowest, educational attainment levels of all Latinos/as²⁰ (Covarrubias, 2011; Pérez Huber et al., 2015; Yosso & Solórzano, 2006). Moreover, when it comes to Latino/a graduate degree attainment, 80% of

²⁰ Where no research or disaggregate data specific to Mexicanos/as is found, I used research on Latinos/as.

Latinos/as enrolled in graduate school are enrolled in master's programs, and of those 64% are women. However, as you learned through this dissertation and from existing research, it is evident that little is known about master's degree education in the United States, and even less about Mexicanas in master's programs in the United States. Although various scholars have sought out to understand the experience of Mexicans along the K-12, undergraduate, and doctoral educational pipelines (Castellanos & Orozco, 2005; Ceja, 2004; Cuádriz, 1997; De Loera, 2018; Delgado Bernal, 2001; Delgado-Gaitan, 1992; Gándara, 1993, 1995; Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Solórzano, 1998; Valencia & Black, 2002), the experience of master's students has gone under-examined and resulted in a gap in higher education research, making this dissertation a timely and necessary study.

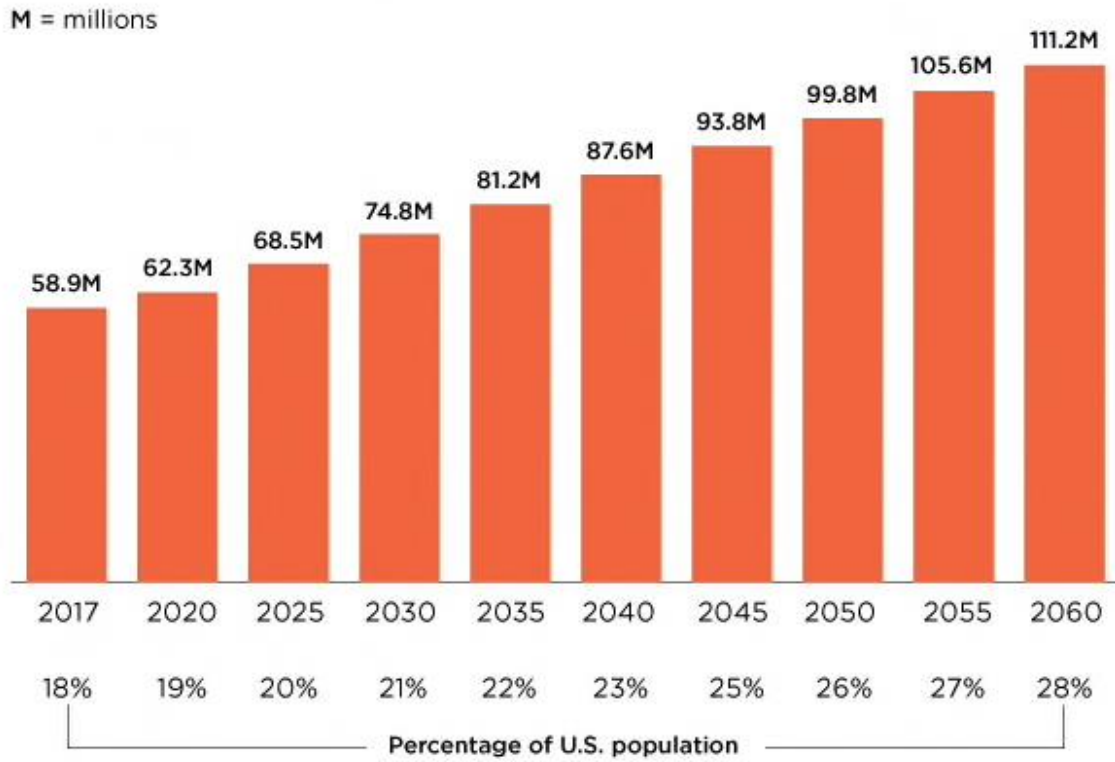
Contributions

This dissertation continues to fill some of the gaps in higher education research, particularly master's education. Through this study I was able to expand on our understandings of Chicana Feminist Epistemology and conceptualizations of Community Cultural Wealth. Moreover, I was able to expand and reimagine the pláticas methodology and created genuine and safe spaces via virtual pláticas. This dissertation also provides clear and specific recommendations for higher education institutions, administrators, and faculty as to how they can more intentionally support Chicanas in their master's trajectory. Similarly, this work provides direction for policymakers to implement legislation that intentionally supports Chicano/a recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation. Most importantly, this work gives others the opportunity to hear and learn directly from Chicana students. This study also provides important insights into Chicana master's students experiences and shares recommendations for future research that can help guide further investigations in this area.

