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Testimonios From Latinas in Community College Administration in Nuestra Comunidad

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

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by

Yessika Garcia-Guzman

MPhil, Walden University, 2022

MPA, John Jay College, 2006

MS, Hunter College, 2004

BS, Fordham University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Administration

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Abstract

It is not known why Latina community college administrators are disproportionally underrepresented in higher education. Of all full-time faculty in postsecondary institutions, 3% are Hispanic females; 1% or less of full-time professors are Hispanic females, and 3% are full-time assistant professors. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe the experiences of Latina community college administrators in their journey as college students and how these experiences informed their understanding of the academic and student support systems that either hinder or support Latinas. Phinney's theory of racial and ethnic development was the theoretical foundation for the study. The research questions focused on the perceived main factors of the participants' barriers and facilitators in the pursuit of enrollment and college completion. A narrative inquiry approach in the form of *testimonios* was used. Participants were purposively selected and included nine Latina administrators from county community colleges. Data were collected using a researcher-developed interview guide to conduct face-to-face or Zoom interviews. The data were coded and analyzed for themes and patterns using the NVivo software. Results indicated (a) staff and faculty relations, (b) family, (c) economic fitness, (d) sense of belonging, and (e) self-efficacy and motivation facilitated college completion. College administrators, educational leaders, and policy makers may benefit from the results of this study by developing programs and services to facilitate Latina students' ability to successfully complete their community college education leading to positive social change.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother Xiomara Payano, who always encouraged and supported me. She knew that education was the key to success, and she sacrificed everything to make sure my siblings and I were afforded every opportunity for a chance at a better life. *Mami, gracias por todas tus bendiciones, tu amor y apoyo incondicional.*

I also dedicate this dissertation to all the mujeres in my family, my sister, aunts, cousins, and grandmothers. I am a strong Latina because of your legacy and the quiet yet persistent strength that manifested through your consejos. I stand on your shoulders.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the nine amazing Latinas who courageously shared their stories with me. Your testimonios inspired me to persevere in this educational and professional journey despite its peaks and valleys. Thank you for your light and wisdom.

Finally, I dedicate and share this doctoral degree with my husband Juan R. Guzman, who supported me throughout this long and arduous process. He took care of the boys and house while I spent countless hours in my office. *Viejo, eres mi constante en esta vida tan inconstante.* I also share this degree with our two boys Nicholas and John who waited patiently and without complaints those long writing days to spend time with me. Mami is finally done! I love you today and always.

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Finally, to my administradoras, thank you for agreeing to be part of this study. You opened yourselves to the process and shared your stories with such amor. You are doing exceptional and transformative things in the field of higher education. Your terquedad and daring leadership has further fueled my passion. Your testimonios will inspire Latina administrators to lead and persist and have so strongly validated the words of Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor (2001), "In every position that I've been in, there have been naysayers who don't believe I'm qualified or who don't believe I can do the work. And I feel a special responsibility to prove them wrong."

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Latinas are a quickly growing population in the United States poised to account for one in five women by the year 2060 (Gándara, 2015). Despite this growth, Latinas are not well represented in leadership roles across all careers and still less so in administrative leadership roles in postsecondary education (Velarde Pierce, 2020). An apparent gap in representation exists between academic and administrative leadership in institutions of higher education and the student populations they serve (Capers, 2019; Velarde Pierce, 2020). As the college enrollment of Latina students increases nationwide, it is paramount that institutions invest in the recruitment and development of Latinas in higher education leadership roles. When Latina students experience and see representation of Latinas in administrative roles, they can define and envision their own academic and career potentials (Velarde Pierce, 2020).A facilitating factor in college enrollment and completion is representation, and institutions whose students experience significant levels of representation in student body, faculty, and administration can expect to have increased completion rates (Velarde Pierce, 2020). The potential social implications of this qualitative study can include a better understanding of the academic and student support services Latina students need in order to successfully complete a postsecondary degree. Additionally, the completion of a degree often leads to improved socioeconomic status and better career opportunities.

In this chapter, I provide a brief background on Latina college completion and the lack of representation in secondary education and community college administrators. I

include the research problem as well as identify the gap in knowledge that this study addressed. The purpose of the study and the research questions are provided along with the theoretical framework. Lastly, I describe the nature of the study and provide definitions of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

Hispanics are the leading racial minority in the United States and a population that is poised to increase (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). Consequently, supporting their successful attainment of a college degree allows for increased socioeconomic standards and mobility. The Hispanic share of the labor force is projected to increase from 28,969,000 (18.0%) in 2020 to 35,933,000 (21.2%) by 2030(Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2022); therefore, the United States' economic growth is connected to the success of the Hispanic population (Capers, 2019). Some inequities in society can be mitigated by education. Nuñez et al. (2011) examined the factors that affect Latinos' enrollment in community colleges identifying as Hispanic serving institutions; they include geography, accessibility to support programs, access to continued social ties and family networks, and ease of transferability to 4-year institutions. Among the positive factors were peer and familial role models, representation, mentoring, self-efficacy, and confidence. The negative factors included discouragement from educational staff based on ethnicity and gender manifested in microaggressions and suggestions of alternative paths to college (Cerezo et al., 2013).

The existing body of literature on Latina students and administrators has focused primarily on states such as Arizona, California, and Texas. The top five locations where Latinos enroll are also where they graduate. Almost two-thirds (65%) of Latinos have earned a degree in California (29%), Texas (15%), Florida (10%), New York (6%), and Puerto Rico (5%). These five locations enrolled 63% of Latinos (Excelencia in Education, 2022).More specifically, the top five institutions where Latinos enrolled as of Fall 2018 were Miami Dade College, Florida International University, South Texas College, Lone Star College System, and El Paso Community College (Excelencia in Education, 2022).

Four of the top 10states with a positive Latino degree attainment change in 2016 included New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Rhode Island (Schak & Howard Nichols, 2018). Although the degree attainment for Latino students in New Jersey as of 2016 was only24.4% (Schak & Howard Nichols, 2018), the state's higher education departments, organizations, and institutions of higher education have not prioritized this educational inequity with targeted initiatives. Hence, this study helps to fill a gap in the research by focusing specifically on Latina community college administrators serving as vice presidents, deans, directors, and coordinators in New Jersey to better understand the need for support programs for Latina students. This study was needed because there is a direct correlation between economic status among racial and ethnic groups based on educational attainment. Hispanic Americans fare better when they experience an economic setback if they possess at least a bachelor's degree (Kochhar & Sechopoulos, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Research is lacking in understanding the role of academic and student support systems in Latina students' enrollment and college completion. Also absent in research is how Latina college administrators' higher education journeys informed their understanding of the academic and student support systems that hinder or support Latina students. Hispanic female college enrollment has increased over the past 20 years. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), 40% of Hispanic females were enrolled in college in 2018 compared to 25% in 2000. In 2016, the postsecondary attainment rate of Hispanic females increased, with 60% completing a bachelor's degree and 62% completing an associate degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). However, the staff, faculty, and administration in colleges and universities across the country often do not represent their student populations. For Latina women in college, the absence of Latinas in leadership roles can influence their own perspectives of obtaining a future leadership role in any career, particularly in higher education.

Of all full-time faculty in postsecondary institutions, 3% are Hispanic females; 1% percent or less of full-time professors are Hispanic females and 3% are full-time assistant professors (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). Administrative, professional, and staff positions do not fare better. The American Council on Education (2019) reported that most of all administrative positions in postsecondary institutions are held by Whites (75%), while 26% are held by people of color (individuals who identify as Asian, Black, Hispanic, or an ethnicity other than White). A lack of training programs,

absence of executive and board support (Gillett, 2017), conventional masculine norms in leadership positions (Eddy & Khwaja, 2019; Wheat& Hill, 2016), and disparity in compensation (Edwards, 2017) have continued to influence the dismal number of women in administration. In higher education administration, Latinos make up only 9% of full-time student services staff, and out of this small group, 3% are Latino males and 6% are Latino females (Sánchez et al., 2020). This problem impacts the socioeconomic mobility of the Hispanic population, which is the leading racial minority in the United States, totaling 57.5 million in 2016 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016) and a powerful and influential constituency.

Some community colleges are exploring institutional challenges, such as developmental education, faculty and student representation, and social, cultural, and educational programs to better assist Latino students before, during, and after they enroll (Ponjuán et al., 2017). Literature reviewed for this study suggested that it is the academic determinations and goals of Latino students (Pérez II, 2017) that facilitate their enrollment in and completion of a college degree despite a lack of faculty and administrative mentors, cultural mediators, and role models (Delgado & Ozuna Allen, 2019) who inhibit it. For women, in particular, a positive leadership experience in college can be a critical pathway for careers in leadership roles later in life (Offermann et al., 2020). In 2016, the most recent year this type of data was collected by the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, New Jersey colleges and universities' non-White race/ethnic makeup of full-time faculty was 23%, while 40% of students identified as non-White (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2019). For the 2016 reporting

year, race and gender information on staff was not available for the community college

sector. Within the entire sector, nonetheless,783 employees were in management, and

1,720 held professional roles (Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, 2016). In this

study, I used narrative inquiry with nine Latina administrators in community colleges to

understand the role of academic and student support systems that impact Latina students'

enrollment and completion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how the college experience of Latina

community college administrators informed their perception of the impact of academic

and student support services on Latina college students. Latina college students often

commence college with competing pressures, such as familial responsibilities, cultural

traditions, concerns with academic acuity, and external financial commitments (Espino,

2020). The lack of strong institutional academic and student support systems that can

successfully bridge these competing pressures and create experiences that address these

needs can influence student completion. Latino/a college students make up 46% of total

community college enrollment nationwide (Sáenz et al., 2018). Latino/a college students

often prefer community colleges because of their low tuition, flexibility in course

scheduling, as well as the convenience of being close to home, which can allow them to

continue to meet family responsibilities that do not subside based on college enrollment

status (Sáenz et al., 2018). Using a qualitative narrative inquiry approach, my study

addressed an under researched area of community colleges with a population that

continues to grow, and by 2060 is projected to comprise approximately a third of the female population in the United States (Gándara, 2015).

Research Questions

Research question (RQ)1: What academic and student support services do Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive would impact Latina student's degree completion?

Sub-RQ2: What are the factors that Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive to inhibit Latinas' enrollment and college completion?

Sub-RQ3: What are the factors that Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive to facilitate Latinas' enrollment and college completion?

Theoretical Framework

This research was informed by Phinney's (2003) theory of racial and ethnic development that focuses on students' identity process and how they can examine their sense of self successfully for educational achievement. This theoretical framework allowed for exploring the issue of ethnic development and belonging in college campuses for Latino females. Phinney (1996) suggested that ethnic clubs on campuses can assist students in their search of identity and immersion. Additionally, efforts by educational institutions to develop courses, invite speakers, and promote activities that recognize and celebrate diverse cultural and ethnic groups help students achieve academic success (Phinney, 1996). Ethnic identity refers to one's identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group, and acculturation is more generational and measured in scales (Phinney, 2003).

The concepts of my study addressed participants' perception of college and the influences and factors in preparation of both their college and professional career. I also sought to examine if participants' cultural and ethnic identity shaped their college perspective. Consequently, I aimed to discover if participants felt supported and represented in class and on campus as they started their college career. This data analysis was used to add theory development and knowledge for educators and policymakers to address.

Nature of the Study

The nature of my research was qualitative with a narrative inquiry approach (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016) in the form of *testimonios*. Patton (2015) posited that narrative inquiry focuses on stories and examines human lives through the lens of a narrative. Narrative inquiry entails telling stories to seek understanding of a phenomenon and analyzing these stories as it relates to the individual and society (Maynes et al., 2008). Narrative inquiry allows discovery of the distinctiveness of individuals (Rudestam & Newton, 2015) as well as the characteristics of the group. Using individual narratives in research offers an opportunity to incorporate characteristically marginalized populations, like Latinas, to use their stories as counternarratives to social and educational claims (Maynes et al., 2008) that have been universally accepted. Therefore, *testimonios* as a form of narrative inquiry features political, social, historical, and cultural histories that guide a person's life experiences as a path to elicit change via "consciousness-raising" (Bernal et al., 2017, p.2).

For this research, the population was the 18 county community colleges located in New Jersey. Participant criteria included females who identified as Latino or Hispanic, regardless of age, who held an administrative position throughout the colleges. Purposeful sampling was used to select nine participants who matched the criteria (see Creswell, 2013). Sample size in narrative inquiry studies is typically small; however, the focus was the point at which saturation was met (see Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Data for this study were collected via in-depth interviews with each of the participants. The data collection tool was a researcher-developed open-ended interview guide after consultation with the Institutional Review Board. Some interview questions could have been upsetting or distressing to participants. Topics such as discrimination, race, and ethnicity may have arisen, and the combination of questions and answers could have resulted in painful or unpleasant memories or feelings (see Walden University, 2021). As outlined in the consent form, I reminded the participants that their participation in this study was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time. The data were coded and categorized to look for codes, categories, and themes from nine interview transcripts, phrases, direct quotes, and observations. These were analyzed using NVivo 14 software, which can store, organize, manage, and reconfigure data (see Saldaña, 2016).

Definitions of Key Terms

The following are the key terms used in this research.

Administradoras: Spanish word for female administrators.

Comadres: Spanish word godmother, or close friend, associate, or companion (López et al., 2020).

Comunidad: Spanish word for community.

Consejo: Spanish word for advice.

Dicho/refrán: Spanish word for saying.

Familia: Spanish word for family.

*Familismo***:** Strong attachment to nuclear and immediate family in Latin/o/a/x cultures (Rodriguez et al., 2021).

Hermandad: Spanish word for sisterhood (Castellanos, 2016).

Hispanic: A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

Latino/a/x: A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (United States Census Bureau, 2020).

Mujeres: Spanish word for women.

Pláticas: Spanish word for discussions (Castellanos, 2016; Kiyama, 2018).

Terquedad: Spanish word for stubbornness.

Testimonio: A form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions of this study based on constructivism or interpretive research was that I, as the researcher, relied on the participants' truths, views, discussions, and interactions, and I interpret my findings at the conclusion of the study

(see Creswell, 2013). Constructivists believe in multiple meanings; therefore, the goal of the study was to depend on the individuals' views of the phenomenon (see Creswell, 2013) with the understanding that the interpretation of these realities could have been shaped by my own experiences. The methodological assumptions embedded in narrative inquiry are that the nature of the participants' stories exists within a bigger social, cultural, linguistic, familial context (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Although narratives or stories are unique to every person, these narratives are influenced by interactions between people as well as social, cultural, and familial factors (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As the researcher I had to assume that the narratives of the participants could have been affected by our interactions and my own personal narrative and background.

