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FACTORS INFLUENCING SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF A COLLEGE DEGREE BY HISPANIC FEMALE EDUCATORS

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By

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FACTORS INFLUENCING SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF A COLLEGE DEGREE BY HISPANIC FEMALE EDUCATORS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
GRADUATE COLLEGE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Richard, and my daughter, Jennifer, who endured my absence in many activities and for many hours, days, weeks, etc. Their support and understanding was invaluable. I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to the women of my study who, despite the odds against them, achieved a college degree and to all other Hispanic females who desire educational achievement.

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ABSTRACT

Despite educational attainment gains over the years, Hispanics lag behind their White and Black peers in achieving college degrees. For 2013, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported only 16 percent of the Hispanic population achieved a bachelor's degree as opposed to 40 percent for Whites and 20 percent for Blacks (NCES, 2014, Educational Attainment). Additionally, a persistent gap in educational achievement persists. The White-Black educational gap widened from 13 to 20 percentage points, and the Hispanic-White gap widened from 18 to 25 percentage points between 1990 and 2013 for 25 to 29 year olds (NCES, 2014, Educational Attainment).

Using qualitative multiple case analysis, the purpose of this study is to identify factors influencing degree achievement of Hispanic female educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley in south Texas and to determine if identified influential factors are grounded in self-efficacy theory. From the data collected via personal interviews and a focus group meeting, cross case analysis illuminated overarching themes common among the cases. Findings revealed the emergent themes are grounded in self-efficacy theory.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

It Can Be Done

Cesar Chavez does not have a national holiday in his honor, but he is hailed as one of this nation's and one of history's significant civil rights leaders. Cesar Chavez, born March 31, 1927, dedicated his life to causes similar to those of Martin Luther King, Jr. While King fought for the rights of Blacks, Chavez fought for those of farm workers. Underpaid and working in harsh, and in many instances, unsafe conditions, Chavez brought attention to the struggles of laborers through non-violent methods such as fasting, boycotts, strikes, and pickets in hopes of garnering better working conditions and, ultimately, dignity to individuals who labored in agricultural fields. "Si, se puede" (Yes, it can be done) was the motto behind the cause. These famous words have become a motto many Hispanics believe, value and espouse. Chavez fervently believed the changes he sought could be realized, and this belief enabled him to achieve many things, including the establishment of the National Farm Worker Association in 1962, which eventually became the United Farm Workers and has had a membership as high as fifty thousand. Farm workers were able to unite into unions and strive for improvements; thereby proving that unification of farm workers could be done. Cesar Chavez died on April 23, 1993, but his legacy continues to live. Senator Barack Obama (2008) said the following about Chavez

> Chavez left a legacy as an educator, environmentalist, and a civil rights leader and his cause lives on. As farmworkers and laborers across America continue to struggle for fair treatment and fair wages, we find strength in what Cesar Chavez

> accomplished so many years ago. And we should honor him for what he's taught us about making America a stronger, more just, and more prosperous nation. ("Cesar E. Chavez," 2008, para. 4)

Themes behind the then Presidential candidate Barack Obama's 2008 campaign were "Yes, we can," and "Change for America." These themes paralleled the themes behind Chavez's cause: "Yes, it can be done," and change for the farm worker. Millions of Americans believed in Obama's message and elected him to be their next President in 2008. Similarly, in 2012, the American people once again voted Barack Obama their President. The theme of Barack Obama's 2012 campaign was one of hope and moving forward. In his November 7, 2012, victory speech, Obama stated

> I have always believed that hope is that stubborn thing inside us that insists, despite all the evidence to the contrary, that something better awaits us so long as we have the courage to keep reaching, to keep fighting, to keep working.…we will continue our journey forward ("Barack Obama's", 2012, para. 33)

A hope for a better tomorrow sustained by a constant move forward toward that goal was Chavez's message in the 1960s, was Obama's message in 2008 and in 2012, and will probably continue to be an inner drive that propels human beings forward toward a better tomorrow.

The Lack of Education

Going to college and achieving a college degree is a dream for many Americans. With a college degree, the odds of getting a better job, better wages, and ultimately experiencing a comfortable life are increased. For many Hispanics, however, this dream is exactly that, only a dream. Statistics confirm this as a deplorable fact for most

Hispanics living in the U. S. For instance, Fry (2003) said, "Latinos lag every other major population group in attaining college degrees, especially bachelor's degrees," (p. 1) and that "…Hispanic undergraduates are more 'at risk'," (p. 3). In addition, Castellanos and Gloria (2007) asserted, "…Latina/o students' experiences in the educational system are frequently not positive" (p. 379). Could it be that Hispanics, as Richard Fry, Senior Research Associate for the Pew Research Center, asked, "…are chasing a target that is accelerating ahead of them?" (2005, p. i).

Enrollment in degree-granting institutions has increased overall across America. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), between 2001 and 2011, enrollment in degree-granting institutions increased from 15.9 million to 21.0 million, an increase of 32 percent in total enrollment (NCES, 2013, Fast Facts, para. 1). For 2012, NCES reported the total number of enrollment in degree-granting institutions for all students between the ages of 18 and 24 to be 41.0 percent (NCES, 2013, Table 302.60).

The number of Hispanics between 18 and 24 years of age enrolled in degree-granting institutions in 2005 was 24.8 percent; that percentage rose to 37.5 percent in 2012 for the same age group (NCES, 2013, Table 302.60), but unfortunately, and despite the increased enrollment in institutions of higher education by Hispanics, the educational gap of degree attainment between Hispanics and other races remained.

As shown in Table 1, The National Center for Education Statistics reported the following data by degree type and ethnicity for the years 2005 through 2006. Of the total number of students achieving a bachelor's degree, Whites accounted for 72.4 percent, Blacks accounted for 9.6 percent, and Hispanics accounted for 7.2 percent

(NCES, 2007, Table 274). Of students who achieved a master's degree, the pattern was the same: Whites at 66.2 percent, Blacks at 9.9 percent, and Hispanics at 5.5 percent (NCES, 2007, Table 277). The trend was the same for students who achieved doctorate degrees: White students at 56.4 percent, Black students at 5.6 percent, and Hispanic students at 3.4 percent (NCES, 2007, Table 280).

Table 1

Degree Type Percentage by Race for Years 2005 Through 2006

Ethnicity	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate Degree
White	72.4	66.2	56.4
Black	9.6	9.9	5.6
Hispanic	7.2	5.5	3.4

The remaining percentages were assigned to the Asian / Pacific Islander population, the American Indian / Alaska Native population, and the Non–resident Alien population.

Table 2 shows the statistics for the same data and indicating a similar trend reported by the United States Department of Education Center for Education Statistics for the years 2009 through 2010 (NCES, 2012, Fast Facts).

Table 2

Degree Type Percentage by Race for Years 2009 Through 2010

Ethnicity	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate Degree
White	72.9	72.8	74.3
Black	10.3	12.5	5.8

Hispanic	8.8	7.1	5.8

Table 3 shows, for 2012, the Pew Research Center reported total population for the specified races. Table 3 also shows the total college graduates for the population 25 and over to be 4,027,757, or 13.9 percent for Hispanics, 45,909,369, or 32.6 percent for Whites, and 4,462,348, or 18.8 percent for Blacks, wherefore once again, illuminating the same trend (Pew Research Center, 2012, Table 1, Table 22).

Table 3

Total Population and College Graduates 25 Years and Older: 2012

Total Population	College Graduates	College Graduate Percent
White – 197,275,734	45,909,369	32.6
Black- 38,535,707	4,462,348	18.8
Hispanic – 52,932,483	4,027,757	13.9

Despite overall increases in degree achievement by Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics, Hispanics continue to lag behind their White and Black peers. For 2013, the U.S. Census Bureau's *Current Population Survey* reported a persistent trend that marks Hispanics as the least educated population. Table 4 illuminates this persistent dilemma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, Table 1).

Table 4

Educational Attainment of the Population 18 Years and Older and 25 Years and Older: 2013

Race	18 – 24 Years	25 Years and Older

White	2,237,000	33,859,000
Black	212,000	3,445,000
Hispanic	240,000	3,121,000

The number of Hispanics between the ages of 18 and 24 who earned a bachelor's degree outnumbered Blacks in 2013, but remained behind Whites. The number of Hispanics, however, aged 25 and over who achieved a college degree in 2013 lagged behind Blacks and Whites. While some improvement in college education attainment was made by Hispanics in the 18 – 24 year old group, the trend of being the least educated minority group remained for the aged 25 and over group, hence, a persistent dilemma. Sadly, 2014 did not see a change.