Closing Statements

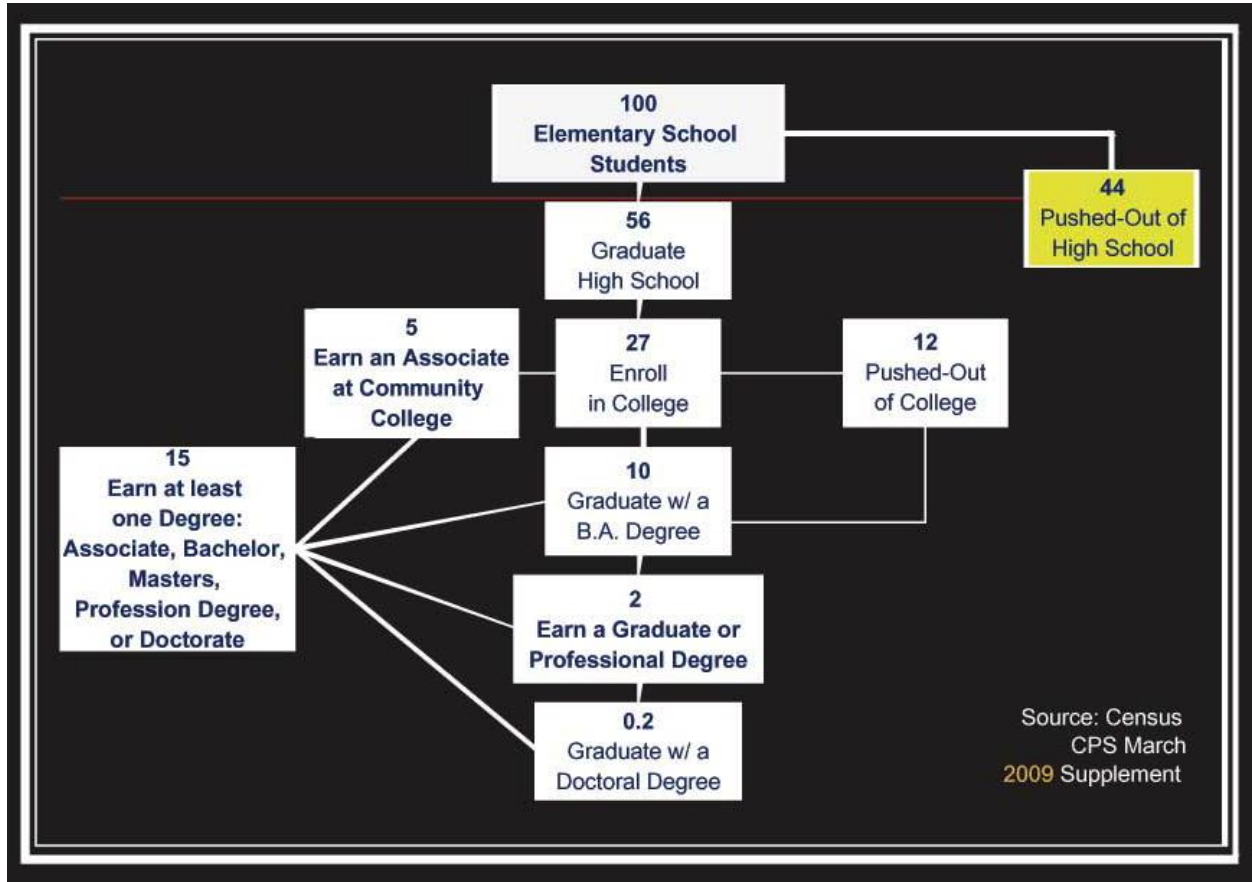
As a proud Mexicana and first-generation college student, reaching this point in my academic trajectory has been no small feat. Getting through my undergrad at Santa Clara University, and learning about and applying to graduate school was a challenge but also a beautiful community effort filled with both joy and tears. My hope is that this dissertation reminds higher education institutions that we as Chicanas are trailblazers, worthy of academic research, and continue to climb in numbers when it comes to master's education. Moreover, I hope that other Chicanas and Women of Color can see themselves reflected in this work and are inspired to share their own stories as well. I hope this work inspires generations to come and motivates people to speak their truth. Let us continue to uplift and empower the voices of Chicanas and People of Color in academia and work towards creating a higher education system that truly cares and supports all students.