The main practical assumption of my research was that the participants would be forthcoming and truthful with their experiences as college students and in their current administrative positions at their respective county colleges. Some may have withheld information due to concerns in their current workplace. The choice of *testimonios* as narrative analysis for interviewing participants proposed learning their lived realities and allowing their personal and professional trajectories to be a source of inquiry for further research. Furthermore, there was an assumption that all participants aware able to reserve and commit to scheduled interviews and debriefing processes.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was limited to one area: the state of New Jersey. The present study used public county community colleges in New Jersey where Latina administrators are employed. Participants were of Latina descent serving as vice

presidents, assistant vice presidents, deans, executive directors, and directors. Nine Latina administrators participated. Latinas in staff or entry level positions in county colleges in the state of New Jersey were excluded. In this study, I explored the college experience of Latina administrators and how this experience informed their perception of the impact academic and student support services have on Latina college students. In addition, this study assisted in discovering the inhibiting and facilitating factors of Latinas' college enrollment and completion.

In narrative inquiry, there is no definitive sample size, and in practice the range is typically five to 30 participants (Rudestam & Newton, 2015) or as small as one participant for a biographical study (Creswell, 2013). For my study, I used a small sample size of nine participants. One of the main reasons for choosing a small sample size was due to the limited number of Latina administrators in key leadership roles throughout the 18 county colleges in the state of New Jersey. Participant *testimonios* was another reason for choosing a smaller sample size for the present study. *Testimonios* can be long and detailed, which results in exhaustive transcripts that can be time-consuming for both the researcher and participants (Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

For the study to have potential transferability, I provided detailed descriptions from the participants' *testimonio s*and storytelling. I also ascertained that the settings had comprehensive information so as to be compared to other settings effortlessly (see Ravitch& Carl, 2016). My study involved the New Jersey community college system setting. Within this college system, the focus was on Latina administrators. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), this strategy allows other researchers to transfer characteristics

of a study design and its findings by considering the factors within the study instead of striving to duplicate the study design and findings.

Limitations

One main limitation in this study was the scant amount of literature on Latina students, administrators, or executives in leadership roles in institutions of higher education in the northeastern states neighboring New Jersey and the nonexistent literature and information on Latina students and administrators in New Jersey. Researcher bias was another limitation as I am a Latina woman and a current administrator at one of the county colleges. My perceptions, overall beliefs, and personal experiences may be similar to those of the participants.

Another limitation of this study was the study design, which relied on *testimonios* and storytelling. This study design can make the qualitative research a strongly personal and reflective style of research. Collecting extensive personal information about a participant's life requires intricate collaboration and a level of comfortability the researcher and participant might not immediately develop. Likewise, as the researcher, I had to be reflective regarding my own personal background as both a Latina and an administrator.

The reasonable measures to address these limitations was to review notes, transcripts, and recordings, engage in peer review, and conduct member checks and journaling for any discrepancies (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). These measures assisted me in checking for deficiencies or inaccuracies and assured that biases did not jeopardize

its dependability. Moreover, not having detailed descriptions of participant information provided can risk transferability.

Significance of the Study

This research helps fill a gap in understanding by focusing specifically on the inhibitors and facilitators Latina students experience on the road to collegiate success as narrated by current Latina administrators. The results of this research can assist policymakers, educational leaders, and college administrators with developing programs and services to facilitate their ability to successfully complete their community college education in the state of New Jersey. Latina/o students attending community colleges often encounter an increased amount of stress and negative emotions related to discrimination and racism (Genthe & Harrington, 2022). Latinx college students are often made to feel unfit in academic spaces and academically inferior compared to other racial/ethnic groups by the institutions responsible for their education and social development (Cheng et al., 2020). Because Latinas/os are the leading racial minority in the United States and a population that is poised to increase, supporting their successful attainment of a college degree allows for increased socioeconomic standards and mobility. A quality education and educational attainment are social determinants of health; thus, improving the quality of early and higher education of Latinas/os can result in higher socioeconomic status and reduced health disparities, such as hypertension, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease (Dudovitzet al., 2016; Mahika, 2021). Among Latinos, women often have higher rates of health disparities than men due to increased familial and household responsibilities and lower levels of education (López &

Yamashita, 2018). Health disadvantages of Latinos directly converts into the health disparities of the nation as Latinos continue to become a larger section of the United States population (López & Yamashita, 2018).

Summary

In this chapter, I provided a brief background on Hispanic population and its continued growth in the United States. I also discussed Latina enrollment and degree completion across institutions of higher education nationwide juxtaposed with a disproportionate rate of staff, faculty, and administration who do not represent their student populations. Next, in the problem statement, I described the growing college enrollment of Latina college students that is not accompanied by a corresponding representation of Latinas in leadership roles in any career, particularly in higher education. Latina staff, faculty, and administrators perform a substantial role on college campuses in helping to diversify not only the classrooms but the key common and public spaces of these institutions. I stated the purpose of the study: to explore how the college experience of Latina community college administrators informs their perception of the impact of academic and student support services on Latina college students. I also discussed the theoretical framework as basis for the research study. Finally, I addressed the nature of the study, definition of key terms, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance.

In Chapter 2, I present a comprehensive review of the existing literature and expand on the gap in the research. I describe Phinney's theoretical framework of ethnic identity and development, particularly as it develops during the transition to college. The

literature review focuses on the five main factors that assist and hamper Latina students'

enrollment and college completion. I identify the gap in the existing research. Finally, I

detail how this study may help in providing insight into current practices community

college administrators and leaders use to make colleges campuses more inclusive for

Latina students.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Latina female college enrollment and postsecondary attainment has steadily increased over the past 20 years in the state of New Jersey and across the United States. Faculty, staff, and administration in colleges and universities, nonetheless, do not represent their student populations, both locally and nationally. The purpose of this research was to explore how the college experience of Latina community college administrators informs their perception of the impact of academic and student support systems on Latina college students. Therefore, this study can aid community college leadership gain an increased awareness of the inhibiting and facilitating factors affecting Latina college enrollment and completion.

Current literature reviewed revealed that Latinos are the largest and second fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021); however, many Latinx community college students do not complete their coursework and leave college without a degree (Genthe & Harrington, 2022). In 2016, 49% of Latino students in New Jersey attended public 2-year institutions, but only 16% completed their community college degree within 3 years (Mugglestone & Dannenberg, 2019). Some of the obstacles affecting the Latino community college persistence and completion rates are financial barriers, lack of institutional support, educational preparation, psychosocial factors, familial/cultural issues, and first-generation status (Acevedo-Gil, 2018; Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020; Genthe & Harrington, 2022; Mugglestone & Dannenberg, 2019).

This chapter includes a description of the search strategies used to find relevant literature on Latina students and their experiences in community colleges. Next, I discuss Phinney's (1996, 2003) ethnic and racial development theory. Finally, I present the literature on inhibiting and facilitating factors leading to enrollment and college completion of Latina students and how Latina administrators are working to reshape community college culture to be more inclusive of Latinas.

Literature Search Strategy

The study's literature review was conducted using the following databases: ERIC, Education Source databases, EBSCO, Education Source, Sage Premier, and Google Scholar. The search terms used for research were *Hispanic/Latina female students, Latina identity, familismo, first-generation students, ethnic and racial development, racial and ethnic tension, community colleges, factors affecting enrollment and completion, financial aid, faculty and staff interaction, support programs, academic programs, discrimination, community college administrators, mentoring, peer interactions, peer support, cultural climate, diversity and inclusion, racism, sense of belonging, sense of purpose, self-efficacy, marginalization, microaggressions,* and *Latinas in higher education leadership.*

Studies on the subject of Latina students and administrators have been primarily based on Western states such as California, Arizona, and Texas. From the research conducted, the State of California has had the majority of studies on Latina students and administrators. However, the Eastern part of the country is not represented at all in current literature; this includes the state of New Jersey. For this study, population and

college completion data were obtained from educational and government websites such

as the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education (www.state.nj.us), the Higher

Education Student Assistance Authority (www.hesaa.org), and National Center for

Education Statistics (www.nces.ed.gov).

Theoretical Foundation

Phinney (2003) defined ethnic identity as a dynamic, multidimensional concept

that refers to a person's identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group. Ethnic

groups assert a common ancestry and share elements of culture, religion, language,

kinship, phenotype, and place of origin (Phinney, 1989, 1990, 2003). Phinney's (1989)

identity model comprised of a 3-stage progression: (a) an unexamined ethnic identity, (b)

a period of exploration, and (c) an achieved or committed ethnic identity. As a result of

this process, people gain insight and appreciation of their identity, which continues

modification over time as individuals become aware of differences within subgroups

(Phinney, 1989, 2003). Ethnic identity formation involves the development of both

personal and group identity, typically achieved with increasing age (Phinney, 1998, 2000,

2006). Achieving ethnic identity may be different for individuals who exhibit a high level

of confidence in their identity without conforming or adapting their ethnic language or

customs versus those individuals who deeply examine and seek meaning in their ethnic

identities. Ethnicity exploration presumably occurs during adolescence and into initial

adulthood where individuals feel a sense of identity acceptance and internalization

(Phinney, 2006; Syed et al., 2007). A secure, clear, and confident sense of ethnic identity

becomes apparent in an individual through their commitment and exploration (Phinney,

1989, 1990, 1996). An ongoing examination of identity, even after it has been achieved,

can occur for those individuals whose surroundings and contexts change, such as

attending college (Phinney, 2006; Syed et al., 2007).

Latinos' Ethnic Identity and College

Latino students attending college, particularly when they are the underrepresented

student body, undergo a reevaluation of race and ethnicity as a result of new experiences,

circumstances, and surroundings. Fluctuations in Latinos' ethnic identities are initiated,

partly, by challenges they encounter, such as the transition to college (Syed et al., 2007).

However, Latinos' adjustment to college can be ameliorated by establishing ethnic-

related organizations as well as faculty and institutional support (Schneider & Ward,

2003). Latino students risk positive academic and nonacademic performance at

institutions where they are greatly underrepresented and ethnic-related support is limited

(Schneider & Ward, 2003). Instead, academic and student services support should include

emphasis on cultural identity as identity development is an integral part of academic

development (Guerra et al., 2019).

Phinney et al. (2006) concluded that ethnically diverse college students mention

ethnic identity and cultural values as reasons for attending college. Furthermore, a secure

ethnic identity in this diverse group provides them with a sense of direction that may be

linked to higher educational attainment (Phinney & Lipuria,1996; Phinney et al., 2006).

A study on multiethnic, multiracial high school and college students revealed that they

were not at a psychological disadvantage due to their mixed background; on the contrary,

their multiethnicity afforded them an appreciation of diversity and a perceived future

lessening of intergroup conflicts (Phinney & Lipuria, 1996). Latino students who start college with a greater national identity augment their stages of ethnic identity commitment during their college journey more than those who start with a weaker national identity (Fuller et al., 2013). However, Latina/o students with a strong ethnic identity who sense a negative college environment may feel less committed to completing their degree (Hernández & Villodas, 2019). Family interdependence, parental support, and ethnic identity are key factors in college success for Latino students despite their low socioeconomic status and academic preparation at the beginning of enrollment (Ong et al., 2006).

Latinos in Community Colleges

The community college system in the United States enrolls the majority of Latino students, representing 51% of all Latino undergraduates in 2019 (Excelencia in Education, 2019; Zerquera et al., 2018). In the state of New Jersey, 49% of Latino students attended public 2-year institutions, but only 16% completed their community college degree within 3 years in 2016 (Mugglestone & Dannenberg, 2019). The Latino graduation rate from public 4-year institutions in New Jersey was 54% in 2016, a state where a higher percentage of new jobs requires a bachelor's degree or higher (Mugglestone & Dannenberg, 2019). Thus, investing in the higher educational future of Black and Latinx persons in New Jersey is imperative as they represent 33% of New Jersey's state population and 41% of the state's 0- to 25-year-old future generation (Mugglestone & Dannenberg, 2019). Failure to address these inequities in education can affect the economic future of these populations and the state.

Latino students often choose to enroll and attend community colleges for their proximity to home, affordable tuition rates, employment, and the desire to remain near family. Community colleges have open access policies providing educational opportunity for individuals with limited academic preparation. Despite the increase in Latino student enrollment nationwide, research on the Latino student experience has remained focused principally in California and Texas (Zerquera et al., 2018), and there is no existing literature on students in the Eastern portion of the country.

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

The Latina/o adult population constitutes one of the largest and fastest growing minority groups in the United States, increasing by 72% from 2000 to 2016 (Excelencia in Education, 2019). It is also the youngest; the median age of Latinos in 2017 was 29, compared to 41 for non-Hispanic Whites (Excelencia in Education, 2019). Despite the vast increase in the Latina/o population, their degree completion rates are significantly low. Only 23% of Latino adults have earned a college degree compared to 47% of non-Hispanic Whites (Excelencia in Education, 2019).

Inhibiting Factors to Enrollment and Completion

Latina/o community college students face academic and nonacademic challenges to enrollment and college completion. Some of the main challenges include but are not limited to being first-generation college students, coming from low-income backgrounds, poor college academic preparation in high school, comparably higher enrollment in developmental education courses, working full-time or part-time jobs, attending college part-time, lack of financial aid knowledge and assistance, being English language

learners, poor or nonexistent faculty interaction, minimal to no representation of Latina/o faculty, staff and administration, and lack of access to transfer information (Acevedo-Gil, 2018; Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020; Perez, 2020). Some studies have suggested that enrollment and persistence of Latino community college students decreases when they attend part-time or mix their enrollment, lack academic and social integration, and do not receive financial aid (Carales, 2020). While 40% percent of Latino students enroll in colleges full-time, the remaining 60% enroll exclusively part-time or mix their enrollment (Excelencia in Education, 2019). Part-time enrollment leads to lower persistence rates generally, but with Latinx students, an interruption to their college education could potentially lead to noncompletion (Genthe & Harrington, 2022).

Latina/o community college students enrolled in developmental courses often experience invalidation from faculty, which causes them to have lower educational aspirations, self-efficacy, and academic self-confidence (Acevedo-Gil, 2018; Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015). One study proposed that endemic racism, inadequate college information, and low expectations from academic personnel in K-12 are solely responsible for the limited postsecondary options afforded to Latina/o students when compared to their White counterparts (Gaxiola Serrano, 2017). On college campuses across the United States, the topic of race is often avoided and not implicitly engaged as reported by students and faculty while students of color feel as outsiders in these spaces (Flink, 2018; Vue et al., 2017). Montgomery et al. (2018) recommended that institutions offer workshops for faculty, staff, and students that concentrate on microaggressions, the changing demographics in the United States, and English language learners. This is

notably crucial because students who experience racial microaggressions feel less committed to completing college (Hernández & Villodas, 2019).