For 2014 and the population 25 and older as shown in Table 5, the U.S. Census Bureau reported the following data: at the bachelor's level, 34,023,000 Whites, 3,641,000 Blacks, and 3,162,000 Hispanics; at the master's level, 14,316,000 Whites, 1,506,000 Blacks, and 1,037,000 Hispanics; and at the doctorate level, 2,970,000 Whites, 206,000 Blacks, and 193,000 Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014, Table 1).

Table 5

Educational Attainment of U.S. Population 25 Years and Older: 2014

Race	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Doctorate Degree
White	34,023,000	14,316,000	2,970,000
Black	3,641,000	1,506,000	206,000
Hispanic	3,162,000	1,037,000	193,000

Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics reported the educational gap between Whites and Hispanics at the bachelor's level for the population 25 to 29 year old widened from 18 percentage points to 25 percentage points between 1990 and 2013 (NCES, 2014, Educational Attainment). A college degree, however, isn't the only thing Hispanics lack.

The Lack of Money

The Census Bureau uses specific guidelines and thresholds to determine who is in poverty. The thresholds represent dollar values that differ based on the size and composition of a family (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2008, p. 45). Originally created in the early 1960s, these guidelines were meant to determine how much income a family needs in order to purchase food. It was surmised that food accounted for one third of a family's income, thereby establishing the formula for calculating whether a family is considered to be living in poverty or not: the cost of food is multiplied by three (Kluever, 2005, p.1). Once these thresholds are established, a family's total income is compared against them. If the total income for a family falls below the established threshold, that family, to include all members, is considered to be living in poverty.

The Census Bureau (2013) reported the following poverty data for the U.S. and for the years 2011 and 2012 as shown in Table 6 (De Navas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2013, p. 14) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, Table 3).

Table 6

People in Poverty in America: 2011 and 2012

Ethnicity	Population in 2012	Living in Poverty in 2012	Living in Poverty in 2011

White	242,147,000	30,816,000 / 12.7%	30,849,000 / 12.8%
Blacks	40,125,000	10,911,000 / 27.2%	10,929,000 / 27.6%
Hispanics	53,105,000	13,616,000 / 25.6%	13,244,000 / 25.3%

The Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (ERS) states, "an important dimension of poverty is time" (USDA ERS, 2014, para. 5). Researching poverty over a 30-year period (between 1980 and 2000), the ERS reports poverty illuminates a "regional pattern." Echoing the same statistics as the Pew Research Center, the ERS also concluded the highest percentages of poverty were to be found in the South. The ERS, however, added persistent poverty is also highest in the South. Persistent poverty is defined as having at least 20 percent of an area's population living in poverty for more than 30 years. Using this definition, the ERS reported 353 U.S. counties as persistently poor, or 11.2 percent of all counties. Of these 353 persistently poor counties, 84 percent are located in the South (USDA ERS, 2014, para. 5).

Specifically, the poverty rate in Texas is among the highest in the nation. In February of 2005, the Center for Public Policy Priorities commented, "poverty in Texas is more pronounced than in the nation as a whole" (Kluever, 2005, p. 2). Within Texas, the poor tend to be concentrated in areas along the Texas–Mexico border. These areas were found to have higher than average poverty. Among counties having a poverty percentage above 20% in 1999, the four Rio Grande Valley, Texas counties fell into this category: Cameron County with 33.1%, Hidalgo County with 35.9%, Starr County with 50.9%, and Willacy County with 33.2% (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, QT-P34). The Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) determined two of the Rio Grande Valley

counties to have poverty rates higher than 30% in 2007: Cameron County and Hidalgo County (CPPP, 2007).

Since 2007, the percentage of the population living in poverty for each of the four Rio Grande Valley counties increased by 2012. According to the United States Department of Agriculture Education Research Service (2012), the percent of the total population living in poverty in 2012 is as follows: Cameron County – 35.5%, an increase of 6.1% from 2007; Hidalgo County – 34.2%, an increase of 3.7% from 2007; Starr County – 43.6%; an increase of 8.8% from 2007; and Willacy County – 38.6%, an increase of 9.0% from 2007 (USDA ERS, 2012). In 2014, the Center for Public Policy Priorities (CPPP) published key facts regarding poverty for the state of Texas. According to the CPPP, two of the top three areas in the United States having the highest poverty rates in 2013 were to be found in the Rio Grande Valley: the McAllen-Edinburg-Mission area and the Brownsville-Harlingen area (CPPP, 2013, "Key Facts about Poverty"). Considering these high poverty rates, who are the poor in Texas? Who are the poor in the Rio Grande Valley?

Who are the Poor in Texas and the Rio Grande Valley?

The United States Census Bureau 2007–2011 American Community Survey identified the poverty rate for the Texas White and Black population for 2007-2011 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007–2011, Tables A-1 & A-2). The U.S. Census Bureau's publication *American Community Survey Briefs* identified the poverty rate for the Texas Hispanic population for 2007-2011 (Macartney, Bishaw & Fontenot, 2013, p. 20); see Table 7.

Table 7

Texas Poor: 2007 - 2011

Ethnicity	% Living in Poverty
White	15.2%
African American	23.6%
Hispanic	25.9%

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF), a not-for-profit research and analysis organization focusing on health issues reported the people living in poverty in Texas for the year 2013 included 8% of the White population, 23% of the Black population, and 25% of the Hispanic population ("The Henry," 2013). See Table 8.

Table 8

Poverty Rate by Race for Texas: 2013

Ethnicity	% Living in Poverty
African American	23%
Hispanic	25%
White	8%

Regarding the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, Table 9 depicts the poor population for the four counties as reported by the U.S. Census Bureau's 2011–2013 American Community Survey 3-year estimates (United States Census Bureau, 2013, 2011-2013 Poverty Status, Table B17001A, Table B17001I)

Table 9

Rio Grande Valley Poor According to the American Community Survey 3-Year Estimates: 2011-2013

Race	Cameron County	Hidalgo County	Starr County	Willacy County
White Males	58,156	122,098	10,713	3,432
White Females	70,721	142,421	13,092	4,174
Black Males	No data	No data	No data	No data
Black Females	No data	No data	No data	No data
Hispanic Males	60,604	126,373	11,122	3,411
Hispanic Females	73,856	148,770	13,592	4,130

It is evident Texas has a persistent poverty problem, and it is equally evident the Hispanic population in Texas, especially in the Rio Grande Valley, continues to suffer from higher poverty rates. Hispanics have been and continue to be among the poorest population in the nation, in Texas, and in the Rio Grande Valley. Sadly, the disparity is not only an economic one, it also an educational disparity.

The Educational Disparity in Texas

In Texas, for the 2000 census, the Texas Data Center reported the percentage of Hispanics who earned a college degree was less than that of Whites and Blacks. As depicted in Table 10, and for the population 25 and over who achieved a college degree, 25.8 percent were White students and 15.3 percent were Black students; for Hispanic students, the percentage was just 8.9 (Texas Data Center, 2000, Tables 13h, 13b, 13a, [States in the United States]). Hispanics residing in the Rio Grande Valley, however, do outnumber Whites and Blacks. But, in this report, it is the only statistic in which Hispanics have higher percentages.

Table 10

Degree Attainment by Students 25 Years and Older by Race for Texas: Census 2000

Ethnicity	Degree Attainment %
White	25.8
Black	15.3
Hispanic	8.9

Educational attainment for the Rio Grande Valley also showed the Hispanic as the least educated; this is depicted in Table 11. For the population 25 and over who had achieved a college degree for the Rio Grande Valley in 2000, The Texas State Data Center reported the following data: Cameron County - Hispanics at 8.9 percent, Blacks at 28 percent, and Whites at 14.3 percent; Hidalgo County - Hispanics at 9.6 percent, Blacks at 16.7 percent, and Whites at 13.5 percent; Starr County - 6.2 percent Hispanics, 34.6 percent for Blacks, and Whites at 6.6 percent; Willacy County – Hispanics at 4.7 percent, Blacks at 0.7 percent (the only percentage for Blacks lower than that of Hispanics for the Rio Grande Valley), and Whites at 9.01 percent (Texas Data Center, 2000, Tables 13h, 13b, 13a, [Texas and Counties in Texas]).

Table 11

Degree Attainment by Race for Rio Grande Valley Counties for Persons 25 Years or Older: 2000

Race	Cameron County	Hidalgo County	Starr County	Willacy County
Hispanic	8.9	9.6	6.2	4.7
Black	28	16.7	34.6	0.7

White	14.3	13.5	6.6	9.07

A decade later, the data is similar. According to the America Community Survey 3 Year Estimates for 2011 – 2013 and for the population 25 and over for the Rio Grande Valley, the Hispanic lingers behind educationally (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, Table B15002I, Table B15002B, Table B15002A). See Table 12.