APPENDIX A: HISPANIC POPULATION TO REACH 111 MILLION BY 2060



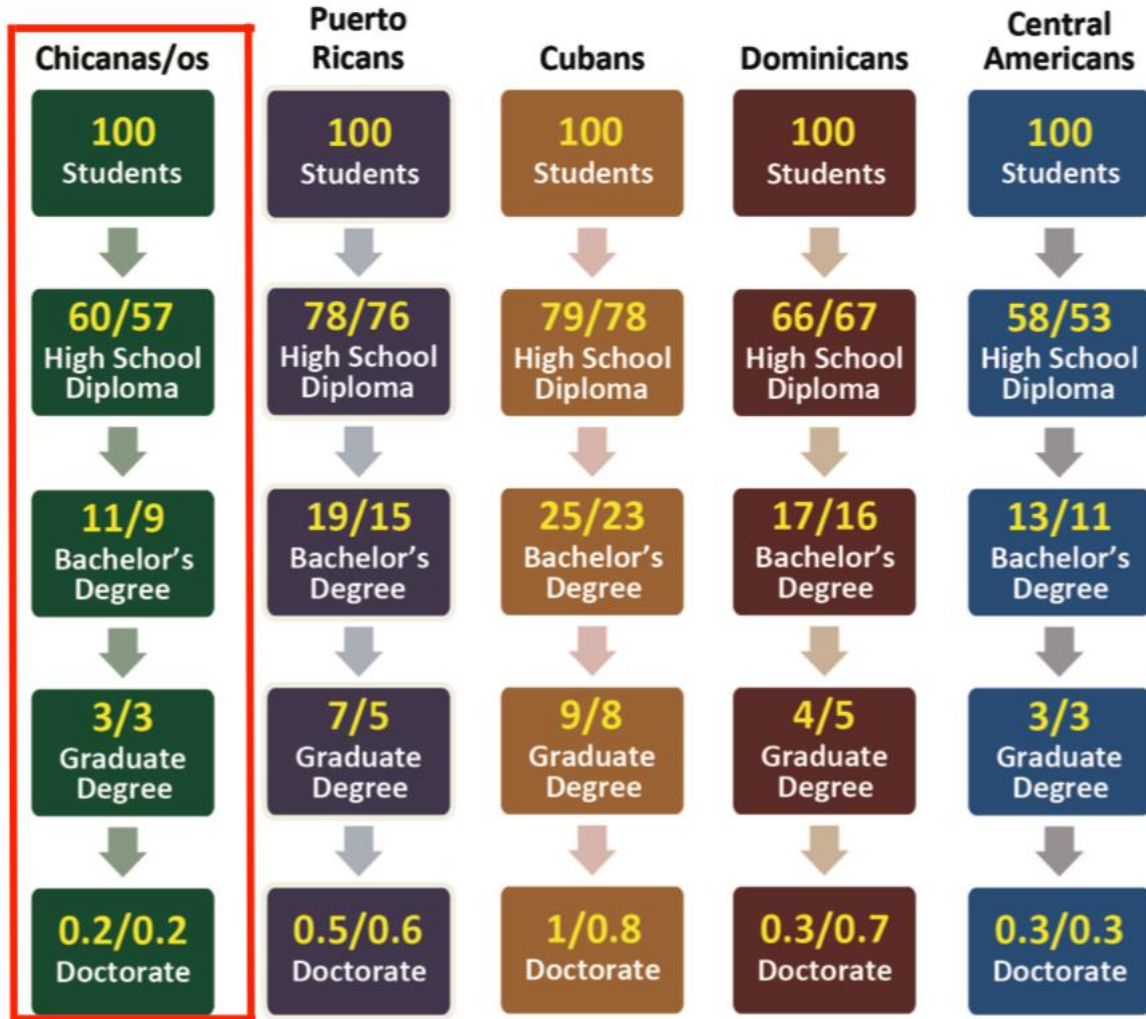
Source: U.S Census Bureau, 2018

APPENDIX B: THE CHICANO/A (MEXICAN) EDUCATIONAL PIPELINE



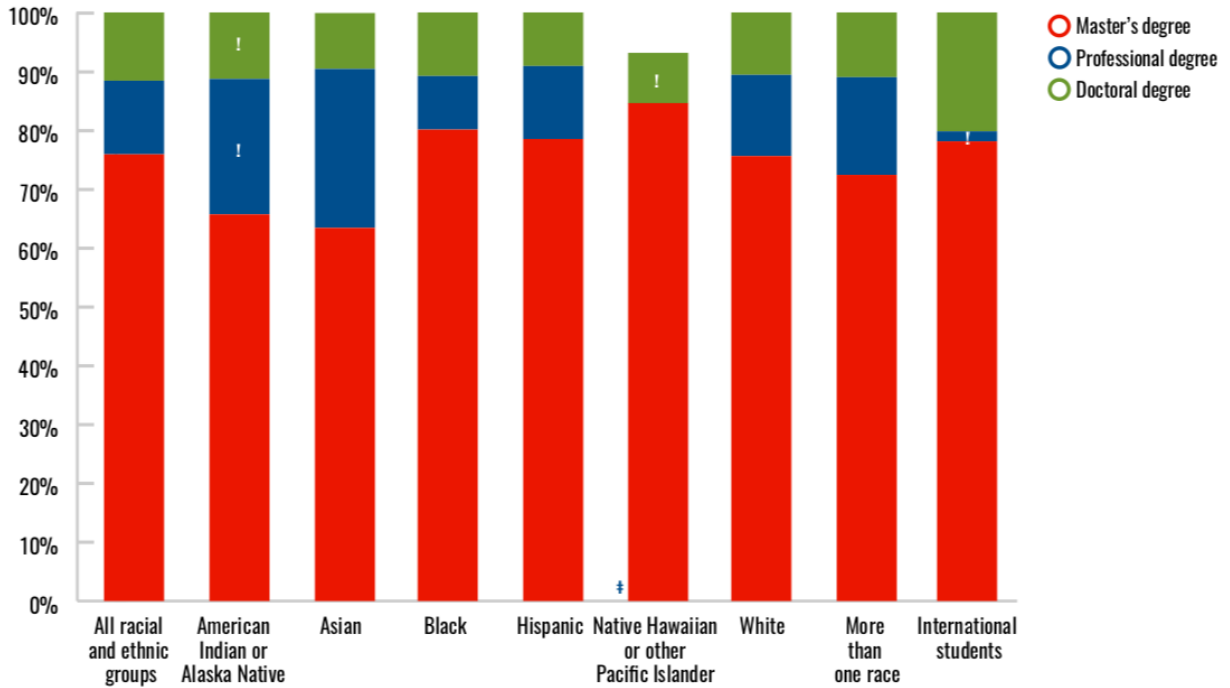
Source: Covarrubias, A. (2011)

APPENDIX C: THE US EDUCATION PIPELINE, BY LATINO/A SUBGROUP AND GENDER



Source: Pérez Huber et al. (2015).

APPENDIX D: GRADUATE ENROLLMENT BY PROGRAM LEVEL AND RACE AND ETHNICITY 2015–2016



Source: U.S Department of Education National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 2016

APPENDIX E: BACHELOR'S DEGREES CONFERRED BY POSTSECONDARY
INSTITUTIONS, BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND SEX OF STUDENT, 1976–1977 THROUGH
2016–2017