Deficit-oriented thinking in secondary and postsecondary education held by administrators place Latina/o students at a disadvantage. These beliefs are rooted in the idea that Latina/o students lack particular qualities, such as academic drive to succeed in higher education (Carales& López, 2020). Deficit-thinking predisposes school administrators to describe Latina/o students at fault for inferior academic performance because they enter the school system without standardized education and skills and with parents who do not value or support their education (Carales& López, 2020).

On average, Latino students work more than 30 hours a week to assist in financing their education; approximately 32% of Latino students work 40 or more hours, 19% work 30 to 39 hours, 26% work 20 to 29 hours, and 23% work 1 to 19 hours per week (Excelencia in Education, 2019). Colleges can ease Latina/o students work restrictions by offering work-study opportunities on and off-campus. Working on or close to campus not only reduces transportation costs to students, but it also increases the time they can dedicate to their coursework. Young Invincibles (2017) recommended changes to the federal work study program to include granting larger awards to higher education institutions that enroll and graduate financial aid eligible students at a higher rate. Flores et al. (2021) stated that the complex higher educational financial aid system, by means of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and other state and institutional requirements, place Latina/o students at a disadvantage. Latina/o parents' limited knowledge of the financial aid process, financial literacy challenges, and the lack of

multiethnic representation in offices such as financial aid potentially lock students out of aid eligibility (Flores et al., 2021; Genthe & Harrington, 2022). A significant number of students fail to complete their FAFSAs annually; 17% of Pell eligible Latina/o students do not complete the application (Young Invincibles, 2017), and the lack of financial aid may be barring them from degree attainment.

Facilitating Factors to Enrollment and Completion

The factors facilitating Latina/o enrollment and completion include college readiness programs, family engagement, positive staff and faculty interactions, diverse campus clubs and academic organizations, accessible and transparent transfer information, mentoring, and positive self-perception, which leads to increased levels of self-efficacy and confidence (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020; Marrun, 2020). Positive student-faculty interaction on college campuses increases a student's sense of belonging and intent to persist principally in Latina/o students who may be the first in their families to attend college (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020; Rodríguez et al., 2016). Additionally, it impacts students' persistence and confidence as college students (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015). Montelongo (2019) emphasized notwithstanding the low rates of Latina/o faculty, faculty in general still have a critical role in student academic persistence. Latino students want to connect specifically with Latino staff and faculty; however, the small number of Latino educators make it hard to do so (Genthe & Harrington, 2022). When Latino staff and faculty on campus are proportionally represented, it promotes a sense of belonging and integration among Latino students. Researchers found that when faculty maintain rigorous expectations for Latina/o students

work in their classes, students learn more (Lundberg et al., 2018). Although most community college faculty are hired part-time, more meaningful investment should be made from college administration to develop methods for assisting faculty in setting standards and assessing the way those standards affect student work (Lundberg et al., 2018). Faculty investment should not stop in training development; gains must also be made in representation. In institutions of higher education currently, added effort is being positioned on student services and outcomes rather than in existing infrastructural elements such as faculty to support academic student success (Contreras, 2017). Notwithstanding the existing studies demonstrating the benefits of having Latina/o faculty and administrators, colleges are not engaging or developing procedures that increase Latina/o representation in these roles. Santos and Acevedo-Gil (2013) recommended active recruitment and consideration of Latina/os for faculty and administrative positions in addition to providing existing Latina/o personnel with quality mentoring and professional development opportunities to prepare them for administrative roles. The successful recruitment and hiring of Latinx staff and faculty relies heavily on having diverse hiring committees as these tend to advance applicants who are similar to themselves (Muñoz, 2009).

In 2019, Lucero et al. conducted a study to examine the experiences of students who identified as Latino/a with a focus on their engagement of on-campus clubs and organizations. The study found that ethnically oriented clubs and organization provided a protected space for identity development and cultural affirmation (Lucero et al., 2019) as well as crucial support for successful persistence. An academic support center on campus

provided students with advising, mentoring, and cultural activities as yet another place where underrepresented students felt academically, emotionally, and culturally supported (Lucero et al., 2019; Murphy & Murphy, 2018). Identifying and connecting with an institution of higher education enhances Latinx students' satisfaction and sense of belonging (Garcia& Dwyer, 2018). Heredia et al. (2018), expanded on the recommendation of establishing culturally sensitive support programs for Latino/a students by having said programs inform students of the benefits of feeling interconnectedness to the college. Latina/o students are confident in their decision to attend a specific college when they feel the environment is supportive and comfortable (Heredia et al., 2018). Furthermore, ingroup representation of Latino students on campus positively associates with increased persistence (Genthe & Harrington, 2022).

Mentoring as a retention strategy has been a growing and successful trend among institutions of higher education. Most undergraduate college students do not have access to formal mentorship opportunities. The opportunities for Hispanic students and other underrepresented minorities are minimal, and for Hispanic women mentorship programs are almost nonexistent. Latinas face a lack of mentors in their field, particularly in higher education where marginalization occurs not only based on ethnicity but also on gender (Gomez, 2020; Menchaca et al., 2016; Rodríguez, et al., 2016). Mireles-Rios and Garcia (2019) stressed mentoring relationships should start as soon as students arrive at the institution as the first-year transition to college from high school may prove strenuous on most; particularly when first-generation college students are more likely to stop out during their second academic year. Community college administrators should establish

mentorship programs on their campuses for Latinx students and in doing so prioritize the

recruitment of diverse faculty and staff to spearhead them. Contreras (2017) determined

diverse faculty and staff are more likely to mentor students of color and are further

engaged with student organizations.

Cuellar and Gonzalez (2021) suggested Latina/o students are more likely to aspire

to earn a degree beyond a bachelors when they enter college with an initial aspiration to

earn an advanced degree. Therefore, it is imperative for community colleges to have

resources on their campuses such as academic advising, career services, and financial aid

to not only inform but also to further support Latina/o students. Establishing these college

and career pathways as soon as they enter college will provide students with knowledge

on the different graduate degrees and the types of experiences that will prepare them for

these future opportunities such as exam preparation, internships, field and/or clinical

work (Cuellar & Gonzalez, 2021). In a case study focused on a TRIO program at a four-

year private university in California, Perez (2020) found that bridging services assists in

retaining and graduating first-generation, low-income Latinas. The study further showed

Latina students become galvanized when they have mentors who teach them

responsibility and how to advocate for themselves in their college careers (Perez, 2020).

Marrun (2020) challenged the deficit-based generalization that Latino families are

unsupportive and uncaring regarding their children's post-secondary education. The

researcher found that family engagement with regards to academic aspirations positively

influenced Latino students' persistence and college graduation (Marrun, 2020). Although

Latino parents have limited knowledge of higher education and may not fully

comprehend the process of enrolling and ultimately attending college, they manifest engagement by emotionally supporting their children and validating their college experiences with their own family narratives of hardship and persistence. Capannola and Johnson (2022) explored family relationship experiences of first-generation college students and found the students' academic success was due to their parents and not despite them. Furthermore, the importance of familial relationships extends from just a parental one. The participants in this study indicated that relationships with siblings, grandparents, cousins, and aunts were as equally influential (Capannola & Johnson, 2022).

Based on the knowledge on the emphasis on the role of the family in the Latina/o culture, institutions of higher education should reach out and include the families of prospective and current students. More importantly, parents of first-generation college students need college orientation workshops and programming (Flink, 2018; Montelongo, 2019). The research of Kouyoumdjian et al. (2017) reinforced key sources of support for college students stemmed from family as well as supportive partners and friends. Further studies suggest increasing college readiness of Latino students not only through academic support skills but also through parental involvement (Ozuna et al., 2016). Latino parents' lack of knowledge and information about college create doubts in their minds on how to best support their children which leads school personnel to assume parents are disinterested and unsupportive. Including parents in their children's college journey and providing them with relevant information such as workshops on college preparation, financial aid, and inviting them to college visits can increase their confidence and ability

to support college making decisions (Ozuna et al., 2016). In Palomin's (2020) study, parents recommended high school districts increase their presence in the communities by hosting college fairs, financial air workshops, and college requirements in different community buildings. By moving these preparatory events within the communities where the high schools are located, it creates neutral spaces where all parents from differing social classes and backgrounds can benefit from the same college preparation information (Palomin, 2020). Langenkamp and Hoyt (2019) proposed postsecondary institutions consider developing summer programs to start building social support networks, create social inclusion, pair students with mentors and bringing parents to campus. Once students are on campus, student support services should continue such as career advising, tutoring, mentoring, and learning communities (Hu & Blanco, 2021). Additionally, Cuevas (2020) found in order to alleviate parental misinformation and a misconstrued notion of college life, both secondary and postsecondary institutions should inform Latina/o parents on the mechanisms of higher education particularly hosting workshops about what occurs after students commence college.

Olivarez (2020) interviewed five Latina/o students and their families to explore their understanding of the process of choosing and ultimately going to college. Utilizing funds of knowledge as the framework for her study, Olivarez asserted that families can and actually do help their children, using the accumulated knowledge within the home, in choosing to attend college (Olivarez, 2020). The knowledge within the home combined with parental intuition, steered parents in providing emotional support to their children as they made application decisions for college (Olivarez, 2020). Familial caring

relationships in Latina college students are a protective and influential factor as they serve as strategies of resistance against the oppression Latinx students experience entering college (Díaz de Sabatés & Taylor, 2021). Community college administrators should continue to capitalize on activating funds of knowledge in the home to retain students. One way is to provide college materials such as college brochures, financial aid, and scholarship information in the parents' native language (Olivarez, 2020). When parents are furnished with college knowledge, specifically in their native language, they can have meaningful conversations with their children regarding college choice, cost, and programming.

The Latina Experience

Latina college students' trend toward independence and self-reliance has been on the rise lately, however, their purpose for attending college continues to remain centered on family needs of alleviating "financial burden, increase social capital, and provide opportunities for upward mobility" (Sy & Romero, 2008 p. 223). These familial obligations, perceived as deficit notions, essentially serve as sources of support, encouragement, and assistance for Latina students (Sapp, Kiyama, & Dache-Gerbino, 2016). Notwithstanding the challenges and barriers some Latina students face in school settings, they display an important level of self-efficacy and "activate agency in order to position themselves for college opportunity (Sapp, Kiyama, & Dache-Gerbino, 2016 p. 46). Kiyama's (2018) use of *testimonios* in her study of Latina students affirmed they value education and agency which manifests itself inside and outside of the classroom. Latina students confidently proclaim their place and space as well as consign

accountability on college staff for supporting their educational success (Kiyama, 2018).

Latina college students want to be seen beyond stereotypes and deficit-thinking due to

their ethnicity, cultural and academic background, and socioeconomic status. The

existing literature is abundant in recommendations for the creation of culturally and

ethnically diverse clubs and organizations across campus colleges. Castellanos (2016)

dares to go further and endorses specific organizations on college campuses for Latina

students where they can create a network of *hermandad* or sisterhood and provide a

nurturing environment during their college journey. One type of sisterhood organization

developed as a mentoring program to support Latina undergraduates, *Las Comadres,*

(López et al., 2020) was established in 2016 in the University of Houston. A five-year

longitudinal qualitative study on *Las Comadres* found this type of program established a

sense of community among its members as they each possessed a common interest,

commitment, and collective determination in empowering Latinas (López et al., 2020).

Velarde Pierce (2020) interviewed Latinas in administrative leadership positions

at institutions of higher education applying *testimonios* as research design for the study

and discovered their path to these high-level positions were wrought with challenges and

barriers. The participants provided *consejos* for aspiring Latina administrators focusing

mainly on identifying role models and mentors; creating support networks; hard work;

being authentic and keeping true to self; and visualizing success (Velarde Pierce, 2020).

Haber-Curran and Tapia-Fuselier (2020) challenged campus administrators to reimagine

leadership opportunities for Latinx students that center on their diverse identities and

experiences, developing programming with asset-based approaches and a focus on

community of all students. Onorato and Musoba (2015) further suggested leadership training experiences should encourage the understanding that leadership is not gender, race, ethnicity neutral and although they do not advocate for separate training, it is simply recommended it not be ignored.

The existing literature on Latino students, specifically, Latina students have been exclusively researched in colleges and institutions located in the Western portion of the country. The institutions of higher education where these studies have been conducted stem largely from California, Texas, Arizona, Colorado. The limited data that exists for Hispanic/Latino students in the Northeast has been typically researched by the Community College Research Center located in the Teachers College at Columbia University. Leinbach and Bailey (2006), in the last comprehensive study on Hispanic students enrolled in the City University of New York system, which is comprised of both community and 4-year colleges, found that Hispanics primarily attend community colleges regardless of being foreign-born or native-born. With the knowledge of the limited studies on Hispanic/Latino students in the Northeast section of the country, particularly in the community college sector, this research focuses on the gap in research on Latina college students in community colleges in the state of New Jersey.

Summary and Conclusions

In my review of the literature, I examined research studies conducted to determine the facilitators and inhibitors of Latino students' enrollment and completion of a college degree. The review exposed that college readiness programs, family engagement, positive staff and faculty interaction, diverse campus clubs and academic organizations, accessible

and transparent transfer information, mentoring, positive self-perception which leads to increased levels of self-efficacy are key facilitators that may support improved educational outcomes for Latino college students.

The literature review also revealed academic and nonacademic challenges Latino students encounter. Some of the main challenges are poor college academic preparation in high school, lack of financial aid knowledge and assistance, poor or nonexistent faculty interaction, minimal to no representation of Latina/o faculty, staff and administration, and lack of access to transfer information.

In this chapter, the literature relating to the factors that facilitate and inhibit Latina students from enrolling and completing a college degree was reviewed. The review began with the discussion of the theoretical framework that shaped this research and the key variables and concepts of the literature review. The existing literature on Latino college students, specifically, Latina students have been exclusively researched in colleges and institutions located in Western states. However, no studies emerged that focused on the community college experiences leading to degree completion of Latina/o students in the Northeastern part of the country, particularly in New Jersey.