Table 12

Educational Attainment for Population 25 and Over for Rio Grande Valley: 2011-2013 Estimates

Race	Cameron County	Hidalgo County	Starr County	Willacy County
Hispanic	200,159	386,403	33,231	11,474
Black	No data	2,594	No data	No data
White	215,276	404,053	32,121	12,665

The Plight of Hispanic Females

The tables above illustrate an individual has a higher likelihood of living in poverty and a higher likelihood of not having a college degree if his or her ethnicity is Hispanic. Using deductive reasoning, one might then deduce if an individual is Hispanic, he or she is, or will be poor and lack a college degree. If an individual is a female Hispanic, her struggle to achieve a college degree is likely to be much more formidable. In a November 2005 speech, then Senator Barack Obama recognized the struggle of women:

> From the first moment a woman dared to speak that hope-dared to believe that the American dream was meant for her too-ordinary women have taken on

> extraordinary odds to give their daughters the chance for something else; for a life more equal, more free, and filled with more opportunity than they ever had. In so many ways we have succeeded, but in so many ways, we have much work left to do (Obama, 2005, "National Women's Law Center").

For the purposes of this study, the question arises, how do Hispanic females compare to their White and African American counterparts economically and educationally?

The Pew Research Center, which is a research organization founded in 2001 and located in Washington D.C., conducts research on many topics related to the Hispanic population in America. In a 2007 report titled *Hispanic Women in the United States,* author Felisa Gonzales reported the following data:

- There are 30.1 million Hispanic adults in the United States and 14.4 million of them – or 48% - are women, according to recent U.S. Census Bureau estimates.
- Hispanic women who work full-time earn less than non-Hispanic women who work full-time; a median of $460 per week, compared with $615 per week for non-Hispanic women.
- Hispanic women are more likely than non-Hispanic women to be employed in blue-collar occupations such as building, grounds cleaning and maintenance (10% versus 2%); food preparation and serving related jobs (9% versus 6%); production (8% versus 4%); and personal care and service occupations (7% versus 5%).
- Hispanic women are twice as likely as non-Hispanic women to live in poverty; 20% of Hispanic women are poor compared with 11% of non-Hispanic women.

- Hispanic women are less educated than non-Hispanic women. Some 36% have less than a high school education, compared with 10% of non-Hispanic women (Gonzales, 2008, p. 1-2).

As of July 1, 2013, the Hispanic population estimates according to the U.S. Census Bureau climbed to 54 million; of that number, 26, 610,478 were females (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, "Annual Estimates"). The Center for American Progress reports the following data on Latinas in the United States:

- The Latina share of the female population in the United States will increase from 16.4 percent today to 25.7 percent in 2050.
- Latinas are more likely to lack health coverage among America's uninsured women, with more than 38 percent being uninsured.
- Latinas hold only 7.4 percent of the degrees earned by women, though they constitute 16 percent of the female population in 2012.
- Latina women make 55 cents to the dollar when compared to White, non-Hispanic males. White women make 78.1 cents to the same dollar.
- Latina women earn $549 per week, compared with White women's median earnings of $718.
- According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 32.2 percent of Latina women work in the service sector, compared with only 20 percent of white women (Jackson, 2013, Sections 1, 2, & 4).

When it comes to education and achieving a college degree, the data paints the same picture for Hispanic females. The Digest of Education Statistics (2009), however, reported an increase in overall enrollment in degree-granting institutions between the

years of 1987 and 1997, a total increase of 14%. The trend intensified for the years between 1997 and 2007, but to a faster degree. Enrollment between those years increased a total of 26%, or 14.5 million to 18.2 million. Furthermore, the highest increase in enrollment to degree-granting institutions was in the female population. According to the Digest of Education Statistics (2009), full-time enrollment in degree granting institutions by females increased 29% as opposed to increase in enrollment by males of 22% between 1997 and 2007 (Snyder, Dillow, & Hoffman, 2009, p. 269). Enrollment percentages for students aged 18 to 24 years enrolled in degree-granting institutions for 2012 were at 37.6% for men and 44.5% for females (NCES, 2013, Table 302.60). Despite the increased enrollment in degree-granting institutions by females, Hispanic women continue to lag behind when it comes to achieving a college degree compared to their White and Black peers.

Although there have been gains in enrollment to degree-granting institutions by females, there exists a gap between degree achievement by women of ethnicity across America and, to a larger extent, in Texas. According to census 2000 data, the Texas State Data Center (TSDC) reported the following numbers for females age 25 or older who were college graduates (TSDC, 2000, Tables 13a, 13b, & 13h):

- Total U.S. White female college graduates: 17,944,809
- Total U.S. Black female college graduates: 1,654,577
- Total U.S. Hispanic female college graduates: 975,025

For the state of Texas, the numbers were as follows:

- Total Texas White female college graduates: 1,150,962
- Total Texas Black female college graduates: 120,041

- Total Texas Hispanic female college graduates: 156,427

According to the 2013 American Community Survey 1 year estimates, and reported by the U.S. Census Bureau, educational attainment by sex and race for the population 25 years and older and for the state of Texas were as follows (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, Sex By Educational Attainment, Tables B15002A, B15002B, & B15002I):

- Total Texas White female college graduates with a bachelor's degree 1,236,746
- Total Texas Black female college graduates with a bachelor's degree 159,399
- Total Texas Hispanic female college graduates with a bachelor's degree 263,805

Educational attainment for the same age group and reported by the U.S. Census Bureau for the year 2013 reports the following statistics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, Table1):

- Total U.S. White females with Bachelor's degree: 17,300,000
- Total U.S. Black females with a Bachelor's degree: 2,016,000
- Total U.S. Hispanic females with a Bachelor's degree: 1,700,000
- Total U.S. White females with a Master's degree: 7,700,000
- Total U.S. Black females with a Master's degree: 938,000
- Total U.S. Hispanic females with a Master's degree: 540,000
- Total U.S. White females with a Doctoral degree: 979,000
- Total U.S. Black females with a Doctoral degree: 97,000

- Total U.S. Hispanic females with a Doctoral degree: 55,000

In her report *Hispanic Women in the United States: 2007,* author Felisa Gonzales commented, "Hispanic women are less educated than non-Hispanic women. Some 36% have less than a high school education, compared with 10% of non-Hispanic women [and] 46% of native-born Hispanic women have at least some college education" (Gonzales, p. 2, 2008). In reporting on the educational distribution of women, the Women's Data Center (2008) stated the following:

> Women of color are much more likely than White women to have less than a high school education or a high school education only…nearly a quarter of Hispanic women have not completed high school (24.8 %) compared with only 4.1% of White women (para. 8).

Furthermore, the report stated among women, the highest levels of education are least represented by Hispanic females, whereas the lowest levels of education have the highest concentration of Hispanic women. Consequently, across America, Hispanic women are poorer and less educated. Similarly, for the state of Texas, Hispanic women are poorer and less educated than their White counterparts. What does it take for a Hispanic female to transcend the barriers that keep her from achieving academic success?

This study did not focus on the causes of poverty nor specifically concentrate on the reasons for lack of education for the Hispanic population. There is an abundance of literature documenting reasons and causes for Hispanics' lack of education, much of which concentrates on poor school achievement (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004, p. 153). Instead, this study focuses on the factors that contribute to the academic success,

meaning the achievement of a college degree, of Hispanic female educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley. Specifically, this research seeks to determine if self-efficacy is a contributing factor to the successful achievement of a college degree by Hispanic female educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley.

Self-Efficacy: The Burden of Great Potential

Albert Bandura is one of the 20th century's transcendentalists; his research greatly impacted the direction of psychology. As a researcher, Bandura's initial investigative inquiries focused on observational learning, more specifically, the role of modeling in human behavior. His first book on this subject, *Adolescent Aggression*, was published in 1959. His second line of research took his initial work further and incorporated the dimensions of vicarious experiences. This research line sought to investigate the influence of modeled behavior on learning, which led to Bandura's classic experiment known for the use of a rebounding doll named Bobo. Children, the participants in the study, who were exposed to role models exhibiting violent behavior towards the Bobo doll, imitated the witnessed behavior when allowed to play with a Bobo doll. Bandura and his colleagues concluded, "…children could learn new patterns of behavior vicariously without actually performing them or receiving rewards" (Pajares, 2004, para. 15). The findings from this work were published in 1963 as Bandura's second book titled *Social Learning and Personality Development.* This research sought to separate social learning from its roots in Freudian and Skinnerian influences on social learning, namely, reinforcements. Around the same time, during the 1960s, Bandura also researched children's self-regulatory processes. This work was the launching point for his revolutionary Social Cognitive Theory. His emphasis on self-

regulatory mechanisms eventually led to the publication of *Social Learning Theory* in 1977. He later changed the label to Social Cognitive Theory. In that same year, Bandura's seminal article "Self–efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change" was published; this is the article in which he introduced the construct of self-efficacy.