| Year and sex | Number of degrees conferred to U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and nonresident aliens | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|---|-----------|---------|----------|------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | Total | White | Black | Hispanic | Asian/Pacific Islander | American Indian/Alaska Native | Two or more races | Non-resident alien |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Total | | | | | | | | |
| 1976-77 ¹ | 917,900 | 807,688 | 58,636 | 18,743 | 13,793 | 3,326 | — | 15,714 |
| 1980-81 ² | 934,800 | 807,319 | 60,673 | 21,832 | 18,794 | 3,593 | — | 22,589 |
| 1990-91 | 1,094,538 | 914,093 | 66,375 | 37,342 | 42,529 | 4,583 | — | 29,616 |
| 1999-2000 | 1,237,875 | 929,102 | 108,018 | 75,063 | 77,909 | 8,717 | — | 39,066 |
| 2000-01 | 1,244,171 | 927,357 | 111,307 | 77,745 | 78,902 | 9,049 | — | 39,811 |
| 2002-03 | 1,348,811 | 994,616 | 124,253 | 89,029 | 87,964 | 9,875 | — | 43,074 |
| 2003-04 | 1,399,542 | 1,026,114 | 131,241 | 94,644 | 92,073 | 10,638 | — | 44,832 |
| 2004-05 | 1,439,264 | 1,049,141 | 136,122 | 101,124 | 97,209 | 10,307 | — | 45,361 |
| 2005-06 | 1,485,104 | 1,075,471 | 142,405 | 107,575 | 102,371 | 10,938 | — | 46,344 |
| 2006-07 | 1,524,729 | 1,100,308 | 146,767 | 114,962 | 105,287 | 11,463 | — | 45,942 |
| 2007-08 | 1,563,734 | 1,123,246 | 152,627 | 122,770 | 109,177 | 11,509 | — | 44,405 |
| 2008-09 | 1,601,399 | 1,144,628 | 156,603 | 129,473 | 112,581 | 12,221 | — | 45,893 |
| 2009-10 | 1,649,919 | 1,167,322 | 164,789 | 140,426 | 117,391 | 12,405 | — | 47,586 |
| 2010-11 | 1,716,053 | 1,182,690 | 172,731 | 154,450 | 121,118 | 11,935 | 20,589 | 52,540 |
| 2011-12 | 1,792,163 | 1,212,417 | 185,916 | 169,736 | 126,177 | 11,498 | 27,234 | 59,185 |
| 2012-13 | 1,840,381 | 1,221,908 | 191,233 | 186,677 | 130,129 | 11,432 | 34,128 | 64,874 |
| 2013-14 | 1,870,150 | 1,218,998 | 191,437 | 202,425 | 131,662 | 10,784 | 45,422 | 69,422 |
| 2014-15 | 1,894,969 | 1,210,071 | 192,829 | 218,098 | 133,916 | 10,202 | 54,215 | 75,638 |
| 2015-16 | 1,920,750 | 1,197,323 | 194,408 | 235,190 | 138,257 | 9,735 | 61,584 | 84,253 |
| 2016-17 | 1,956,032 | 1,196,007 | 196,300 | 252,166 | 144,078 | 9,582 | 66,526 | 91,373 |

| Females | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|---------|---------|---------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--|
| 1976-77 ¹ | 423,476 | 369,527 | 33,489 | 8,425 | 6,155 | 1,522 | — | 4,358 | |
| 1980-81 ² | 465,175 | 401,146 | 36,162 | 11,022 | 8,687 | 1,893 | — | 6,265 | |
| 1990-91 | 590,493 | 492,803 | 41,575 | 20,744 | 21,326 | 2,645 | — | 11,400 | |
| 1999-2000 | 707,508 | 526,148 | 70,989 | 44,759 | 42,056 | 5,254 | — | 18,302 | |
| 2000-01 | 712,331 | 525,577 | 73,204 | 46,377 | 43,037 | 5,349 | — | 18,787 | |
| 2002-03 | 775,553 | 564,368 | 82,759 | 53,928 | 47,734 | 6,005 | — | 20,759 | |
| 2003-04 | 804,117 | 580,631 | 87,390 | 57,356 | 50,713 | 6,394 | — | 21,633 | |
| 2004-05 | 826,264 | 592,549 | 90,312 | 61,634 | 53,498 | 6,164 | — | 22,107 | |
| 2005-06 | 854,602 | 608,074 | 94,332 | 65,770 | 56,568 | 6,736 | — | 23,122 | |
| 2006-07 | 874,913 | 619,561 | 97,052 | 70,201 | 57,710 | 6,955 | — | 23,434 | |
| 2007-08 | 895,550 | 630,886 | 100,329 | 74,973 | 59,642 | 6,986 | — | 22,734 | |
| 2008-09 | 915,977 | 641,232 | 103,138 | 78,877 | 61,808 | 7,372 | — | 23,550 | |
| 2009-10 | 943,259 | 653,611 | 108,653 | 85,287 | 64,026 | 7,526 | — | 24,156 | |
| 2010-11 | 981,894 | 662,698 | 113,716 | 93,581 | 65,797 | 7,137 | 12,561 | 26,404 | |
| 2011-12 | 1,026,391 | 679,954 | 122,180 | 102,653 | 68,656 | 7,022 | 16,289 | 29,637 | |
| 2012-13 | 1,052,973 | 686,550 | 123,882 | 112,610 | 70,323 | 6,821 | 20,294 | 32,493 | |
| 2013-14 | 1,068,245 | 682,989 | 123,147 | 122,113 | 71,818 | 6,613 | 27,285 | 34,280 | |
| 2014-15 | 1,082,276 | 679,653 | 123,513 | 131,217 | 72,836 | 6,141 | 31,970 | 36,946 | |
| 2015-16 | 1,099,004 | 674,489 | 124,561 | 142,201 | 75,075 | 5,913 | 36,427 | 40,338 | |
| 2016-17 | 1,119,987 | 674,586 | 125,746 | 152,835 | 78,680 | 5,852 | 39,442 | 42,846 | |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2018