In Chapter 3, I describe the research design and rationale for the design and the RQs. I also describe my role as a researcher, including discussion of potential biases. I include a description of the methodology for participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Lastly, I summarize issues concerning trustworthiness and the ethical procedures that will guide the research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

While Latina student enrollment in institutions of higher education has been steadily increasing the last 2 decades, the staff, faculty, and administration at these colleges and universities do not reflect their student demographical composition. While only 18% of the overall population is Latino, 25% of students in K-12 education are Latino (Excelencia in Education, 2020). The United States experienced a decline of 7.2 million children between 2000 and 2017 among Whites and an increase of 6.4 million children among Latinos (Sáenz, 2020). As more Latino students begin postsecondary education, leadership at these institutions should be prepared to have an increasingly young, Latino, first-generation population of college students (Excelencia in Education, 2020).

The purpose of this study was to explore how the college experience of Latina community college administrators informs their perception of the impact of academic and student support services on Latina college students. Consequently, in this study, I used a qualitative research approach.

This chapter detailed the importance of narrative inquiry in the form of *testimonios*. Additionally, I explained the rationale for the research design. I discussed the role of the researcher and positionality, and I described participant recruitment, data instrumentation and collection, and procedures for data analysis. Finally, I addressed issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

One main RQ and two sub questions were designed to describe the experiences of Latina community college administrators in their journey from college students to college personnel guided this research.

RQ1: What academic and student support services do Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive would impact Latina student's degree completion?

Sub-RQ2: What are the factors that Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive to inhibit Latinas' enrollment and college completion?

Sub-RQ3: What are the factors that Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive to facilitate Latinas' enrollment and college completion?

I chose a qualitative approach for my research design. Qualitative research endeavors to comprehend and study individuals, groups, and phenomena in their normal settings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For this study, quantitative methods would not have encapsulated the depth and breadth of Latina community college administrators and their experiences from and within higher education. Latino/a students are a marginalized yet growing population across college campuses nationwide; therefore, a qualitative study was appropriate for describing the lived experience and intergroup diversity of marginalized Latinx populations (see Delgado-Romero et al., 2018, p. 318). Qualitative research allows for narratives, expressions, and the lived experience of Latinx people to inform and inspire others to better understand their complexity (Delgado-Romero et al., 2018).

Specifically, I used narrative inquiry, which works to understand, provide knowledge, and examine personal stories (see Patton, 2015). Narrative researchers collect stories from individuals about their lived and told experiences (Creswell, 2013). I considered phenomenology before concluding that a narrative approach would be the best approach. A narrative study reports the stories of a single person or several whereas a phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several persons of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Narrative analysis explains that personal narratives are not deemed simply as personal but rather serves to emphasize the complicated relationship between the individual and society (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience, lived and told, not only lived, as in phenomenological studies (Creswell, 2013).

Colleges and universities, and community colleges in particular, are the bedrock of educational achievement for Latinx students (Acevedo-Gil, 2018; Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020). As the main contributors to the degree completion process of Latino/a students, community college administrators should pay special attention to institutional challenges such as developmental education, faculty and student representation, and the social, cultural, and educational programs they provide to Latino/a students. Institutional and academic researchers in colleges and universities have started to encourage the amplification of qualitative research studies to enhance their awareness on the experiences of students of color (Abrica, 2019). However, institutional and academic researchers have a responsibility to include qualitative approaches in their research methods to question and account the racial disparities in transfer, degree, and certificate

completion in community colleges rather than simply report and quantify these observations (Abrica, 2019).

Bochner (as cited in Patton, 2015) suggested that narrative inquiry has the potential to honor people's stories as stand-alone or it can be examined for associations between the psychosocial, cultural, and political aspects of human experience. Narratives can be beneficial in critical research as an opportunity to include characteristically marginalized voices and allowing their stories to serve as counternarratives that debate universally accepted claims (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Narrative researchers can choose from different types of narratives for guiding their collection of stories, and oral history rooted in *testimonios* was the one I chose for this research (see Creswell, 2013).

Testimonios as Narrative Inquiry

Testimonios as narrative accounts has its roots in Latin American human rights struggles, marginalization, resistance, and oppression (Bernal et al., 2017). The Latina Feminist Group (2001) described *testimonio* as "a form of expression that comes out of intense repression or struggle, where the person bearing witness tells the story to someone else, who then transcribes, edits, translates, and publishes the text elsewhere" (p.13). *Testimonio* involves the individual in reflection of their personal experience (Bernal et al., 2017), witnesses to their own lived realities, and creators of their own space (Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Participant t*estimonios* analyzed through Phinney's (2003) theory of racial and ethnic development can assist researchers in documenting individuals' untold stories as a

means to convey marginalization as a result of race, gender, and sexuality (Reyes &

Curry Rodriguez, 2012).

Role of the Researcher

The credibility of the researcher and the role of the researcher as the main

instrument (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) of the study is paramount. Researcher reflexivity is the

ongoing and methodical valuation of the researcher's individuality, positionality, and

subjectivities (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Reflexivity involves constant vigilance of the

researcher's role and influence on the research as well as understanding of biases and

subjectivities during data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Some of the practices I used

to address this were reflective journaling; reviewing notes, transcripts, recordings;

engaging in peer review; and conducting member checks (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016;

Rudestam & Newton, 2015).

Researchers must continuously explore their own biases and prejudices

throughout all phases and stages of the research process. Understanding my personal

biases and subjectivities during the data collection process shaped my experience as my

convictions, acculturation, and comprehension of notions and experiences may appear

neutral but are admittedly wholly subjective, political, and value laden (see Ravitch &

Carl, 2016).

Positionality

I am a Latina student services administrator with 21 years of experience in higher

education. My interest in this topic is rooted in my personal experience as a Latina female

student with an undergraduate and various graduate degree from different private and

public institutions of higher education in urban parts of New York City. Additionally, my previous and active roles as a financial aid executive administrator in institutions of higher education in New York and New Jersey have afforded me with first-hand knowledge and experience of the economic, educational, and social barriers students face while attempting to pursue a postsecondary degree. As a postsecondary school administrator in southern New Jersey, the trend of Latino students enrolling at the college continues to rise year after year while the representation of Latino staff, faculty, and administrators is minimal to nonexistent. During monthly, quarterly, and yearly meetings with their respective affinity groups, other Latino college administrators working in admissions, registration, and academic affairs offices throughout the council of community county colleges in New Jersey noticed the same phenomenon. Thus, we sought out each other, started monthly *pláticas,* and formed a *comunidad* to pursue answers, commonalities, and resources.

As a Latina woman, the importance of education was impressed upon me by my parents and extended family at an early age. I was born in the Dominican Republic. In 1987, my parents left their home country and immigrated to the United States in search of a better life. I was 8 years old; my little brother was 4, and my sister was just 2 months old. I am a proud product of the public school system in New York City where my family settled. As the first person in my family to attend college, I left the familiar comfort of my small apartment in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan and embarked to the Fordham section of the Bronx to commence my undergraduate studies at Fordham University. Left behind was my beloved Latino community, a predominantly Dominican

one, and in turn, I entered a space I did not know, where I was "otherized,"
"marginalized," and made to feel "deficient." Missing were other students who looked
like me. There were only about 30 Latino students in the College of Business
Administration school at Fordham in 2001 and no Latinos in leadership roles, staff, or
faculty. The few Latinos working at Fordham were relegated to service jobs; they were
our custodians, the housekeepers in our residential halls, and the cooks and caterers in our
cafeterias.

My career in higher education started months later in a public 4-year college in
New York where I witnessed a slight improvement in Latino/a representation among staff
and students but not among faculty or administration. Years later and a state over, I
started working at a county community college in New Jersey where I was the only
Latina in an executive administrative role. There are no structures in place to advance
inclusion and diversity of college personnel within existing roles nor at the human
resources level. I was dismayed to learn all 18 county colleges in New Jersey suffer a
similar fate. There are very few Latino/a administrators in community college
administration, and the ones in these coveted roles lack influence and institutional
cultural capital to enact social change. Therefore, I believe my background provided a
solid foundation for my topic and as my role as a researcher.

Finally, I managed potential researcher bias by often reassessing my positionality
and engaging in self-reflection. My perceptions, overall beliefs, and personal experiences
may be similar to those of the participants. Some of the practices I used to address this
was reflective journaling, taking notes, and drafting research memos.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Participants selected for this study were Latina administrators employed in county community colleges located in the state of New Jersey. Purposeful sampling was used for the identification and selection of participants (see Creswell, 2013). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research consists of selecting individuals who can provide an understanding of the problem and phenomenon in the study (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The participation criteria were participants who (a) self-identified as Hispanic or Latina, and (b) held an upper-level higher education administrative position at a county college in New Jersey. The participants for this study were identified by contacting them as a result of my personal and professional circles, which aided me in identifying nine participants for the study. With narrative inquiry, saturation is the key factor for sample size (Rudestam & Newton, 2015). Data collection should be discontinued when the results are proven redundant (Ravitch& Carl, 2016). Once confirmed for participation, each of the participants received an email (Appendix A) about the study with a formal invitation to participate as well as a consent form.

The U.S. Census Bureau defined Hispanic or Latino as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (United States Census Bureau, 2020). For the purposes of this study, the U.S. Census Bureau definition of Hispanic or Latino was used.

Instrumentation

For qualitative researchers, the data collection instrument of choice is the interview. The main goals of a qualitative interview are to obtain insight into participants' lived experience, understand how participants make sense of the phenomenon studied, and explore how their experiences relate to other study participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I developed a semi structured, open-ended interview guide (see Appendix B). Rubin and Rubin (2012) suggested preparing an interview guide in advance as a useful tool. A key characteristic of a good qualitative interview is the development of the main questions, follow-up questions, and probes. The main questions ensure that each of the individual parts of a RQ are answered, the follow-up questions are used when researchers want the interviewees to expound on an idea, event, or concept they mentioned, and probes are expressions that can encourage interviewees to continue talking (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Each question was developed to understand and discover the experiences of Latina community college administrators in their journey as college students. I developed the interview questions using my literature review and theoretical framework. The interview questions address the RQs I sought to explore in this study. The initial questions asked the participants about the main factors that inhibited and facilitated their enrollment and college completion. The last set of questions asked the participants about the academic and student support services they perceived would impact Latina student's degree completion and would be most advantageous in reshaping college culture to be more inclusive for Latina students.

The interview questions were developed based on Phinney's (2003) concepts of racial and ethnic development, which afforded the participants the opportunity to use their *testimonios* as counternarratives to challenge the stereotypes, deficits, and negative identities society claims as true.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The recruitment of participants that met the participation criteria began upon approval from the Institutional Review Board. I started by contacting potential participants in my professional and personal networks. I am a member of local and state professional organizations such as the New Jersey Association of Financial Aid Administrators, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, and Council of County Colleges, among others. I also actively participate in my college's senate, committees, and staff/faculty organizations.

The participants recruited for this study were identified by contacting them as a result of my personal and professional circles. During professional conferences, meetings, and networking events I was scheduled to attend, I explained my study and the participation criteria to colleagues. I expected some would volunteer themselves for the study and others would provide me with contact information for potential participants as we all belong to a comprehensive list of state higher education educators. The sector of county colleges in New Jersey consists of 18 colleges whose administrators and executives work closely together on academic and nonacademic issues that affect our student populations. The lack of diversity in staff, faculty, and administration is at the center of our collective concerns. The county college sector formed a general Diversity

and Inclusion Committee, of which I am a member, with the goal of developing smaller

committees at each institution. Therefore, this study resonated with mid- and upper-level

administrators within the sector who as women are in the minority, as Latina women,

even more so. Once I confirmed the selected individuals for participation, I sent them an

invitation email (Appendix A) and consent form. Upon receipt of the consent form, I

contacted each participant to schedule either an in-person, WebEx, or Zoom interview.

The face-to-face interviews were recorded on a digital recorder as well as on my iPhone

with an application called Audio Recorder. The virtual interviews were recorded, and the

links were emailed to the account attached to my Zoom and/or WebEx subscriptions.

At the start of each of the interviews, I introduced myself as the interviewer and

reiterated the purpose of the interview as it related to the study. The interview protocol

and subsequent questions were created with the purpose of developing a conversational

partnership between the researcher and interviewee. Rubin and Rubin (2012) defined a

conversational partnership as a relationship between the researcher and interviewee that

fosters open, candid, and detailed responses. Both parties play an active role in this

partnership, leading to a respectful and cooperative experience in which the interviewee

feels understood and trusted as a reliable source of information on the topic (Rubin &

Rubin, 2012). Qualitative researchers should organize and reorganize data while

engaging with data via multiple strategies. Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained that

analyzing interviews includes multiple steps: transcribing and summarizing; coding,

sorting, and comparing; weighing and integrating; generating a theory; and generalizing

findings. Memos and reflective journals were composed throughout the interview process and were also used as data.

Data sources that complement the interviews will be direct observation, field notes, memos, and reflexive journaling as they will allow me to "comment upon impressions, environmental contexts, behaviors, and nonverbal cues" (Sutton & Austin, 2015 p.227). It is important to take notes during or immediately after the interviews. The notes you take before, during, and after the interview provide additional insight into the process and the interviewee. Halcomb and Davidson (2006) stated the use of written field notes are reported as superior to the exclusive use of audio or video recordings. Additionally, the interviewer can recognize and allocate extra weight to a comment because the interviewee contemplated more about the subject (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), where a computer program cannot.

Direct Observation

Whether the interviews are conducted in person or virtually, I engaged in direct observations, noting distractions (if any), interactions that occurred, as well as any other body language cues I could discern from these meetings.

Field Notes

If the interviews were conducted in person, field notes were collected at each one. The use of field notes can be catalogued and include specifics about the location, environmental factors, participant behavior, events that occur, and any thoughts that I may have related to observations.

Memos

Research memos assist researchers in documenting initial thoughts, impressions, insights, and learnings (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Memos should be composed throughout to document the process. Memos should be dated and shared if utilizing peer reviewers. Memos included my observations and reflections, interactions with the interviewees, my questioning during the interviews and ways to improve for the upcoming ones, and how I may be influencing the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Reflective Journaling

Reflective journaling is a common practice used by researchers that provides a constant and structured way to reflect on the research process, potential biases, identifying thoughts, emotions, and ideas (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). During the study, I reflected often on how participant interviews were conducted, the similarities and differences between participants and their experiences, the richness of the participants' storytelling, and the familiarity of their experiences with my own. All nine participants are bilingual as am I, and we repeatedly switched between English and Spanish. We all had some iteration of the *dichos* or *refranes* our parents and grandparents taught us while growing up regardless of country of origin.