According to Albert Bandura, perceived self-efficacy is "…people's beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their own functioning and over events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1994, para. 75). Unfortunately, many people do not act on their capabilities, otherwise referred to as the *burden of great potential* [emphasis added]. But, human individuals have the power to act upon the environment, what Bandura terms human agency, wherein lies "…the power to originate actions for given purposes" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Human agency functions as a result of three interdependent factors: behavior, environment, and personal. Bandura stated, "among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives," their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1989, p. 1175). But, as Bandura stated, if people do not believe they have the power to "…produce results, they will not attempt to make things happen" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Is self-efficacy a distinguishing factor in Hispanic female educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley who have achieved a college degree?

Statement of the Problem

Although enrollment in a four-year degree-granting college or university by Hispanics has grown steadily, Hispanics continue to lag behind their White and Black

peers in achieving a college degree. To understand the phenomenon of success, degree attainment, and the potential influence of self-efficacy on Hispanic female educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, investigation that is naturalistic and interpretive in nature is needed, whereby obtaining rich data that may be overlooked with quantitative research. Qualitative case study research on self–efficacy has increased over the past decade, but it lags considerably behind quantitative studies on the subject.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative case study seeks to investigate factors influencing college degree achievement by Hispanic female educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley to determine whether identified factors are consistent with self-efficacy theory. First, qualitative research on the concept of self-efficacy is minimal. A 2008 analysis of self-efficacy studies conducted using a quantitative approach versus a qualitative approach from the earliest recorded studies to 2008 as maintained by database PsycINFO revealed quantitative studies considerably outnumber qualitative studies: there were 4,062 quantitative studies, 429 qualitative studies, and 36 nonclinical case studies. More recently, in 2014, the same analysis of self-efficacy studies was investigated using PsycINFO once again. The database revealed 20,342 quantitative studies, 2,227 qualitative studies, and 211 nonclinical case studies. Clearly, investigation of self- efficacy has increased; however, in order to better understand the complexities of human behavior and human experience that may be overlooked with quantitative methods, it is important to utilize qualitative methodologies more.

Second, as stated earlier, qualitative research on the concept of self-efficacy with Hispanic female educators and college degree achievement is limited in the literature. The concept of self-efficacy has been studied extensively, but as stated, it has been studied primarily through quantitative methods. Anita Wolfolk Hoy, a leading contemporary self-efficacy researcher, commented "for the past 25 years, teacher self-efficacy has been studied predominantly through quantitative scales and surveys" (Milner & Hoy, 2002, p.4). However, Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) note a need for qualitative investigations to further our understanding of self-efficacy and its development (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998, p. 242).

Third, vast amounts of literature pertaining to college exists, but just like Hispanics lag behind their White and Black peers in achieving a college degree, the literature focusing an Hispanics and college success is also limited. In 2005, researcher Frances Contreras commented there is still much that is unknown about Latinos who strive toward achievement of a college degree (p. 199).

Fourth, as the Hispanic population continues to grow as projected, its impact on the economy is significant. Researcher Jongsung Kim (2003) commented on the need for further research into the Hispanic population, as this population will have an important role in America's economy and society (p. 277). President Barack Obama echoed this sentiment by stating the future of America is most definitely connected to the future of Hispanics (Department of Education, 2011, p. 2). The New America Alliance Institute's (NAAI) report "American Latino Agenda Report 2014" indicated that, "America's engine of economic growth hinges on Latino educational success" (NAAI, 2014, p. 32).

Fifth, the earning gap between college graduates and non-college graduates is significant. But, even more significant is the greater earning gap for Hispanic workers as opposed to White workers (Kim, 2003, p. 276). Furthermore, the returns of a college education by a Hispanic worker outweigh those of a White worker, up to three times greater; Hispanic workers having earned a college degree were found to earn up to 28% more than Hispanic workers having achieved a high school diploma or less (Kim, 2003). In general, the median earnings for individuals 25 and over having a bachelor's degree in the U.S. are still greater than without a bachelor's degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013, Median Earnings, Table S2002).

Sixth, if having achieved a college degree is indeed one of the identified vehicles by which individuals may move up the socioeconomic ladder, it behooves the academic community to research factors leading to successful college completion by Hispanics, the most impoverished and uneducated population, so they too may potentially live the American dream. America experiences periods of economic crisis from time to time; having a college degree may be increasingly necessary for individuals to weather these economic downturns. RAND researcher Georges Vernez commented that up to 13 million jobs filled by individuals who lacked at least 12 years of education were eliminated between the years 1970 to 1990, yet only a little over one million jobs were created for high school graduates (Vernez, 1998, p. 9). In his paper titled "Education's Hispanic Challenge" (1998), Vernez commented:

> Today, nearly all new jobs created by the economy are being filled by workers with some college or more. At the same time, the number of jobs filled by workers with less than a high school education has declined by 41 percent since

> 1970. Also, the number of jobs filled by high school graduates has increased by only 3 percent since 1980, compared to an increase of 19 percent for the economy as a whole (Vernez, 1998, p. 1).

Considering the potential for reoccurring economic crises in America and the likelihood of employees being laid off by the thousands, having earned a college degree may very well be the distinguishing feature that enables many people to sustain a livelihood despite the nation's economic storms. The importance of college education is seen in adults who choose to return to school to either sharpen or learn a new skill. Reporting for Denver's Rocky Mountain News, reporter Myung Oak Kim asked returning adults why; the reply was simply to help ensure a steady paycheck (Kim, 2009, *Rocky Mountain News)*. Clearly, many are hopeful their return to college will bring about a better tomorrow. In regards to the economic future of America and Hispanics, the New America Alliance Institute (NAAI) commented, "given that the competitive demands of a global and high tech economy increasingly require college degrees, the under-representation of Hispanics in higher education is a national crisis" (NAAI, 2014, p. 37)

Finally, the time has come for the Hispanic population to shake off the distinction of being the least educated population group. It is therefore critical the educational needs of the fastest growing minority in the nation are met. Supporting higher educational achievement by Hispanics is essential for the future economic well-being of America and is essential for the economic, as well as personal, well-being of the Hispanic people.

Towards this goal, the current study involves qualitative case study analysis of Hispanic female educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, in order to investigate the potential influence of self–efficacy on college completion, an approach widely neglected in the literature. The research employs naturalistic and interpretive methodology as well as approaching the investigation from an emic perspective whereby gaining a deeper understanding from the point of view of the participants. It is absolutely critical to understand which factors lead to the successful achievement of a college degree by Hispanic female educational professionals, and for the purposes of this study, from the Rio Grande Valley, and to determine if these factors are grounded in self-efficacy theory in order to progress forward in the tumultuous task of minimizing the post-secondary educational gap between Hispanics and other races. Cesar Chavez echoed the words, "Yes, it can be done," many years ago, and President Obama chanted the words, "Yes, we can," throughout his campaign and into his Presidency. But Hispanics ask, "How?" It is the goal of this research to answer this question for Hispanic females seeking a college degree, seeking the American dream, to shed light on factors that may enable the completion of a college degree. This research is appropriate, timely, and necessary!

Research Questions

There are two research questions for this investigation.

1. Which factors enable female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas to overcome barriers and achieve a college degree?
2. Are these factors grounded in self-efficacy theory?

Contributions of this Study

This research will contribute to the body of literature regarding the educational achievement of Hispanics, and specifically, Hispanic females by providing a unifying context for educational achievement.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Conducting multiple-case study research has been said to be one of the toughest types of research to conduct (Yin, 2003). Unlike its quantitative sibling, qualitative research does not have the formal structure, the set procedures, or the strict methodology. Procedures and methodology for qualitative research are guidelines left to the discretion of the researcher and based on the purpose of the study. Each approach to research contributes to the knowledge base about some phenomenon or theory or hypothesis resulting from investigation. Qualitative case study research enables a researcher to delve deeply into the lives of the participants whereby enabling a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon investigated. This is what author Mark F. Goldberg sought when he interviewed significant leaders in education.

Goldberg did not set out to conduct multiple-case analysis, but it is exactly what happened. Goldberg was a writer who conducted interviews for educational publications. Although content with his writing, Goldberg felt the interviews lacked depth. He commented,

> I wanted to ask people such questions as who they were, how they came to be in education, who their heroes were, how they got started in their work, how their work had gotten through obstacles, what their dreams were in education, and what they felt was their career achievement. (Goldberg, 2000, p. 1)

Through the in-depth interviews of leaders in education such as Madeline

Hunter and Rudolf Giuliani, Goldberg discovered various similarities. Commonalities among most all of the leaders Goldberg interviewed include the following: "…the people were strikingly familiar with all of the details of their work…the level of idealism and commitment among the interviewees, [and] a deep, and often primary, interest in the plight of disadvantaged youngsters" (Goldberg, 2000, p. 4). In a similar fashion, this researcher wanted to know how Hispanic females achieved a college degree, what their goals were, who their heroes were, and how they overcame obstacles. Additionally, the researcher sought to determine if commonalities existed among the participants and if common factors were grounded in self-efficacy theory. A theoretical framework for the construct of self-efficacy, hence, is initially provided followed by a review and discussion of Hispanics and academia, closing with a rationale for this research.