APPENDIX F: DOCTOR'S DEGREES CONFERRED BY POSTSECONDARY
INSTITUTIONS, BY RACE/ETHNICITY AND SEX OF STUDENT, 1976–1977 THROUGH
2016–2017

| Year and sex | Number of degrees conferred ¹ to U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and nonresident aliens | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|--|---------|--------|----------|------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | Total | White | Black | Hispanic | Asian/Pacific Islander | American Indian/Alaska Native | Two or more races | Non-resident alien |
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 |
| Total | | | | | | | | |
| 1976-77 ² | 91,218 | 79,932 | 3,575 | 1,533 | 1,674 | 240 | — | 4,264 |
| 1980-81 ³ | 97,281 | 84,200 | 3,893 | 1,924 | 2,267 | 312 | — | 4,685 |
| 1990-91 | 105,547 | 81,791 | 4,429 | 3,210 | 5,120 | 356 | — | 10,641 |
| 1999-2000 | 118,736 | 82,984 | 7,078 | 5,042 | 10,682 | 708 | — | 12,242 |
| 2000-01 | 119,585 | 82,321 | 7,035 | 5,204 | 11,587 | 705 | — | 12,733 |
| 2002-03 | 121,579 | 82,549 | 7,537 | 5,503 | 12,008 | 759 | — | 13,223 |
| 2003-04 | 126,087 | 84,695 | 8,089 | 5,795 | 12,371 | 771 | — | 14,366 |
| 2004-05 | 134,387 | 89,763 | 8,527 | 6,115 | 13,176 | 788 | — | 16,018 |
| 2005-06 | 138,056 | 91,050 | 8,523 | 6,202 | 13,686 | 929 | — | 17,666 |
| 2006-07 | 144,694 | 94,225 | 9,371 | 6,576 | 14,727 | 917 | — | 18,878 |
| 2007-08 | 149,190 | 97,701 | 9,451 | 6,933 | 15,170 | 932 | — | 19,003 |
| 2008-09 | 154,564 | 101,400 | 10,188 | 7,497 | 15,840 | 978 | — | 18,661 |
| 2009-10 | 158,590 | 104,419 | 10,413 | 8,085 | 16,560 | 952 | — | 18,161 |
| 2010-11 | 163,827 | 105,990 | 10,934 | 8,662 | 17,078 | 947 | 1,251 | 18,965 |
| 2011-12 | 170,217 | 109,365 | 11,794 | 9,223 | 17,896 | 915 | 1,571 | 19,453 |
| 2012-13 | 175,026 | 110,759 | 12,085 | 10,108 | 18,406 | 900 | 2,440 | 20,328 |
| 2013-14 | 177,587 | 110,157 | 12,621 | 10,665 | 19,118 | 861 | 2,966 | 21,199 |
| 2014-15 | 178,548 | 108,914 | 13,272 | 11,263 | 19,186 | 884 | 3,670 | 21,359 |
| 2015-16 | 178,134 | 107,235 | 13,377 | 11,781 | 19,614 | 811 | 3,782 | 21,534 |
| 2016-17 | 181,352 | 107,445 | 14,067 | 12,493 | 20,344 | 746 | 4,166 | 22,091 |