Data Analysis

Patton (2015) described twelve tips for ensuring a strong foundation for qualitative analysis: (a) begin analysis during field work, (b) inventory and organize the data, (c) fill gaps in the data, (d) protect the data, (e) express appreciation, (f) reaffirm the purpose of your inquiry, (g) review exemplars for inspiration and guidance, (h) make

qualitative analysis software decisions, (i) schedule intense, dedicated time for analysis, (j) clarify and determine your initial analysis strategy, (k) be reflective and reflexive, and (l) start and keep an analysis journal (p.523). According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), qualitative data analysis is the intentional, systematic scrutiny of data at various stages and moments throughout the research process (p. 217) and should begin as soon as data are collected.

Analyzing interviews includes multiple steps, transcribing and summarizing, coding, sorting, and comparing, weighing, and integrating, generating your own theory, and generalizing findings (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Nine interviews were conducted for this study. Participants were debriefed at the end of each interview and guided on the next steps. After the interviews are transcribed, they were shared with the participants for accuracy and revisions. In line with Sutton and Austin (2015), the most important part of data analysis and management is to be true to the participants.

The generic coding method of using first cycle and second cycle coding will be used for the interviews. The first cycle coding methods include in vivo coding which derives from the actual language of the participants (Saldaña, 2016). The second cycle coding method, thematic analysis, includes pattern or focused coding which categorizes coded data as an initial analytic strategy (Saldaña, 2016). Thematic analysis is suitable for interviews where there is a focus on identity development (Saldaña, 2016). Rubin and Rubin (2012) explained the fundamental part of early analysis of data is to recognize and identify concepts, themes, events, and examples. The direct observations, field notes, memos and reflexive journals were coded as well using the generic coding method of first

cycle and thematic coding. The qualitative data analysis software I used to organize the data collected was NVivo 14. NVivo 14 software allows the user to import text, audio, video, emails, images, spreadsheets, online surveys, web content and social media from various sources into a simple, intuitive interface.

Issue of Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness, researchers must set research boundaries. According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), setting boundaries is important at the outset of the research and throughout the study. These boundaries are determined by the roles we play as researchers and how this dynamic may influence the research. Researchers should not be overly friendly or appear removed (Ravitch & Carl, 2016), therefore finding that middle ground is key. Ravitch and Carl (2016) opined to not over promise at the beginning or at any time during the research as we may not be able to keep promises of being able to share all findings or continue to offer ongoing assistance well after the study has been completed. Setting these boundaries and expectations upfront and continuously prevents unintended harm and the breach of our own ethics as researchers. Similarly, we must be careful with reciprocity when it comes to the participants in the study.

Ensuring the quality, trustworthiness, and credibility of my qualitative research starts with exhibiting reflexive attention to the existential, relational, contextual, and ultimately dialogical nature of the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). For quality in my research, I ensured the research methods I employed were well established and had been efficaciously applied in previous comparable research projects (see Shento, 2004).

Moreover, I ascertained triangulation in my research and use different methods such as observations and individual interviews (see Shento, 2004).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the ability of the researcher to allow for the intricacies that arise in the study and how to make sense of the patterns from the instruments used throughout the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I used member checks and peer debriefers to assist in establishing credibility in my study. The utilization of instruments such as observations and reflective journaling will contribute to codes and categories.

Transferability

Transferability in qualitative study refers to the findings and their applicability or transferability to other contexts while "still maintaining their context-specific richness" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016 p.189). Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Ravitch & Carl, 2016) explain that to achieve transferability the research should have detailed description of data and context so as to enable readers to make comparisons to other contexts based on the information provided. My goal with this study was to discover the main factors that facilitate and hinder Latina student's enrollment and successful college degree completion to add to theory development and knowledge for community college administrators, leaders, and educators.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the reliability and the stability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016) of the data over time. Developing a solid research design which includes a robust data collection plan is vital to achieving dependability (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The

dependability of the data in this study was its consistency and accuracy. To demonstrate dependability in my study, I ensured that the data collection methods I employed were answering the RQs.

Confirmability

Confirmability represents a researcher's objectivity with confirmable data while also acknowledging their biases and prejudices through researcher reflexivity processes throughout the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To demonstrate confirmability in my study, I implemented researcher reflexivity processes and established an external audit by having member checks.

Ethical Procedures

Researchers are faced with unique ethical challenges of protecting privacy, minimizing harm, and respecting the shared experiences of others, particularly in the information age. Confidentiality in qualitative research is related to an individual's privacy and how the data related to said individual will be distributed throughout the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To protect participants' privacy, researchers may utilize pseudonyms or omit specific identifiable information such as names or job titles in the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I obtained consent from each participant by emailing them the consent form and having each participant reply to my college email with the phrase, "I consent". According to Rudestam and Newton (2015), the two main ethical issues when utilizing participants in research are the need to obtain their fully informed consent and ensuring they emerge from the experience unharmed. Therefore, I assured participant confidentiality and established a safe atmosphere where participants could share

meaningful experiences. Pseudonyms were assigned to each participant to protect their identity.

I assumed that some interview questions could be upsetting or distressing to participants, and I anticipated such risk by outlining this possibility first-hand at the onset of the scheduled interviews. Topics such as discrimination and immigration status can arise, and the combination of questions and answers can bring back painful or unpleasant memories or feelings. As outlined in the consent form, I reminded the participants that their participation in this study was voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time.

I informed each participant that the data collected were stored on a password-protected computer and I was the sole person with access to said computer. After five years, all documents related to this study will be deleted and shredded.

After applying and receiving approval through Walden University's Institutional Review Board, I started conducting the study. The approval number for my study (12-05-22-0724134)was included in the consent form provided to participants.

Summary

In this chapter I identified the RQs and explored the method that will be used in this research. I described my role as a researcher and identified any potential biases stemming from personal and professional relationships. I detailed the research design and rationale, participant selection and recruitment, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures involved. This research sought to discover the experiences of Latina community college administrators in their journey as college students and determine how these experiences informed their knowledge of the institutional systems that hinder or support Latinas. The

purpose of this research was to fill a gap in the research by focusing explicitly on Latina

community college administrators in the state of New Jersey. In Chapter 4, I reflect on

the results of this research. I will share themes and finding through individual testimonios

of the participants and inform aspiring and future New Jersey Latina college

administrators.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to explore how the college experience of Latina community college administrators informed their perception of the impact of academic and student support services on Latina college students. The purpose of the study was to explore the barriers and success factors that contributed to the degree completion of nine Latina administrators. The following RQ and sub questions were explored:

RQ1: What academic and student support services do Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive would impact Latina student's degree completion?

Sub-RQ2: What are the factors that Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive to inhibit Latinas' enrollment and college completion?

Sub-RQ3: What are the factors that Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive to facilitate Latinas' enrollment and college completion?

In this chapter, I present the setting followed by the participant demographics. Then, I discuss the data collection process and analysis of the data including codes, categories, themes, and evidence of trustworthiness. The results of the analysis address the themes that emerged from the data. I conclude Chapter 4 with a summary and transition to Chapter 5.

Setting

For this study, nine Latina administrators shared their narratives regarding their college journey as students and how it impacted their current role as they seek to assist students navigate their own college journeys on their campuses. The setting for this study was not affected by any personal or organizational conditions that could have influenced participants or their experience at the time of the study and, consequently, could affect the interpretation of the results. The process for recruitment, participation, and selection of the participants followed the procedures outlined in Chapter 3.

As a result of the hybrid and remote schedules of the participants due to the COVID-19 pandemic and institutional remote work policies, two of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, and seven were conducted via WebEx.

Demographics

The participants were nine Latina administrators working in the New Jersey community college system. The participants' demographic information is shown in Table 1, followed by a brief profile. I provide generic personal details about their specific roles and number of years in higher education to maintain confidentiality and privacy. All nine participants were given pseudonyms, and each name represents a meaningful woman in my own family. Table 1 shows the demographics of the nine participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Title	Years in Higher ed
Martha	Executive director	12
Doris	Vice president	30+
Yanet	Vice president	19
Maria	Director	17
Isabel	Assistant vice president	15
Luisa	Director	20+
Xiomara	Dean	16
Sobeyda	Assistant vice president	18
Lidia	Associate dean	15

Participant Profiles

- Martha is a Puerto-Rican and Argentinian executive director who has been in higher education for 12 years, first in academic affairs and now in student affairs. She is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Administration.

- Doris is a vice president with over 30 years of higher education experience in academic affairs in Florida and New Jersey. She immigrated from Venezuela as a young adult and earned her doctorate in 2006.

- Yanet is a vice president with 19 years of student affairs higher education experience. She is Puerto-Rican and grew up in the Bronx, New York. She earned her doctorate in 2011.

- Maria is a Puerto-Rican Director with 17years of experience in student services at a county college.

- Isabel is an assistant vice president with 15 years of experience in both academic and student affairs. She is Puerto-Rican and earned her doctorate in 2020.

- Luisa is a director with over 20 years of student affairs experience in higher education. She is Puerto-Rican and earned her doctorate in 2020.

- Xiomara is a Colombian academic dean with 16 years of experience in academic and student affairs in a county college.

- Sobeyda is an assistant vice president with 18 years of student affairs experience in higher education. She is Peruvian and earned her doctorate in 2018.

- Lidia is a Cuban associate dean with 15 years of academic affairs experience in higher education. She is currently pursuing a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership and Administration.

Data Collection

The number of participants in the study was nine. The location for seven of the nine interviews was via WebEx, conducted from our respective home and work offices. The remaining two face-to-face individual interviews were conducted at an agreed upon secluded location. Each of the interviews ranged from 90 minutes to 2 hours in length, and all were completed in one session, with no to a few minor interruptions.

The WebEx interviews were recorded and later transcribed from the software itself. The data for the face-to-face interviews were recorded both on an electronic recording device and on my mobile phone with an application called Audio Recorder. The interviewees were informed and provided verbal consent to the recording. Data from all interviews were transcribed by me. The transcriptions were then imported into the NVivo 14 software for coding and analysis. There were no variations in data collection from the plan presented in Chapter 3. Additionally, no unusual circumstances were encountered in the data collection for this study.

<div align="center">**Data Analysis**</div>

This study is qualitative, and I used narrative inquiry as a method to discover themes that emerged from the experiences of the Latina administrators working in county community colleges and narrating their college journeys. I listened to and watched the nine interviews as well as carefully read the transcriptions approximately 10 times before importing the data into the data analysis software. Employing the NVivo 14 software program (2023), the student license option, the participant narratives were imported for the generation of codes. NVivo offers automated coding tools that assist in the coding process, which allows the researcher to quickly identify and code recurring words or phrases. Once the NVivo import analysis was completed, 75 recurring words or phrases were identified across the participant narratives. I began the process of manually condensing these codes and eliminating redundancies. I completed this by using the delivered feature of the hierarchy chart, which allowed me to organize the frequency and importance level of these codes. There were no predetermined codes. The relationship

among the codes led me to identify which best addressed the interview questions. The participants' responses to the interview questions allowed me to determine the category names. The category names reflect the flow of the interview questions as I first asked the participants about their college experience, the support they received while in college, the hardships they encountered, the services and support they had and/or lacked, and lastly their experience as students to later transitioning to careers in college administration. Five main themes developed from the data collected from the participant interviews, notes, and reflective journaling. The themes were (a) staff and faculty relations, (b) family, (c) economic fitness, (d) sense of belonging, and (e) self-efficacy and motivation. I derived my themes from the codes in relationship to the RQ and the two sub-RQs. For the RQ, I derived the two themes of sense of belonging and staff and faculty relations. For sub-RQ1, the one theme was economic fitness. For sub-RQ2, the two themes were family and self-efficacy and motivation.

After every interview, I engaged in reflexibility and reflected in my journal on how I interacted with each participant. I listened to the recordings to make certain I probed for context and looked for connections between my RQs and my interview questions. My positionality as a fellow Latina administrator influenced my data collection and interaction with the participants. The participants narrated several experiences and stories during their interviews that they conveyed I would understand as having attended college in the northeast and being a current Latina student myself. Table 2 shows the codes, categories, and themes.

Table 2

Codes, Categories, and Themes

Generated codes	Category	Themes
Engagement and caring; support; education; faculty; advisors; counselors; mentoring; staff and faculty interaction; representation	College administration	Staff and faculty Relations
Family; parents; siblings; culture; community; children; husband	Influence and support	Family
Working part-time and full-time; single mother; financial aid; low-income; middle class	Barriers and obstacles	Economic fitness
Mentors; allies; supporters; faculty; professors; first-generation; impostor-syndrome; belonging; persistence	Practices and resources	Sense of belonging
Resilient; proud; confidence; Latina perseverance; stubbornness; leaders; grit; resistance	Success factors	Self-efficacy and Motivation

Theme 1: Staff and Faculty Relations

Faculty and staff relationships are essential for college students and can positively or negatively impact their academic performance and degree completion (Winterer et al., 2020). The nine participants of this study all highlighted the positive and influential relationship faculty and staff had on their college journeys. Martha expressed, "My professors were incredible. I'm in touch with most of them still today. They are very

proud of how my career has developed." Yanet attended a 4-year postsecondary

institution in New York for her bachelor's degree but cited, "I did have some really good

professors. I have to say that the professors I had, it was almost like, they were

community college mission driven. They knew the population they were working with."

Isabel, also enrolled in a 4-year institution in New Jersey, described her professors: "I

remember every one of them. I didn't have a bad instructor there. My whole psychology

faculty were just so fantastic."

Three of the nine participants started their college career at a community college

and then transferred to 4-year institutions. Their experiences were also positively

impacted by faculty at these institutions. Doris emphatically mentioned, "I had such a

good foundation from community college. I had great faculty. I can't tell you how many

great faculty I had in community college. Fantastic faculty."

Receiving individual attention and observing faculty investment in students'

academic and overall well-being motivates and contributes to their college success

(Winterer et al., 2020). Maria experienced this first-hand:

> I was close to giving up, but one instructor was pivotal in my degree completion.
>
> Her checking on me and just making sure I was okay helped me to not quit. I was
>
> really close to throwing in the towel.

Faculty and staff relationships are crucial for student success and college completion.

Moreover, faculty and staff at institutions of higher education should have a cultural

understanding of the students they teach and serve. Preuss et al. (2020) found that even

within Hispanic-serving institutions, the non-Hispanic faculty and employees were not

well informed about Hispanic culture. Positive faculty relationships are desirable for Latina students regardless of the faculty's race, but when they seek to learn about their students' cultures and backgrounds, students feel seen and connected. O'Hara (2022) opined that faculty can engage with Latino students as part of a college's orientation program, therefore developing and maintaining a relationship from the start.