Theoretical Framework

Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy beliefs are at the root of Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1986), which posits, "…a view of human agency in which individuals are agents proactively engaged in their own development and can make things happen by their actions" (Pajares, 2002, p. 3). As stated earlier, human agency is the power individuals have within themselves enabling them to make things happen. According to Pajares (2004), human agency is the enabling force that drives people to shape their own lives by reflecting, regulating, and organizing their life events instead of being at the mercy of environmental forces. The influential force behind human agency is self-efficacy. Consequently, self-efficacy beliefs become, "…the internal rules individuals

follow as they determine the effort, persistence, and perseverance required to achieve optimally as well as the strategies they will use" (Pajares, 1997, p. 18). These internal rules people follow constitute the lives people actualize for themselves and are, therefore, of critical significance in the lives of individuals. Bandura (1997) commented,

> Such beliefs influence the courses of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize (p. 3).

The concept of self-efficacy has been widely studied in a multitude of areas over the last four decades. In its infancy, research on self–efficacy began when researchers from the RAND Corporation wanted to investigate the beliefs teachers had about their ability to control the reinforcements that ensued from their actions. To investigate this, the RAND Corporation conducted the "Change Agent Study" during the 1970s. It was a study of four federally funded programs each of whose purpose was educational initiative: bilingual education efforts, career education, reading programs, and local innovative projects. The samples included 293 local projects in 18 states. For the state of California, the Los Angeles Unified School District contracted the RAND Corporation to assess reading achievement in selected elementary schools whose student population was predominantly minority. Specifically, the school district wanted to determine if reading achievement had improved in these schools after the

implementation of the School Preferred Reading Program in 1972. One dimension of the methodology of the study used by the RAND researchers included a self-efficacy instrument created by the RAND researchers (Armor, Conry-Oseguera, Cox, King, McDonnell, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976), the first of its kind. Not typical of self-efficacy scales in today's research, this scale (Armor et al., 1976, p. 23) included only two items:

- Item 1: When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment.
- Item 2: If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.

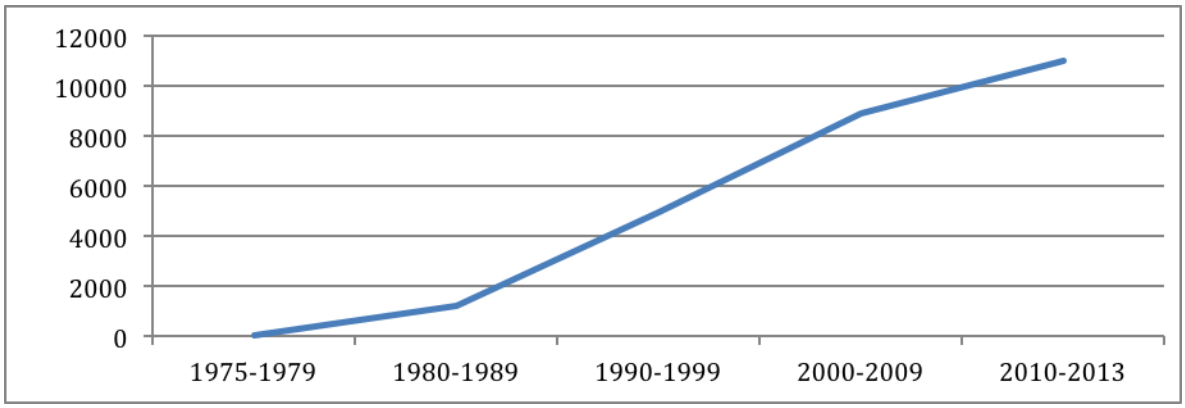
The intent of the items was to determine teachers' beliefs about their control over students' learning and motivation. One conclusion made was "in reporting on the RAND Corporation's 'Change Agent Study,' for example, McLaughlin and Marsh note that *teachers' sense of efficacy was the most powerful attribute* [emphasis added] in the RAND analysis" (1978, p. 84). Since the RAND's initial investigation of self-efficacy, the concept has been widely researched. In his article, "Current Directions in Self-efficacy Research," Frank Pajares commented:

> the tenets of the self-efficacy component of social cognitive theory have been widely tested in varied disciplines and settings and have received support from a growing body of findings from diverse fields. Self-efficacy beliefs have been found related to clinical problems such as phobias (Bandura, 1983), addiction (Marlatt, Baer, & Quickley, 1995), depression (Davis & Yates, 1982), social

skills (Moe & Zeiss, 1982), assertiveness (Lee, 1983, 1984), to stress in a variety of contexts (Jerusalem & Mittag, 1995), to smoking behavior (Garcia, Schmitz, & Doerfler, 1990), to pain control (Manning & Wright, 1983), to health (O'Leary, 1985), and to athletic performance (Barling & Abel, 1983; Lee, 1982) (1997, p. 1).

Consequently, self-efficacy research has steadily increased over the last four decades. An Internet search yielded evidence of the evolution of self-efficacy research. Key words were typed into an online database, PsycINFO, a database containing a multitude of data on most domains in the social sciences. When the key word self-efficacy was typed into the search window, the search results indicated a total of zero recorded data on the concept of self-efficacy from the earliest recordings to 1975. From 1975 through 1979, a total of 46 entries appeared. From 1980 to 1989, a total of 1,227 entries on the topic of self-efficacy appeared. Between the years 1990 to 1999, 4,933 entries resulted. From 2000 to 2009, a total of 8,880 entries resulted from the search of data pertaining to self-efficacy. Finally, from 2010 to 2013, a total of 11,023 entries appeared. See Figure 1.

Figure 1
Entries for 'self-efficacy' in PsycINFO between 1975 and 2013



Arguably, the construct of self-efficacy has grown tremendously over the years. As stated earlier, self-efficacy is studied in many fields of research that investigate a myriad of topics related to human life, functioning, and behavior. In particular, an area of high investigation and continued research growth is education.

Influence of self-efficacy. Dembo and Gibson made observations of teachers with low self-efficacy and high self-efficacy in their 1984 study examining how self-efficacy influences classroom behavior. Analysis of the observation data revealed differences in three specific areas: classroom organization, instruction, and teacher feedback. Teachers with high self-efficacy utilized more of their "time monitoring and checking seatwork…were more effective in leading students to correct responses, and …allocated twice the amount of time to whole-class instruction, [while teachers with low self–efficacy] spent almost 50% of their time in small group instruction [and]…tended to give the answer" (Dembo & Gibson, 1985, p. 176). They also noted that teachers with low self-efficacy became frustrated when their routines were interrupted (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

During the 1980s, Albert Bandura and Dale H. Schunk (1981) conducted research on the impact of proximal goals versus distal goals on cultivation of, among other things, self-efficacy. The participants for the research included 40 children between the ages of 7 and 10. Specifically, the aim of the research was to test the hunch that proximal goals have the potential to maintain activity engagement, which, in turn, helps to develop self-efficacy and interest (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). The 40 participants were chosen based on their achievement on a mathematical assessment. Researchers were seeking children who were grossly deficient in mathematical skills.

Once selected, the construct of self-efficacy was measured using a Likert-type scale. Students were shown 25 math flash cards for two seconds each. Students were then told to judge their capability to solve the types of problems presented on the cards on the scale, which indicated scores of 1 to 100 in intervals of 10. The higher the score the children gave, the higher the self–efficacy. Three treatment conditions ensued: the proximal group, the distal group, and the control group. Each group was assigned to solve 42 pages of mathematical instructional items, a total of 258 problems. This was the same for all groups. The distinguishing feature was the suggestion made by the experimenter. The proximal group, prior to beginning, was told it might be a good idea to attempt to finish at least six pages of instructional items each session; there would be a total of seven sessions. This suggestion was repeated a final time at the beginning of the second session. Children were then left to their own devices and decision making to determine how much they would complete each session. The distal group was told it might be a good idea to complete all 42 pages by the end of the seventh session. This suggestion was also made at the beginning of session two and no more after that. Children were then left to their own devices and decision making to determine how much they would complete each session. The third group was not given any suggestion as to the pacing of their work. They were simply left to their own devices to complete the task as they determined necessary. By the end of the fourth session, researchers assessed completion of the task. The amount of instructional material completed by the proximal group was 74%; the amount of instructional material completed by the distal group was 55%, and the amount of instructional material completed by the control group was 53% (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). The results of the study helped to confirm

the notion that proximal goals have an influential impact on competency, self-efficacy perceptions, and intrinsic interest (Bandura & Schunk, 1981). The study further showed the positive influential impact of high self-efficacy. Students who were determined to be high in their efficacy beliefs for solving the mathematical problems as assessed early in the investigation were the students who persisted longer, did not quit, and who grew more efficacious with mastery (Bandura & Schunk, 1981).