| Females | | | | | | | | | |
|----------------------|--------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-----|-------|-------|--|
| 1976-77 ² | 19,509 | 16,955 | 1,237 | 317 | 363 | 58 | — | 579 | |
| 1980-81 ³ | 28,428 | 24,626 | 1,687 | 586 | 678 | 89 | — | 762 | |
| 1990-91 | 41,305 | 32,979 | 2,438 | 1,375 | 2,082 | 160 | — | 2,271 | |
| 1999-2000 | 53,806 | 37,676 | 4,316 | 2,440 | 5,215 | 375 | — | 3,784 | |
| 2000-01 | 55,414 | 38,190 | 4,380 | 2,640 | 5,828 | 359 | — | 4,017 | |
| 2002-03 | 58,849 | 39,980 | 4,802 | 2,832 | 6,325 | 401 | — | 4,509 | |
| 2003-04 | 62,106 | 41,681 | 5,201 | 3,064 | 6,751 | 414 | — | 4,995 | |
| 2004-05 | 67,130 | 45,014 | 5,623 | 3,252 | 7,263 | 418 | — | 5,560 | |
| 2005-06 | 69,144 | 45,574 | 5,574 | 3,352 | 7,709 | 500 | — | 6,435 | |
| 2006-07 | 73,383 | 48,010 | 6,148 | 3,539 | 8,278 | 496 | — | 6,912 | |
| 2007-08 | 75,850 | 49,583 | 6,160 | 3,794 | 8,654 | 485 | — | 7,174 | |
| 2008-09 | 78,890 | 51,520 | 6,657 | 4,109 | 8,926 | 518 | — | 7,160 | |
| 2009-10 | 81,980 | 53,712 | 6,804 | 4,443 | 9,376 | 522 | — | 7,123 | |
| 2010-11 | 84,155 | 54,302 | 7,096 | 4,672 | 9,533 | 493 | 694 | 7,365 | |
| 2011-12 | 87,547 | 55,877 | 7,673 | 5,005 | 10,104 | 497 | 870 | 7,521 | |
| 2012-13 | 89,946 | 56,563 | 7,775 | 5,635 | 10,216 | 500 | 1,355 | 7,902 | |
| 2013-14 | 92,002 | 56,783 | 8,111 | 5,877 | 10,848 | 496 | 1,669 | 8,218 | |
| 2014-15 | 93,626 | 56,845 | 8,808 | 6,252 | 10,856 | 474 | 1,992 | 8,399 | |
| 2015-16 | 93,894 | 56,541 | 8,813 | 6,659 | 10,982 | 440 | 2,064 | 8,395 | |
| 2016-17 | 96,706 | 57,442 | 9,276 | 7,072 | 11,438 | 439 | 2,386 | 8,653 | |

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, 2018

Recruitment Flyer
**A Study of Chicana/Mexicana
Experiences in Master of Arts (M.A)
in Education Programs**



- **Do you identify as Chicana / Mexicana / Mexican / Mexican - American?**
- **Do you have a Master of Arts (M.A) in Education degree?**
- **Did you earn your degree at the University of California Los Angeles?**

If you answered yes to all of the questions above, please consider participating in a study about the experience of Chicanas/ Mexicanas in Master of Arts in Education Programs, where you will be asked to participate in **1 individual plática and 1 group plática**, each **one hour long**, to discuss your academic experiences.

For more information or to participate please contact **Alejandra Magaña Gamero:**
alemagana310@g.ucla.edu

IRB # 21-001890

APPENDIX H: RESEARCH COLLABORATOR INTAKE FORM

Thank you for showing interest in contributing to my study. Please take a moment to fill out the intake form.

1) Name _____

2) Institution _____

3) Type of Masters (circle one) - MA or MEd?

4) Year of Completion _____

5) Race/Ethnicity _____

6) Contact Information (Email or Phone Number)

The following questions are designed to give you a sense of the research focus and whether you would feel comfortable proceeding.

7) What factors, experiences and/or relationships were important in your decision to pursue a Master of Arts in Education?

8) Who or what played a role in your attainment of the Master of Arts in Education degree?

9) Would you be comfortable talking about these experiences individually, as a group, or both?

APPENDIX I: PLÁTICAS TOPICS

The first plática will be dedicated to reviewing the women's demographic information and exploring the various factors, experiences, and/or relationships that have shaped their educational journeys. The topics below are conversation topics that may come up during the plática.

Individual Plática

- Educational background
 - K-12 Experiences
 - Undergraduate Experiences
 - Graduate Experiences
- Identity
 - First-generation college student
 - Daughter of immigrants
 - Low-income
- Factors
 - Location
 - Socioeconomic status / Funding
 - Length of program
 - Challenges
- Experiences
 - Racism / Microaggressions
 - Micro-affirmations
 - Positive experiences
 - Negative experiences
- Relationships
 - Mentorship / Advisorship
 - Parental / Familial support
 - Friendships
- Career goals

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