Theme 2: Family

The mujeres in this study were all familiar with struggle, whether it was in life, college, relationships, finances, or career. They all described their individual obstacles and how they overcame them with one constant factor: family. These Latina administrators recognized that their college journey was not one they traveled alone, and their college completion was intrinsically tied to the support they received. Family resources in the form of consejos, financial and emotional support, and educational opportunities played a significant role in students' navigation of college (see Capannola & Johnson, 2022).

Lidia stated, "I am blessed. I have my mom and my mom is my right and my left hand. She's just helping me with the kids all the time." Her parents championed her educational motivation and assisted her financially during her undergraduate college journey. Lidia's husband and children were supportive and understanding of her desire for higher education and the positive implications it could have for her career.

Martha had a young child while pursuing her college degree and while her daughter provided her with the motivation to finish, her parents provided the support. She recalled, "To keep going, my mom will make sure the house was quiet so I could study.

She would cook for me and do my laundry. My mom and dad never completed college and they wanted me to finish." Martha admitted that she wanted to fulfill those ideals her parents came to the United States with to complete their own education. They wanted that for themselves but could not make it happen due to the language barrier and the need to work to support their young family.

School educators and administrators sometimes perceive Latino/a parents as not involved in their children's education. What may be perceived as noninvolvement can simply be lack of language skills or lack of knowledge in the American educational system. Kemple Reeves et al. (2023) suggested that Latinos participate in parenting practices that impact their child's educational attainment. These practices may not be apparent to school administrators nonetheless are exhibited with emotional, psychological, and financial support, motivation, encouragement for intellectual development, and parental assistance (Capannola & Johnson, 2022; Kemple Reeves et al., 2023) from Latino parents.

Sobeyda immigrated from Peru with her parents when she was 10 years old with expectations of attending college. She explained that her mother fostered the expectation of attending college at a very young age, and her father was a college graduate who "fought for [them] to get access to resources and to learn the language. He was a real advocate for [her] and [her] siblings." Sobeyda understood that not going to college was not a choice in her household. Her parents deliberately moved the family to a predominantly White neighborhood in order for the children to learn to speak English and assimilate quicker to the American culture.

Doris, who immigrated from Venezuela, expressed her mother's expectation she and her siblings would attend college: "There was no choice. It was a non-starter; we just knew we were going to college." To that end, Doris's mother's financial and emotional support helped her start her college career in the United States. Doris and her siblings were required to attend college and graduate successfully. It was always ingrained in their upbringing how education, particularly an American education, can open doors and lead to financial freedom. Doris's mother afforded her the luxury of attending college and pursuing a degree of her choosing while some of her peers had to work or defer college due to financial limitations.

Xiomara came to the United States from Colombia as an exchange student and exclaimed, "I came from a middle-class family where education was always a given. I'm the youngest of five, so my four siblings all went to college. It was expected that I was going to college as well." Attending a postsecondary institution in the United States posed some financial and educational challenges, however, her family and then her future husband whom she met while pursuing her degree, supported her trajectory.

Luisa declared her maternal grandfather always insisted she attended college "although he couldn't tell me or guide me as to what college, or where or how." Latino/a students whose parents did not have direct college experience or were not encouraged by their parents to attend college, often had immediate family members who had experience with the process or supported them (Jabbar et al., 2019).

Maria's grandparents offered stability and financial support as she grappled with being a single mother to two boys while working and attending college. Maria's

grandmother confessed, "you're not alone. I've walked this path. I can help where I can help." Her aid in the difficult times pushed her to the finish line.

Latinos place paramount importance on family, immediate and extended. Latinos typically have physically and emotionally close families with robust feelings of loyalty and support (O'Hara, 2022). The act of pursuing a degree by a member of a Latino family may be considered as a "family affair" from which all members derive pride and accomplishment in. Family is the glue that binds all aspects of life for Latinos and where comfort, acceptance, support, consejos, and familiarity can be found.

Theme 3: Economic Fitness

The nine Latina administradoras worked part-time or full-time while pursuing their college degree. Marron and Luna (2019) posited finances are meaningful factors to consider as Latinas entering college often balance work, family, and other obligations. Sobeyda explained,

> I worked part time. I worked about between 10 to 15 hours a week when I was in college. My full-time job was to be a student, and that was the expectation in my family. My parents didn't qualify for a lot of financial aid, so I basically paid my way through stuff with loans. The support that I got from my parents was my dad was the cosigner of my car. And they would pay for all my books, all of my supplies and all of my gas, I contributed to the house. I paid cable and a few little bills. That was my only contribution. But the priority was to be a student.

Doris worked while in college and professed there was not a job in existence beneath her:

I started working in laboratories as a lab assistant for anatomy and physiology 101. Biology was another one and genetics as well. So, I was doing that and to make ends meet, I cleaned houses. I had no issues cleaning people's houses. It wasn't beneath me.

Luisa also worked full time while in college declaring,

I had to work full time. My family obligation here was specifically, paying half the bills, but I also had family obligations in Puerto Rico. So, for me, when I had spring break and my friends were going to South beach or going to Cancun, I couldn't do that. I had to go to Puerto Rico because I had to take my grandmother to her doctor's appointments.

Xiomara, as an international student, also worked to support herself while in college:

I did look for a job on campus because I was an F1 student back then. I remember working in the summer in one of the dorms and I was also a teaching assistant. I also worked as a babysitter. I remember doing some house cleaning to get paid and cutting lawns. I used to cut lawns.

Although Lidia was a recipient of financial aid and scholarships, she also had to work, explaining,

The biggest challenge was just to have the money to survive. I remember those days when we didn't have enough money to pay for a meal when I was in school. And then I applied to be a teacher assistant. Even with the scholarships that I received, I still needed money because I was staying at the college, and I needed to pay my expenses that came with room and board.

Yanet had a full-time job as soon as she completed college and kept working her entire college career:

> I worked for the agency that I worked for out of high school while in college. My salary, when I started with this agency, was 13,500 dollars a year and so, you know, I probably spent a fraction of that getting there. And the other fraction went to my mother to help her stay afloat. I had a coworker who would loan me money to make up for whatever books or whatever needs I had. And then I would always pay her back.

Martha worked before and while matriculated in college, stating,

> I felt extremely limited. I became a mom. So, I worked for a couple of years and then reentered college as a nontraditional adult student. I paid for college out of pocket since I matriculated in my local community college. Then I continued working while pursuing my bachelor's and master's degrees.

Isabel planned her courses around her work schedule working two jobs while attending college,

> My parents weren't very wealthy. I couldn't have like a typical college experience. I had to work. I went to school from 8 to 1. So that it could work from 2 to 7 and I worked every day. My mother started a cleaning business and I had to not only work in a daycare, but I would also have to help my mom clean offices on the weekends, so I guess that was a challenge, just balancing all of that and keeping my grades up.

As a single mother, Maria struggled with home, work, and college life "I was a single mom and I worked at the college. I worked 30-35 hours a week. I would have to rush to get them from daycare and I would do my studying at night after I got them to sleep."

Latina women do not only have to consider the cost of tuition, books, room, and board but also the cost of transportation, childcare, and living expenses (Marron & Luna, 2019). These additional costs present financial burdens for Latinas who without family support may not have the resources to complete a postsecondary education. Perez and Farruggia (2022) asserted managing financial and time-related school schedules was a delicate balance for Latina students who worked during college. Financial difficulties impacted all participants in this study thus creating friction between pursuing their postsecondary education and meeting familial expectations of assisting financially at home and/or supporting their own noneducational costs while enrolled in college.

Theme 4: Sense of Belonging

The Latinas in this study discussed the importance of having, seeking, and nurturing mentors during their college journey and careers. The ever-present feeling of the impostor syndrome most Latina women experience at some poignant time of their college and career journeys dissipates a little once we "see" others like us on their career or college ascendancy. The collective sigh of relief and recognition when we encounter someone like "us" in professional settings or in our own places of employment is the answer to our silent prayer of finding an ally, an "hermana." Martha struggled with her sense of identity and belonging in college confessing,

Where do I belong? How do I fit in with something like, you know, community?

How do I fit in into this space that I'm definitely not a part of, right? So being in

college was always being a search for my identity and I used every opportunity to

take classes to kind of figure myself out. So being a Latina was about discovery in

school, but it also was and I'm going to go back to my ancestors because I believe

in that, that ancestral part of me, that the army behind me was there, always there

pushing me to really be myself authentically and to show up authentically.

Martinez and Munsch (2019) opined community college staff and faculty must be

culturally competent and the responsibility of creating a sense of belonging for students

should take place with faculty inside the classrooms and with student affairs professionals

who service students outside the classroom.

Las administradoras spoke about their battles with impostor syndrome and how it

permeates their careers and lives. Luisa declared,

It's like, we inherently deal with impostor syndrome, and we have to navigate that

just to make it up that ladder. It makes it harder for us to make it to the level that

we are really striving to be at. We have to continuously prove ourselves and it's

difficult.

The underrepresentation of Latinas in college campuses, in certain fields or

administrative level positions often creates feelings of self-doubt. Lidia explained,

This impostor syndrome is always affecting me. I always have a small voice

in the back of my head, saying, how do you think that you will do that? How do you think that they will consider you? I sometimes think my aspirations are too high.

Latina students experience the effects of multiple identities such as being a woman and a person of color. These intersections can exacerbate feelings of impostor syndrome and create additional barriers to college and career success. Maria addressed this intersectionality factor and confided,

I still deal with impostor to syndrome to this day. To the point where, you know, I am like, I don't know what I'm doing. Being Latina, being a woman. You know, having those two checks against us. It's very hard because you're trying to fight those stereotypes.

Some of the mujeres shared the necessity, imperativeness, and significance of mentors. For these participants, mentors provided academic guidance, personal support, and assistance with career exploration. Yanet stated,

I am going to say regardless of who the mentor is, you have to have people that you can talk to. You know, you have to have people that have been there, that can help you see around the corners that you can't even anticipate yet. If you don't have the village, you build it.

For Isabel, in college is where she found her most significant mentor:

I had a great mentor in college. I am the leader that I am today because of her. I remember she gave me my first shot. She hired me after I graduated and after my

internship to be a counselor. She certainly helped me in my career as a counselor. I have been so lucky to have so many great women in my life.

The participants in this study battled with impostor syndrome and the fear of not fitting in due to race and gender. Some continue to combat it in their careers by occupying spaces typically held by largely white men and women in higher education. The participants who lived in residence halls while in college lacked a sense of belonging which could always be regained when they went back home. A sense of belonging in college campuses plays an important role on Latina students who are trying to find community and hermandad in this new home away from home.

Theme 5: Self-Efficacy and Motivation

Latina students experience higher stress in college due to the roles of family expectations, employment, and academic related pressures. Even so, Latina students are retained and remain in college during their first year which speaks volumes to the resiliency of the female Latino student in colleges and universities throughout the United States (Lopez & Horn, 2020; Rodriguez & Blaney, 2021).

The participants communicated their resilience as they journeyed through college and into their careers as administrators. Maria exclaimed, "I completed college out of sheer stubbornness. I was not going to let anybody look down on me because I'm a Latina single mother. Be true to yourself and build your support system." Lidia described her resilience as "knowing that you are really good and can make a difference. Having a good work ethic and most times needing to work double. The important role is to be here and show all Latino students they can also make it." While in college and later as she

started her career, Doris stated "I had to learn to master my temper. And it is not my personality but the passion that I have for getting students to the next level. Learned to have an iron stomach. You cannot be super sensitive either." Sobeyda advised,

> Don't second guess yourself. Don't be scared of your capacity to do something. Stick with the people that want your best interest. Remember your foundation and the values of education that were put on you by those close to you.

In the classrooms and in her staff and faculty interactions, Luisa thought "my passion, my knowledge, I've had to give it to people in pieces so they will not think that I am intimidating. I'm coming into myself and I'm learning more. We have to continuously prove ourselves. It's exhausting." Navigating back and forth from her college environment and her home environment, Xiomara felt the pressure of her identity, "I feel like I'm constantly code switching. You have to code, switch code, switch code, switch and it becomes tiring because if I present, you know, sometimes just me, it's like, well, you know, she's too Hispanic." Yanet found purpose and a newfound responsibility to other Latina students and later in her career expounding,

> You have to be intentional. My responsibility is to make sure I bring other Latino women to leadership. I think it's us elevating our positions and our stories and being able to say, like, you know, what? You will find other women who are helping. You will find other women who will lift you up because that is part of that legacy.

Martha expressed a similar sentiment and added, "Never give up. Don't give up finding women in your institution or somewhere else. Find your people. Find your tribe. Be with

them and know that they support one another." Isabel stated, "Work harder. Voice your good ideas, not only voice them, but have an action plan. Don't just give the idea. Make it happen. We just have to work harder."

In their study, Rana et al. (2022) discovered student mothers reported increased self-efficacy and grit, a greater ability to adapt, improved organizational skills and a clearer sense of goals. These student mothers sought to complete their studies not only for themselves; but for their children, their family, peers, and the women who looked to them as a source of encouragement and pride. Salas-Santa Cruz (2020) defined *terquedad* as a form of survival and resistance. This type of survival instincts is on display in the lives of the participants as they sat on the struggle bus and persevered to make it to their final destination in their college journeys.

In this qualitative study of Latina administrators in county community colleges in New Jersey, there were no discrepant cases.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As a Latina administrator in a high-level administrator role at a county community college in the state of New Jersey, I conducted the interviews with a keen awareness of my cultural and work relativity with the participants. Maxwell (2013) warns reactivity and researcher bias pose threats to qualitative research. I maintained a reflexive journal where I recorded observations, thoughts, and notes before and after each of the interviews.

Credibility

Researchers establish credibility by employing strategies of member checking and peer debriefing (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Member checking consisted of reviewing transcribed transcripts with participants for accuracy and authenticity. I had a peer debriefer who reviewed the interview transcripts of the participants as well as my observations and reflective journal to guarantee the credibility of the study.

Transferability

Ravitch and Carl (2016) describe transferability as the manner in which qualitative studies can be applicable or transferable to other contexts while still maintaining the essence of the research. In this study, I established transferability by ensuring the main factors and themes added to theory development. The factors and themes discovered in the study are applicable to other contexts and circumstances.