Effects of self-efficacy. In another study, V. Scott Solberg and Pete Villareal (1997) investigated the personal adjustment to college of Hispanic college students. The purpose of the study "…was to explore possible social (e.g. social support) and cognitive (e.g., stress, self-efficacy) determinants associated with personal adjustment (i.e., physical and psychological distress) of Hispanic college students" (Solberg & Villarreal, 1997, p. 182). Participants were 164 Mexican American and Latin American undergraduates. One of the surveys taken by the participants was the College Self-Efficacy Inventory (CSEI) created by Solberg, O'Brien, Villareal, Kennel, and Davis (1993). The scale consisted of 20 items created from researching various self-help books on the topic of school success. The relationship between variables was assessed, and the results indicated that self-efficacy was related to better personal adjustment.

Career decision-making self-efficacy was investigated by Gushue, Clark, Pantzer, and Scanlan in 2006. Specifically, the research looked into the perceptions of obstacles, the self-efficacy of career related decisions as well as the engagement of activities related to career decisions, and the vocational identity of Latina/o adolescents (Gushue et al., 2006). Researchers distributed packets containing the various instruments to participants in the classroom of teachers who had agreed to participate in

the study. Four scales were in the packet; one of these scales was the Career Decision-Making Scale by Betz, Klein, and Taylor (1996). A total of 28 students at an urban high school who identified themselves as Latino or Hispanic completed the packets. After analysis of the data, findings of the study indicated that higher levels of career decision-making self-efficacy were related to an increased involvement in the explorations of careers and a vocational identity that was more diversified (Gusheu et al., 2006).

Researcher Maristela C. Zell (2010) investigated the subjective and psychological experiences of 15 community college Latina/o students and their impact on continued educational pursuits. The 15 participants were between the ages of 22 and 44. The participants participated in an interview where they were asked questions regarding their experiences with education, obstacles, support systems, access to resources, and how obstacles to these resources were overcome. Some of the questions included, "Why did you decide to go to college and what are your motivations for continuing?" and "What in your family or background supports and motivates you to achieve college goals?" The analysis of the transcribed interviews revealed eight themes: "overcoming personal and social challenges, maturation, self–discovery and college adjustment, self-efficacy, continuously strategizing, sense of purpose, perception of faculty, perception of advisors, and guided and groomed by family to succeed" (Zell, 2010, p. 170).

Regarding self-efficacy, Zell commented that all participants, "…reported feeling confident that they could accomplish their academic goals and depend on their resources and cognitive abilities" (Zell, 2010, p. 174). Zell, furthermore, added that the students' ability to attend and succeed at the community college when others doubted

them was attributed to self-efficacy. According to Zell, several students commented that they persevered, were determined, and were not going to give up.

Changes in self-efficacy. Hoy and Spero (2005) conducted a study with a 1997-1998 elementary education Master's of Education cohort from a public university in which they investigated the efficacy judgments of teachers just entering a preparation program and through their first year of teaching experience (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Four instruments were used to measure self-efficacy at various stages: Gibson and Dembo short form (1984), Bandura Teacher Self-efficacy Scale (Bandura's Instrument), a questionnaire developed by the researchers, the Ohio State University Teaching Confidence Scale, and goals of the preparation program. The various stages at which a measurement was taken using one of the above mentioned instruments were categorized into three phases: Phase I – first quarter of teacher preparation program, Phase II – at the end of the preparation program, and Phase III – at the end of the first year of actual teaching.

Results from their research concluded that self-efficacy increased during teacher preparation and student teaching, but it declined during the first year of teaching experience. Hoy and Spero (2005) asked why efficacy of novice teachers declined with real classroom experience. They speculated student teachers and beginning teachers have high self-efficacy because up to that point, they have been gathering knowledge about the teaching profession and about themselves, all of which is in support of their chosen profession. Once these new inductees into the teaching profession are hired and experience their first real performance as a teacher, however, they begin to experience feelings of inadequacy at being able to simultaneously take care of the many

responsibilities of teaching. Consequently, their perceptions of personal teacher competence are affected whereby lowering their beliefs in their ability, their self-efficacy, to successfully perform as a teacher.

E. Hernandez (1995) conducted an investigation on the impact of role models on the educational and career aspirations and self-efficacy of Texas Hispanic women considered at risk. Specifically, the study investigated the aspirations and levels of self-efficacy among a group of participants exposed to role model activities of the Hispanic Mother-Daughter Program (HMDP) (Hernandez, 1995). The participants included 47 Texas Hispanic women participating in the program. The objective of HMDP is to assist young Hispanic women who are considered at risk for various domains achieve increased high school and college attendance rates and to improve their professional as well as social skills. One strategy used toward this end is to expose these women to positive role models. This was the case with Hernandez's 47 participants.

The participants and their mothers were exposed to a series of positive role model presentations. Role models were successful Hispanic women from various professional fields. The role models were instructed to give a positive and inspiring presentation pertaining to their success stemming from personal experiences. Data was gathered using interviews and focus groups. From the interviews, participants' comments indicated participants had aspirations to further their education and achieve a career; participants had a sense of efficacy, gender identity, and personal identity that was strong (Hernandez, 1995). Strong self–efficacy was determined based on comments made by the participants such as, "I can do it," and "Other women make it, why not me"

(Hernandez, 1995, p. 259). Responses given during the focus group sessions, however, revealed a different perception from the participants.

Although the participants felt HMDP was a positive pathway to career goals, a sense of futility overshadowed their aspirations. These girls revealed what the researcher termed "…a sense of resignation and helplessness and a sense of the futility of fighting against destiny" (Hernandez, 1995, p. 260). The girls made comments such as, "Things just are the way they are," "Life isn't fair, you can't change that," and "Most of the time, I feel that I am by myself" (Hernandez, 1995, p. 260). Furthermore, the girls shared their belief that the role models were atypical examples, not the norm. They felt the role models were the exception and possessed some type of superhuman power, figuratively, to achieve their success whereby confirming their inability to do the same. Hernandez concluded the differing responses from the interviews and focus groups may have been due to the source of self-efficacy enhancement.

Hernandez felt the presentations by the role models may have produced opposite results from what was intended. The participants felt inspired by the role models, but also felt the success achieved by the role models was out of their reach. Despite the exposure to the positive role models, they felt life for them was simply what it was and not much could change that. The researcher concluded one time role model presentations, although well intended, may not be the best approach at attempting to enhance self-efficacy and academic goals.

Researcher J. Derek Lopez (2013) embarked on a study in which he examined the factor of gender and Latino/a self-efficacy. Specifically, the study sought to investigate self-efficacy appraisals of Latino/a students who were in the process of

transitioning into an elite institution that was predominantly White in order to examine differences regarding gender. The participants of the study were freshman Latino/a students between the ages of 17 and 19 who identified themselves as Latino/a in a student body list and were students at the selected university for the study. Participants completed the College Self-efficacy Inventory, a 19-item survey containing three subscales: coursework efficacy, roommate efficacy, and social efficacy. In order to discern changes over time, the survey was administered twice, once in the fall and once in the spring. The results of the analysis of the fall administration of the survey revealed that females scored lower on social efficacy and coursework efficacy compared to the males. This, however, changed throughout the first year of college. The second administration of the survey revealed that the women became, "…more efficacious over time," whereas the male's social efficacy and coursework efficacy decreased over time (Lopez, 2013, p. 98). Lopez concluded there are distinct differences in the self-appraisals of self-efficacy regarding gender of college students that are Latino/a, and that these differences should be considered when programs meant to promote college success are contemplated.

Influences on behavior. In a similar fashion, Milner and Hoy (2003), leading self-efficacy researchers, investigated the sources of self-efficacy for an American suburban high school African American teacher of the United States. Milner and Hoy used tape-recorded semi-formal and structured interviews, observation, and participant review of data to conduct their research. Some of the questions asked included "How did this teacher's self-efficacy for teaching develop over the years?" and "What sources contributed most to her sense of self-efficacy?" (Milner & Hoy, 2003, p. 267). Through

triangulation of data collection, Milner and Hoy were able to develop themes representative of the data. The findings of this study confirm Bandura's theory of self–efficacy sources. Dr. Wilson, the African American teacher in the study, was able to overcome negative stereotyping through the respect of her students and their parents (verbal persuasion) and she was able to remain confident by reflecting on positive and/or successful experiences, one of which was attaining a Ph.D. (mastery experiences). Milner and Hoy (2003) concluded their study with the following comments

> …more qualitative studies may be needed to sharpen and broaden our knowledge about teacher self-efficacy…future research should continue deeper examination of the specifics of teacher self-efficacy in different contexts and in relation to cultural factors (p. 263).