Dependability

Dependability concerns the reliability and the stability of the data over time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The dependability of the data in this study was its consistency and accuracy, thus, I provided detailed explanations of my data collection processes. The data was collected through a combination of in-person and WebEx interviews with the participants. I recorded the in-person interviews with a digital recorder and with my mobile device by downloading an application, Audio Recorder. I used field notes, direct observations, memos, and reflexive journals to provide thorough descriptions of my sentiments, surroundings, and analysis of the study process.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to a researcher's objectivity or neutrality with confirmable data while acknowledging their bias and prejudices (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher mediates these by conducting reflexivity processes throughout the study. To ensure confirmability in my study, I used the notes, observations, and thoughts from my reflexive journal to create an audit trail. The participants of the study reviewed their interview transcripts for validity and accuracy.

Results

This study focused on one RQ and two sub-RQs to explore how the college experience of Latina community college administrators informs their perception of the impact of academic and student support services on Latina college students. The results are presented by RQs and themes.

RQ1: Academic and Student Support Services Impact Latina Student's Degree Completion

RQ1 was as follows: What academic and student support services do Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive would impact Latina student's degree completion? The two themes related to RQ1 that emerged were sense of belonging and staff and faculty relations.

Sense of Belonging

The nine Latina administrators interviewed for this study had very different yet similar college experiences. Although all nine participants worked, whether part-time or full-time, and were hardly on campus except to attend class they recognized the need for

peer, cultural, social clubs, or groups for students. Martha stated, "Culturally, we are all different. We need to be able to learn about that, create groups so that they can support one another, understand one another." Isabel added, "I would like to see a Women's Center; a resource center that is connected to health services, personal counseling, family planning." As a counselor by profession, Isabel has identified the need for a center for female students in general who may not have the finances nor the health insurance to seek out wellness services.

Staff and Faculty Relations

An academic and student service these Latinas perceived would impact Latina student's degree completion is faculty and staff relations. For all students, but particularly for first-generation college students as some of these Latina administrators were, faculty and staff relationships are essential and can positively or negatively impact their academic performance and degree completion. The nine participants of this study all highlighted the positive and influential relationship faculty and staff had on their college journeys. Yanet affirmed, "I started to believe in higher education because of my professors. I saw it as a transformative way to that upward mobility."

A significant factor in staff and faculty relations is faculty and staff representation. Xiomara stated, "Faculty members are not playing the role of mentors to the Hispanic students." The faculty does not represent the student population at her current institution where Latino students comprise approximately 40% of the student population but the faculty and staff population are predominantly White. Sobeyda, whose institution's Hispanic student population is over 25%, would like to develop some

cultural and/or social programming for the Hispanic students exclaiming, "I think to show our students that we have somebody to whom they can relate. Students have to see themselves in the people that work around them." As Latina administrators in key roles at their respective institutions, these professionals may have the platform to push this agenda, however, general institutional support is needed to make substantial change. Luisa explained,

> I think that all institutions, especially those whose student population is predominantly Latino, needs representation from a top-down approach. They need representation at the executive council level. They need representation at the faculty level. We also need faculty to promote a more of a grassroots leadership perspective. Let the faculty be involved in helping these students navigate, helping these students find the resources that they need. I think that, you know, one of the biggest disadvantages that we have in these institutions is the fact that the majority of the faculty are Caucasian. The majority of the faculty do not understand their students' home life. They do not understand a Latino student home life. And the challenges that they face, and the fact that, you know, there's a lot of cultural roadblocks that they need to navigate. So, you know, from my institution specifically, I think representation is a problem. And it also is at the board of trustees' level, right? So, it's like, you have the board that is not representative of the student demographic population. But yet they're the ones that are making the decisions about the students.

Sub-RQ2: Factors Inhibiting Latinas' Enrollment and College Completion

Sub-RQ2 was as follows: What are the factors that Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive to inhibit Latinas' enrollment and college completion? The theme related to sub-RQ2 that emerged was economic fitness.

Economic Fitness

The nine Latina administrators all identified finances and financial aid as an inhibiting factor to enrollment and completion. All the participants expressed they worked part-time or full-time while attending college and pursuing their degrees. Some participants had to contribute to the household to help parents make ends meet. The choice of not working meant absconding their responsibilities to the familia. Martha declared,

> Whether our families are actually pushing us or not, we feel responsibility and obligation to be supportive financially, to be supportive emotionally for our families. We have to bear that responsibility to take care of our siblings, to mentor our siblings. There's a lot of pressure on us to do more within the household, but there's also these stereotypes and expectations that are placed on us that are imposed on us as Latina women.

These mujeres had to work while in college due to the economic situation of the family unit. Isabel stated, "I think money was always an issue for my family." Her parents did not have a college education and worked blue collar jobs which provided stability, not abundance.

The financial aid application process is a daunting process for any student, particularly Latino students who may need to not only translate what is being asked on the form for parents but also interpret the myriad of questions and the need for the department of education to request all this information. Some of the participants completed the FAFSA, were eligible only for loans and borrowed only what they needed.

Sub-RQ3: Factors Facilitating Latinas' Enrollment and College Completion

Sub-RQ3 was as follows: What are the factors that Latina New Jersey community college administrators perceive to facilitate Latinas' enrollment and college completion? The two themes related to sub-RQ3 that emerged were family and self-efficacy and motivation.

Family

All nine Latina administrators communicated family and family engagement as one the factors to facilitate Latinas' enrollment and college completion. Familial responsibilities and obligations in the Latino culture has often been viewed as a deficit in American higher education as it can be construed as a barrier to intellectual and social freedom on college campuses. Familismo, on the contrary, has proven to be a critical component of Latino students' academic success on and has attributed to their degree completion. Luisa affirmed, "My biggest support system was my grandparents. I think that they were adamantly pushing me and incentivizing me to finish." Martha confirmed,

> I had to really persevere. And that comes again from the culture. I think watching my parents work really hard, earn very little, but never giving up, never coming

home and complaining. Always knowing that what you're doing is for a higher purpose, knowing that you are planting seeds.

Mentoring was another factor expressed by all participants as a facilitator to postsecondary enrollment and completion. Seeking out mentors, getting out of your comfort zone to make those connections, and being present in these places that have the potential to elevate you is key to a meaningful and productive career. Doris stated, "My professors were my mentors. They showed me how to write. They also helped me acclimate to college life. They became like family."

Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy and sheer perseverance motivated these nine Latina administrators to complete their college degrees and embark on successful careers as well. Luisa struggled as she balanced full-time work with school and stated it was simply, "Sheer perseverance. Just having that mindset, that focus. Bull headed and strong. Not taking no for an answer." Maria embraces her Latinidad, her femininity and is unapologetic about who she is. She proffered,

I'm confident about certain things. And I'm not going to change who I am like. I am a Christian woman. I am a Latino woman. I'm a Puerto Rican woman, and I'm not going to change those parts of me. So, you have to, but you have to get comfortable with it. There's a reason we have that fire in us, celebrate it. Don't turn it down. Celebrate and be unabashedly who you are.

Summary

The nine Latina college administrators interviewed narrated the academic and student support services they perceived would impact Latina student's degree completion. Developing and spearheading cultural and social clubs on college campuses where students are able to find commonalities outside of the classroom was identified as one student support service. Representation throughout college campuses, from classrooms to student affairs offices, was an academic and student support service the participants identified as contributing to Latina's degree completion. Faculty, staff, and administration should be representative of the student body population at colleges and universities in the United States and specifically in New Jersey.

In Chapter 5, I will interpret the findings of the study, followed by a discussion on its limitations. Next, I will present recommendations for further research. Finally, implications for positive social change will be discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to explore how the college experience of Latina community college administrators informed their perception of the impact of academic and student support services on Latina college students. The goal of the study was to explore the barriers and success factors that contributed to the degree completion of nine Latina administrators. The nature of the study was a qualitative narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry is relational as the researcher fully engages with the participants and retells their stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Purposeful sampling was used to select nine Latina administrators from county community colleges in New Jersey. Interviews were conducted in person and via WebEx employing a semi structured, open-ended interview guide.

The key findings were a result of the RQ and the two sub-RQs that guided this study. The questions steered to five overarching themes from the participant interviews. The five themes were (a) staff and faculty relations, (b) family, (c) economic fitness, (d) sense of belonging, and (e) self-efficacy and motivation.

In this chapter, I interpret the findings of the study, followed by a discussion on its limitations. Next, I present recommendations for further research. Finally, implications for positive social change are discussed.

Interpretation of the Findings

The findings in this study confirmed what has been discovered in the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. These findings enhance the existing body of

literature on Latina students while filling the gap on the limited data that exists for Latina college students in community colleges in the state of New Jersey.

Interpretation of the Findings in Context of Literature Review

Staff and Faculty Relations

All nine participants perceived that positive staff and faculty interactions throughout their college journeys assisted with their degree completion. Meaningful and, for some, longstanding relationships were developed with professors, advisors, and counselors. Positive student-faculty interaction on college campuses increases a student's sense of belonging and intent to persist predominantly in Latina/o students who may be the first in their families to attend college (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015; Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020; Rodríguez et al., 2016).

Maria's, Martha's, Yanet's, Isabel's, and Doris's experiences support the findings of Acevedo-Gil et al. (2015), Alcantar and Hernandez (2020), and Rodríguez et al. (2016). The findings from these studies revealed that positive student-faculty interaction on college classrooms and campuses increases a student's sense of belonging and intent to continue their secondary education, particularly in first-generation Latina/o students. Martha described her professors as incredible and maintains contact with them currently as they have followed her career trajectory and support the work she does at her current institution. Yanet attended a 4-year postsecondary institution in New York for her bachelor's degree where she had some really good professors who inspired her to believe in the transformative effect a higher education can have on people, particularly women. Isabel, also enrolled in a 4-year institution in New Jersey, described her professors as

fantastic, caring, and approachable. One faculty member in particular became a lifelong

mentor on whom she still relies for guidance and support for her own students. Maria

started her college journey at a community college. Upon transferring to a 4-year

institution after completing her associate degree and being a single mother of two young

boys, she struggled with the rigor of the classes. She confessed that she was close to

giving up, but one professor kept pushing her and checked in on her regularly. This

particular professor was a Puerto-Rican woman who Maria believed reminded her of

herself and therefore motivated and supported her.

Montelongo (2019) highlighted that despite the low rates of Latino faculty,

faculty in general still have a critical role in student academic persistence. Latino students

want to connect specifically with Latino staff and faculty; however, the small number of

Latino educators make it hard to do so. When Latino staff and faculty on campus are

proportionally represented, it promotes a sense of belonging and integration among

Latino students (Genthe & Harrington, 2022). A significant factor in staff and faculty

relations is faculty and staff representation. Xiomara's, Sobeyda's, and Luisa's

experiences as college administrators support the findings of Montelongo (2019) and

Genthe and Harrington (2022). Xiomara asserted that faculty members are not playing

the role of mentors to the Hispanic students at her institution. The faculty do not represent

the student population, which is comprised of approximately 40% Hispanic students. The

faculty and staff population are predominantly White. Sobeyda, whose institution's

Hispanic student population is over 25%, would like to develop some cultural and/or

social programming for the Hispanic students. She believed students have to see

themselves in the people who work and live around them. Luisa explicated that all institutions, especially those whose student population is predominantly Latino, need representation. In her institution, the majority of the faculty are White and may not understand the plight of the typical Latino student and the challenges that they face. Additionally, she hopes to see representation at the board of trustees' level. The board are not representative of the student demographic population, yet they are the ones who are ultimately making decisions about the students' education.

Family

All nine participants reported family support as a motivational and facilitating factor before, during, and after completing their college degrees. Martha described her parents as her motivation to start college because they never completed their degrees in their countries of origin nor in the United States. Lidia referred to her mother as her right and left hand as she dutifully helped her with the care of her children and home while she worked and attended college.

Marrun (2020) challenged the deficit-based generalization that Latino families are unsupportive and uncaring regarding their children's postsecondary education. On the contrary, researcher found that family engagement with regards to academic aspirations positively influenced Latino students' persistence and college graduation (Marrun, 2020). Latino parents may have limited knowledge of higher education and not fully comprehend the process of enrolling and ultimately attending college; however, they demonstrate engagement by emotionally supporting their children and validating their college experiences with their own family narratives of hardship and persistence.

Capannola and Johnson (2022) explored family relationship experiences of first-generation college students and found the students' academic success was due to their parents and not despite them. Furthermore, the importance of familial relationships extends from just a parental one. The participants in this study indicated that relationships with siblings, grandparents, cousins, and aunts were as equally influential (Capannola & Johnson, 2022).

Familial responsibilities and obligations in the Latino culture have often been viewed as a deficit in American higher education as they can be often construed as a barrier to intellectual and social freedom on college campuses. Familismo, on the contrary, has proven to be a critical component of Latino students' academic success on and has attributed to their degree completion. Both Luisa and Maria received unconditional emotional and financial support from their grandparents. Their grandparents were not able to help with schoolwork, the completion of forms, or the stressors of campus life; nonetheless, they provided encouragement, meals, consejos, objectivity, and, at times, monetary assistance with the purchase of books, materials, and transportation.

Economic Fitness

All nine participants acknowledged finances and money as an inhibiting factor to fully immerse in the college experience as they all, without exception, worked while enrolled in college. Six of the nine Latina participants were raised in a two-parent home. The participants labeled their families as either middle-class or low-income. All of the participants expressed their parent(s)' inability to fully fund their college education. In

fact, four of the nine participants stated that money was always an issue for their families where one parent lost a job, another one became ill, there were ailing grandparents, and so forth.

This finding was consistent with the Excelencia in Education (2019) report stating that, on average, Latino students work more than 30 hours a week to assist in financing their education. Moreover, approximately 32% of Latino students work 40 or more hours, 19% work 30 to 39 hours, 26% work 20 to 29 hours, and 23% work 1 to 19 hours per week. Colleges can ease Latina/o students work restrictions by offering work-study opportunities on and off-campus. Working on or close to campus not only reduces transportation costs to students, but it also increases the time they can dedicate to their coursework.

Flores et al. (2021) stated that the complex higher educational financial aid system, by means of the FAFSA and other state and institutional requirements, place Latina/o students at a disadvantage. Latina/o parents' limited knowledge of the financial aid process, financial literacy challenges, and the lack of multiethnic representation in offices such as financial aid potentially lock students out of aid eligibility.

Sense of Belonging

The nine participants stressed the importance of mentors in their lives as college students and later as Latina professionals. Latinas often face a lack of mentors in their field, particularly in higher education where marginalization occurs not only based on ethnicity but also on gender (Gomez, 2020; Menchaca et al., 2016; Rodríguez et al., 2016). Mireles-Rios and Garcia (2019) stressed that mentoring relationships should start

as soon as students arrive at the institution as the first-year transition to college from high school may prove strenuous for most, particularly when first-generation college students are more likely to stop out during their second academic year.

In 2019, Lucero et al. conducted a study to examine the experiences of students who identified as Latino/a with a focus on their engagement of on-campus clubs and organizations. They found that ethnically oriented clubs and organization provided a protected space for identity development and cultural affirmation (Lucero et al., 2019) as well as crucial support for successful persistence. An academic support center on campus provided students with advising, mentoring, and cultural activities as yet another place where underrepresented students felt academically, emotionally, and culturally supported (Lucero et al., 2019; Murphy& Murphy, 2018). Identifying and connecting with an institution of higher education enhances Latinx students' satisfaction and sense of belonging (Garcia & Dwyer, 2018).

Heredia et al. (2018), expanded on the recommendation of establishing culturally sensitive support programs for Latino/a students by having said programs inform students of the benefits of feeling interconnectedness to the college. Latina/o students are often confident in their decision to attend a specific college when they feel the environment is supportive and comfortable (Heredia et al., 2018). Latina students, as part of their college choosing process, gravitate towards institutions where they feel seen, supported, and secure. As a result of their size, proximity to home, and affordability, a majority of Latina students start their college journey in community colleges or small private colleges where they are not made to feel invisible as can be the case with the vastness of bigger

institutions. The smaller colleges and universities and community colleges provide an extension of *familia* they have back home.

Self-Efficacy and Motivation

The fifth and final theme that resulted from this study was self-efficacy and motivation. The participants from this study shared that although they confronted some struggles during their college journeys, they persevered. The participants' experiences support the findings from the literature review. Despite the challenges and barriers some Latina students face in school settings, they display a high level of self-efficacy and "activate agency in order to position themselves for college opportunity (Sapp et al., 2016, p. 46). Latina students confidently proclaim their place and space as well as consign accountability on college staff for supporting their educational success (Kiyama, 2018). Maria was determined to complete her college education and would not allow anyone to look down on her because she was a single Latina mother. She added that she finished college out of sheer stubbornness. Latina college students want to be seen beyond stereotypes and deficit-thinking due to their ethnicity, cultural and academic background, and socioeconomic status and will advocate for themselves to do so. Sobeyda attested not to be scared of your capacity to do something, to become something regardless of the stereotypes frequently heard from the same people who are supposed to assist in our learning and growth.

Interpretation of the Findings in Context of Theoretical Framework

I used Phinney's ethnic identity theoretical framework for my study. Phinney (2003) defined ethnic identity as a dynamic, multidimensional concept that refers to a

person's identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group. Ethnic groups assert a common ancestry and share elements of culture, religion, language, kinship, phenotype, and place of origin (Phinney, 1989, 1990, 2003). This theoretical framework allowed for exploring the issue of ethnic development and belonging in college campuses for Latino females. Ethnic identity refers to one's identity or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group, and acculturation is more generational and measured in scales (Phinney, 2003).

All study participants reflected on their Latinidad and how being a Latina influenced them as college students. Xiomara expressed that being Latina helped her persist in college due to the "family values" inculcated in her as young girl. For Doris, it was "discipline" as passed down by her mother and grandmother. For Isabel, it was the predisposition in those around her that she could not enroll or complete a college degree due to her ethnicity and where she lived. She said, "If you think I can't, I'm going to show you how much I can." Lidia defined her Latinidad as she journeyed through college as "energy.". Latinas have an energy and a fire that gets ignited by the parents who impress on them the value of self, culture, and family. Maria defined it even further by crediting her "strong Hispanic women… being raised by women that ruled the family" and not wanting to disappoint them. Phinney et al. (2007) proposed that an achieved ethnic identity develops over time, and it is characterized by a secure commitment to one's own ethnic group as well as decreased feelings of intimidation from other groups. The participants' experiences support the findings of Phinney (1989, 1990, 2003) on ethnic development. By the time the participants of this study were matriculating in college, their sense of self, their ethnic identity, was largely developed.

Limitations of the Study

As previously mentioned in Chapter 1, one main limitation found in this study was the limited amount of literature on Latina college students, administrators, or executives in leadership roles in institutions of postsecondary education in the northeastern states neighboring New Jersey and the nonexistent literature and information on Latina students and administrators in New Jersey. The limited educational data I was able to find was approximately six years old and derived from a state educational higher education website. National educational organizations such as Excelencia in Education provided me with general data and percentages on student demographics in the state of New Jersey.

Another limitation delineated in Chapter 1was researcher bias as I am a Latina woman and a current administrator at one of the county community colleges in New Jersey. Conducting member checks and inviting participants to review their own interview transcripts as well as reflexive journaling limited bias within the study.

The other limitation of this study was the study design which relied on *testimonios* and storytelling. This narrative inquiry design can make the study a strongly personal and reflective one which requires a level of trust and comfortability the researcher and participant may not instantly foster. The concern that this could potentially be a limitation in Chapter 1 did not materialize. I was able to recruit from my personal and professional circles, and while I did not intimately know all the participants, we all belonged and participated in the same organizations and committees. This small

acknowledgement resulted in a more relaxed and comfortable environment for both the researcher and participants.

Recommendations

This study was conducted to explore how the college experience of Latina community college administrators informed their perception of the impact of academic and student support services on Latina college students in the state of New Jersey. Future studies should include Latina administrators from 4-year institutions in the state of New Jersey to learn if their experiences working at four-year postsecondary colleges and universities differed from those Latina administrators working at community colleges.

Another recommendation for future research is to focus on Latina entry-level or mid-level staff personnel in community colleges to determine if their perception on their higher education journeys and what factors hindered or facilitated their completion differs from upper-level higher education administrators.

Finally, this narrative study took place as the world returned to what we now collectively term the "new normal" after being shut down by the COVID-19 pandemic. College campuses and universities throughout the United States are attempting to return to normal operations as they knew it before the pandemic but find themselves grappling with low enrollments, an increase in mental health issues among students, staff, and faculty, a growing expectation from students to offer remote and/or hybrid educational options, and a decrease in local, state, and federal funding for higher education institutions. If Latino students were at an educational and economic disadvantage pre-pandemic, it is my fervent belief that their situation has only become graver. This study

could expand to research on how Latina students are coping with transitioning back to college campuses after the pandemic and how these campuses are responding to their academic, social, and economic needs. My study provided insights from the administrators' perceptions of the challenges and facilitators which may or may not be similar to what Latina students are actually experiencing.

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Implications

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Implications for Social Change

The findings of this qualitative study by utilizing *testimonios* as narrative accounts include the ability to fill a gap in understanding of Latina students' experiences in county community colleges in New Jersey. The findings revealed actions for potential social change which will assist policymakers, educational leaders, and college administrators with developing programs and services to facilitate Latina students' ability to successfully complete their community college education in the state of New Jersey.

As part of their recruitment and orientation practices, colleges and universities in New Jersey should develop parent and family programs offered in Spanish, if possible, so as to include the family unit in the process. The family connection, as narrated by the study participants, is continually present for Latina students and having them come along in this college journey will facilitate what can be an arduous and unfamiliar process for some family members who do not understand the American college landscape. Faculty and staff relations should be cultivated even before the Latina student starts their college career. By creating enrollment and orientation programming focused on student services and academic integration, institutions of higher education can start that connection and

programmatic expectation early on. As evidenced in Chapter 2, these types of services can promote a sense of belonging and integration, not only for the students but for their family members as well (Genthe & Harrington, 2022; Lundberg et al., 2018).

Financial literacy in the form of an orientation course or a separate programming for new and continuing students should be part of the college experience. Understanding finances, money management, and student loan debt assists students in making sound decisions while in college. Colleges and universities should invest in more localized off-campus work-study options as well as expanding the on-campus ones for students to work closer to campus to provide them the opportunity to participate in on-campus activities or work closer to campus so as to have more time to study.

The study can also add to the gap in knowledge regarding Latina community college students in the northeastern part of the United States. A plethora of studies and knowledge exists for Latina community college students primarily in states where the population is predominantly or majority Hispanic. In northeastern states where the Hispanic population is substantial and continues on the rise such as New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut, Maryland; the dearth of studies on Latino community college students in general and Latina students particularly is incommodious.

Recommendations for Practice

Community colleges typically serve non-traditional students and should start operating in a non-traditional sense when it comes to recruiting and enrolling their students. Latino students may need resources presented to them early on and in different formats and times. The COVID-19 pandemic led institutions of higher education to move

many student services online such as academic advising, financial aid application assistance, tutoring, and even campus tours. Presently, some if not all these services remain online. Community college students may not only need these services in-person; Latino community college students may also need bilingual programming or interpretation services. Student services programming should be offered in Spanish to the extent possible. College leaders and administrators should prioritize diversity in their hiring practices as well as ensure existing faculty and staff are trained adequately in cultural sensitivity and pedagogy.

Conclusion

This narrative qualitative study fills a gap in understanding by focusing specifically on the inhibitors and facilitators Latina students experience on the road to collegiate success as narrated by current Latina administrators in county community colleges in New Jersey. The *testimonios* gathered for this study intimate that Latina students need academic and nonacademic resources and services to successfully enroll and complete their postsecondary education. The participants of this study all gained academic and career success; however, it took a village to get them there. The academic village can and should improve on the resources available to Latina students as the Latino population continues to grow and projected to rise to 111 million by 2060 (Excelencia in Education, 2019). For Latina students to succeed academically, it is critical colleges and universities employ equity minded student support services that are relational, race-conscious, community-focused, data informed and compassionate. Administrators, staff, and faculty at these institutions must cease their treatment of Latino students from a

deficit model but lead and treat from a community, cultural, and ethnic one. If a Latino student is an English-language learner, they should not be labeled as having a learning deficit; instead, they should be defined as having linguistic capital. As administrators and educators, and more specifically as long-time students, we must value the narratives of these participants and apply what we learned from these experiences. Educational leaders and college administrators must appreciate their students' cultural, linguistic, and ethnic differences to capitalize on their potential to reach academic success on their campuses and beyond.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in the Study

Dear Latina/Hispanic Professional,

This letter is to invite you to participate in my qualitative research study titled: Nuestra Comunidad: Testimonios from Latinas in community college administration. My name is Yessika Garcia-Guzman, and I am a PhD student in the Public Policy and Administration department at Walden University. The purpose of this study is to explore how the college experience of Latina community college administrators informs their perception of the impact of academic and student support services on Latina college students.

Participation in the study is based on pre-determined criteria:

1. You identify as Latina/Hispanic.

2. You hold an upper-level higher education administrative position at a county college in New Jersey.

If you agree to participate in this study, I will propose conducting a one 90-minute face-to-face interview at an arranged time convenient to your schedule. If a face-to-face interview is not possible or convenient due to your schedule, the interview can be conducted through Zoom. The interview will be audio or digitally recorded. I intend to safeguard your confidentiality as a participant by assigning you a pseudonym, and all references or identifying information, such as your name, and your work site, will be removed. No information or details from the interview will be shared with or discussed with anyone. Participation in the interview is completely voluntary and there are no known or anticipated risks to involvement in this study. You may decline to respond to any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Furthermore, you may withdraw from this research study for any reason, at any time,

without negative consequence to you, by simply notifying me of your decision to do so.

If you decide to withdraw your participation from this study, all information and data you

provided will be discarded.

If you have any questions regarding this qualitative research study or would like

additional information about participation, please do not hesitate to contact me at XXX or

by email at XXX@waldenu.edu.

Thank you for your consideration in this important study.

Sincerely,

Yessika Garcia-Guzman
PhD Graduate Student

Appendix B: Interview Protocol and Questions

Introduction
My name is Yessika Garcia-Guzman, and I am a doctoral student in the Public Policy and
Administration program at Walden University. You were invited to participate in this
study because you shared that you identify as Latina and are currently an administrator at
a county college in New Jersey. During this 90-minute interview, I will be asking you
questions about your college journey, your Latina identity, and how these experiences
informed your understanding of the academic and student support services that impact
Latina college enrollment and completion.

Purpose of the interview
The topics being addressed in this study are. As a participant in this interview, your
information will remain confidential. During the interview process, please let me know if
you feel uncomfortable with a particular question and prefer not to answer it.

Interview Questions

Let's start with your college story. What/ who motivated you to enroll in college?

How well were you academically prepared for postsecondary education?
Were you enrolled in early college courses at your high school?
Did you participate in advanced placement courses in high school?
Did you receive test preparation/guidance for SAT/ACT?

Think back about the process of application and matriculation and describe your
experience entering college. For example:
How did you manage all the steps for admissions? Did someone assist you?
How did you manage registration and/or choosing your course of study? Did someone
assist with the financial aid process? Completion of financial aid forms and assistance
with scholarships?

Once you began college, what was the experience like for you? What were your first
impressions of the college?
Was there a staff/faculty member who helped you or that you went to for assistance?
How did this person continue to assist you (if assisted)?
Did you visit administration offices for assistance with courses, registration, financial
aid? If so, how often?

Please describe any challenges you experienced during your college career.
What was challenging about those experiences?

Please describe any family obligations or expectations during your college career, such as working while attending college or caring for siblings.
Did these family obligations or expectations impact your ability to complete your degree?
Did they positively affect your ability for college completion?

Please describe any positive experiences that were influential in your journey toward degree completion.
What made those experiences positive?

What social/cultural programs did you participate in during college and what was your experience?

What academic resources/programs did you seek and/or utilize during college and what was your experience?

What personal characteristics do you believe helped you persist as a Latina student?

How do you think being Latina played a role in your ability to gain academic confidence at the college you studied?

What would you identify as your main sources of support (personal, social, academic) as you pursued your college degree?

In what way, if any, do you think being Latina influenced your experience as a college student?

How do you feel Latina students experience the journey at the community college differently than other students?

From your perspective, are there any services or resources that the college(s) you attended could offer Latina students that would facilitate their college enrollment and completion?

From your perspective, are there any services or resources at the institution you are currently employed the institution could offer Latina students that would help facilitate their college enrollment and completion?

How do your efforts impact institutional practices and barriers that Latina students may experience?

How would you describe the professional journey in higher education that led you to an administrator-level role?

What do you believe is the most important component of your role as a Latina college administrator?

How does your perspective as a Latina influence your capacity as an administrator?

Do you believe that Latina college administrators navigate their careers in different ways than non-Latinas? Why or why not?

Why do you believe there are so few Latina college administrators across higher education in the United States? New Jersey?

What advice do you have for aspiring Latina staff/faculty who may be aspiring to transition into administrative roles?