Milner (2002) conducted another study in a similar fashion, only this time the participant was an experienced European American teacher. Milner begins his study discussing the percentage of teachers who leave the profession by the third year of teaching experience and by the fifth year of teaching experience. He quoted Gold (1996) and Harris and associates (1993), who stated 25% of beginning teachers leave the profession by their third year and up to 40% leave the profession by their fifth year. Consequently, Milner sought through this qualitative investigation to find out what keeps a teacher from quitting the teaching profession despite the many difficulties that arise and what causes many other teachers to leave the profession (Milner, 2002). More specifically, Milner sought the sources of self-efficacy for the teacher in the study using observation and interviews as data collection techniques. Ms. Albright, the pseudonym

for the teacher in the study, was selected because she met the criteria. She was a teacher who was willing to participate, was a teacher with teaching experience, and she was considered articulate and reflective. The setting was an affluent midwestern high school.

Ms. Albright was a teacher of freshmen gifted and talented students. Although she felt she was doing a good job, giving it all she had, she received criticism from students and parents about her teaching methodology. According to this criticism, Ms. Albright was too soft on her students. She was told she was not tough enough in teaching the gifted and talented students. As much as she tried not taking the criticism personally, she did and began to doubt her teaching abilities.

In attempting to better understand this teacher's sources of self-efficacy, Milner asked various questions, some of which included the following

1. What was the nature of this teacher's sense of self-efficacy?
2. What were this teacher's sources of self-efficacy to keep her in teaching?
3. What sources contributed most to her sense of efficacy? (2002, p. 29)

The criticism hurt Ms. Albright, but in spite of it, she persevered through the negative experience and, as she commented, "…stepped up to the plate," (Milner, 2002, para. 21). She continued to teach, never giving thought to quitting her profession, and became more efficacious because of the experience. Two things helped Ms. Albright persevere through this challenging time: recalling mastery experiences and verbal persuasion. Ms. Albright reflected on experiences that were successful whereby reaffirming her competence as a teacher. The verbal persuasion was received in the form of positive feedback from students, parents, colleagues, and administration. Milner

commented that although mastery experiences are said to be the strongest source of self-efficacy, in the case of Ms. Albright, the verbal persuasion seemed to be the strongest source for this teacher's self-efficacy (Milner, 2002).

As clearly evidenced by the studies discussed above, self-efficacy is an integral part of people's lives. Self-efficacy has the potential to influence behavior, the potential to produce effects, can change over time, and can be cultivated via various sources. In addition, the studies discussed also shed light on the notion that the benefits of being highly efficacious in one regard or another is consistently found to be true. Self-efficacy has been repeatedly shown to have positive impact on the lives of individuals, and as Bandura (1997) stated,

> There are many pathways through life, and at any given period, people vary substantially in how successfully they manage their lives in the milieus in which they are immersed. The beliefs they hold about their capabilities to produce results by their actions are an influential personal resource as they negotiate their lives through the life cycle. (p. 162)

If this is the case, it is important to know where self-efficacy comes from, and how do self-efficacy beliefs produce effects?

Sources of Self-efficacy

According to Albert Bandura (1997) "self-efficacy beliefs are constructed from four principal sources of information:"

- enactive mastery experiences that serve as indicators of capability
- vicarious experiences that alter efficacy beliefs through transmission of competencies and comparison with attainments of others

- verbal persuasion and allied types of social influences that one possesses certain capabilities, and
- physiological and affective states from which people partly judge their capableness, strength, and vulnerability to dysfunction (p. 79).

According to Bandura, of these four, mastery experiences are the most influential. People engage in action, activity, and behavior. Upon doing so, people then reflect on those behaviors and interpret their consequences. These interpretations serve as the source whereby beliefs of one's capabilities develop, which, in turn, influences subsequent behavior. Therefore, according to Bandura, mastery experiences "…provide the most authentic evidence of whether one can muster whatever it takes to succeed" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). Successes help build a belief in one's capabilities that is resilient whereas failures will have a tendency to undermine one's sense of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Individuals, who believe they have within themselves what it takes to achieve and be successful, will ultimately be the ones who persevere when things go wrong or when faced with challenges, and they will be the ones who rebound from setbacks more quickly.

Vicarious experiences also influence self-efficacy. These experiences involve the social comparisons one makes through observations of others. This source of self-efficacy beliefs is weaker than mastery experiences, but Frank Pajares (2002) commented that uncertainty about one's own abilities strengthens the influence of vicarious experiences. Consequently, people influence their self-efficacy when they compare themselves with fellow students, fellow colleagues, fellow competitors, and so on. When one outperforms these others, self-efficacy increases. Conversely, when one

is outperformed, self-efficacy is decreased. Consequently, people evaluate their capabilities when they compare their attainments with those of others (Bandura, 1997). It is within this context that role models play a significant role. When people attach attributes of others as being similar and within themselves, these others and their performance are extremely influential on the beliefs one has about his or her performance.

Bandura commented the beliefs about capabilities to achieve desired ends could be further strengthened by social persuasion (Bandura, 1997). When people who are regarded as significant in the lives of individuals express faith in one's capabilities, it serves to enhance and sustain self-efficacy for that person. Consequently, greater effort will be exerted by individuals for whom evaluative feedback that is supportive is given as opposed to negative feedback, which can undermines one's self-efficacy. Therefore, verbal feedback that is offered plays an influential role in the development of self-beliefs.

Part of what people use to evaluate their capabilities is their emotional states. People are prone to reactions to the environment surrounding them. Hence, events in the lives of people have impact on their physiological selves. These *somatic states*, as Bandura (1994) called them, are the clues people use to gauge their efficacy. People may view themselves vulnerable to stressors whereby judging themselves inefficacious, therefore debilitating efforts. On the contrary, people with a high sense of self–efficacy perceive their somatic clues in a more positive and encouraging way. Bandura stated, "people who have a high sense of efficacy are likely to view their state of affective

arousal as an energizing facilitator of performance, whereas those who are beset with self-doubts regard their arousal as a debilitator" (1994, p. 1).

How Do Self-efficacy Beliefs Produce Effects?

The path through which self-efficacy beliefs manifest themselves into human action is varied. According to Bandura, "…efficacy beliefs regulate human functioning through four major processes…cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective processes" (1997, p. 116). Forethought, a cognitive process, is the regulating mechanism for human behavior. Bandura believed that thought is produced through symbols; in order to have a life with structure, continuity, and meaning, people symbolize the experiences of their life (Pajares, 2002). This being the case, people with high self–efficacy tend to take a future perspective in the way they go about structuring their lives. Goals are an integral part of this futuristic perspective of life. The stronger the sense of one's capabilities, the more confident people are in the goals they set for themselves. The higher the confidence in one's goals, therefore, the stronger the commitment to achieving those goals. It can be said those with high self–efficacy have a tendency to see the glass half full. These people will seize situations as prospective possibilities that can be realized; they see success. On the other hand, individuals with low self–efficacy tend to see the glass half empty. Bandura (1997) commented that people are the architects of their lives and the choices they make shape their future. Efficacious people not only seize opportunities, they are able to maneuver through constraints whereas low efficacious people feel powerless to bring about change in their lives.

As stated earlier, forethought has a futuristic perspective. But, the future states one conjures up in forethought cannot be held accountable for action that is in the present. Instead, these future states are brought to the present through the very act of forethought; "by being cognitively represented in the present, conceived future states are converted into current motivators and regulators of behavior" (Bandura, 1997, p. 22). The behavior of people, consequently, takes on a purposive nature whereby people set goals for themselves and set about attempting to make these future states a reality in time. Cognitively, then, motivation is instigated. People will generate beliefs about their capabilities, anticipate outcomes, whether negative or positive, and plan action according to the goals they have set for themselves.

Human behavior is also influenced by one's affective (emotional) states. Self–efficacy plays an important role in people's ability to self-regulate their affective states. There are three ways in which self-efficacy impacts emotional experiences: thought, action, and affect. Where thought is concerned, self-efficacy controls how one cognitively represents, and recalls, life events: good or bad. Furthermore, self-efficacy influences one's ability to control those disturbing, and possibly debilitating, thoughts that interfere with one's consciousness. Where action is concerned, self–efficacy beliefs, "regulate emotional states by supporting effective courses of action to transform the environment in ways that alter its emotive potential" (Bandura, 1997, p. 137). Finally, where affect is concerned, self–efficacy beliefs make it possible for people to rid themselves of disturbing emotional states once they occur. Ultimately, people possess the ability to regulate their affective states. Bandura commented that people have to live with the psychic environments they create for themselves. Therefore,

people can influence how they feel and behave according to the extent of their ability to regulate what they think.

Not only do people have the ability to regulate what they think, people also possess the ability to make choices. In a sense, then, people are the captains of the ships they sail, and the ship they metaphorically sail is named Destiny. The route individuals navigate is ultimately determined by the life choices they make. This is what Bandura considers to be the fourth means by which self-efficacy beliefs produce effects.

According to Bandura, the beliefs people have about their capabilities strongly influence the choices they make. Therefore, the activities and environments people partake in are partly shaped by the efficacy beliefs they have. People will choose activities and environments they judge themselves capable of maneuvering, but they will avoid those activities and environments they judge themselves not capable of handling. When self–efficacy is high, people choose more challenging activities and have a stronger sense of commitment to those activities. On the contrary, when self-efficacy is low, people will disregard options that have the potential for them to realize their capabilities because the individual initially does not believe in his or her capability to handle challenging or risky activities. Ultimately, people are the shepherds of their lives and as they negotiate life's events, their self–efficacy plays a pivotal role in the choices they make. Bandura commented,

> the stronger people's beliefs in their efficacy, the more career options they consider possible, the greater the interest they show in them, the better they prepare themselves educationally for different occupational careers, and the greater their staying power in the chosen pursuits. (1997, p. 161)

According to his early years of research, Albert Bandura felt something was missing from the prevalent learning theories and from his own social learning theory. In 1977, he identified this missing piece: self-efficacy. This realization was published in his article, "Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change." In a similar fashion, something is missing from the current research regarding the successful completion of a college degree by Hispanics, the least educated minority. Could self-efficacy be the unidentified source of enablement for Hispanics striving toward degree achievement?

In Chapter 1, this researcher pointed out Hispanics lag behind their White and Black peers in achieving college degrees. If self-efficacy has an extensive and significant impact on the lives of individuals, is it self–efficacy that is an undetected force enabling, specifically, Hispanic females, unlikely candidates for educational achievement, from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, to achieve a college degree despite the odds against them?

Hispanics and Academia

A Historical Perspective

The study of self–efficacy began with the publication of Albert Bandura's article "Self-efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change" in the 1970s. Incidentally, the study of the Hispanic / Chicana woman began around the same time. Recognizing and motivated by the extreme lack of Chicanas in higher education, author Gloria H. Cuadraz commented, in her review of the literature pertaining to Chicanas and higher education, "one pattern remains abundantly clear: Chicanas are severely underrepresented in institutions of higher education at the undergraduate, master's, and

doctoral levels" (Cuadraz, 2005, p. 215). Cuadraz (2005) traced the history of literature focusing on Chicanas and higher education for three decades in her article, "Chicanas and Higher Education: Three Decades of Literature and Thought."

Cuadraz focused on the decades between the 1970s and the 1990s. However, two significant events related to education took place prior to the 1970s: The GI Bills of 1944, 1952, and 1966 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The GI Bill, along with the National Defense Education Act of 1958, was meant to financially assist individuals seeking college education. These bills provided low interest loans to people who might otherwise not be able to afford college. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 allowed for the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965. This act provided equal opportunity for those deemed as talented but poor. Opening the doors for many, these events significantly impacted college access for those who previously deemed college as unreachable. For the Chicana and higher education, however, earning a place in the scholarly literature worthy of study became known as the "Mexican problem" (Cuadraz, 2005, p. 5).

The 1970s: Resisting Oppression

This *Mexican problem* [emphasis added] solicited attention from the scholarly community. One of the first scholarly writers on the topic of Chicanas and higher education was Corinne Sanchez. In 1973, she published "Higher Education y la Chicana" in which she discussed the exclusion of Chicanas from colleges and universities across America. In 1978, the Ford Foundation funded research conducted by the Center for Research on Women at Stanford University, investigating barriers to higher education for Chicanas, one of the first studies of its kind. Findings from this

study revealed Chicana women's educational progress was stifled by three things: "hours on domestic labor, less parental support from mothers as compared to boys, and greater stress factors than Chicano men" (Cuadraz, 2005, p. 220). The research findings were significant whereby legitimizing the study of Chicanas in higher education. Breaking ground in the research and study of Chicanas and higher education, writers of the 1970s were considered pioneers and strengthened the voice of the Mexican American woman.

The 1980s: Legacy of Activism

The overarching theme in the literature of the 1970s, voiced through mostly emotional outcries, was resistance to oppression. The 1980s brought about more literature on the topic of Chicanas and higher education. The literature of the 1980s, however, was distinct; it was more objective and had a more theoretical bent than the emotional outcries of the 1970s. Furthermore, it had an activist theme. The first National Hispanic Feminist Conference was held in 1980. This conference brought together scholars, researchers, and community women to discuss issues facing Hispanic women. Ultimately, the conference sought discourse aimed at the overall improvement of the condition of Hispanic women. In 1982, the *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* published a special issue focusing on the Chicana. Its purpose was to bring about visibility of Chicanas. The Association for Chicano Studies focused its annual meeting specifically on women in 1984. The conference led to the publication of *Chicana Voices*: *Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender* in 1990. Editors of this publication commented, "this volume stands as the culmination of years of effort to place Chicana involvement at the center of our scholarly endeavors" (Cordova, Cantu,

Cardenas, Garcia, & Sierra, 1990, p. ix). Some of the first books specifically discussing issues related to Hispanic women were published in the1980s: *The Broken Web: The Educational Experience of Hispanic American Women* edited by Teresa McKenna and Flora Ida Ortiz (1988), *La Chicana* by Evangelista Enriquez and Alfredo Mirande (1979), and *Mexican Women in the United States: Struggles Past to Present* edited by Magdalena Mora and Adelaida del Castillo (1980). While the literature of the 1970s was characterized by emotional outcries resisting oppression; the literature of the 1980s, having a more activist theme, attempted to "…refute the cultural deficit notion of blame the victim" (Cuadraz, 2005, p. 218). The 1990s, on the other hand, began to look at the issues of Hispanic women and education from multiple perspectives.

The 1990s: Multiple Perspectives

The 1990s brought about continued research on Hispanics and education, but this literature incorporated various theoretical lenses from which to research the issue. Scholarly writers of this time used frameworks such as social agency, cultural capital, and critical race theory to better understand educational disparities for the Hispanic. A common thread in many of the 1990 studies was the Hispanic's struggle to overcome messages of unworthiness and their struggle to navigate two worlds: home and university. Studies of the 1990s, furthermore, veered away from the cultural deficit mentality of earlier decades. Instead, many researchers of the 1990s conducted research validating the culture of the Hispanic home whereby seeing it as a beneficial resource and not a disadvantage. In spite of this shift in thinking, however, whether the literature was written in the 1970s, the 1980s, or the 1990s, the writing reflected a defensive

stance on behalf of the Hispanic and education largely due to cultural deficit notions (Cuadraz, 2005).

2000 – 2010: Addressing the *Mexican Problem*

Although some of the literature on Hispanics and their educational experiences published between 2000 and 2010 focused on continued educational inequities, the educational success of the Hispanic was a dominant theme of the scholarly literary landscape of this decade. A few of the scholarly publications of this time include "Study of Successful Latina/o Students" written by Carlos P. Zalaquett in 2006, "From Freshman to Graduate: Recruiting and Retaining Minority Students" written by Lisa D. Hobson-Horton and Lula Owens in 2004, "Increasing Latina/o Students' Baccalaureate Attainment: A Focus on Retention" written by L. Oseguera, A.M. Locks, and I. Vega in 2009, "Achieving a College Education: The Psychological Experiences of Latina/o Community College Students" written by Maristela C. Zell in 2010, and "Overcoming Personal and Academic Challenges: Perspectives From Latina College Students" written by Javier Cavazos, Jr., Michael B. Johnson, and Gregory Scott Sparrow in 2010. Access to a college education for Hispanic students was a popular theme of this period as were topics related to educational advancement to include mentoring programs, participation in student organizations, faculty effectiveness, and Affirmative Action. Some of the terminology used by the researchers and/or authors of these scholarly pieces includes *empowering*, *improving*, *increasing*, *making it*, and *enhancing* [emphasis added]. The educational advancement of Hispanic women was also a topic of interest between 2000 and 2010. Carmen Suarez-McCrink (2002) wrote " Hispanic Women: Building a Room for Self-Efficacy," Miguel Ceja (2004) wrote "Chicana

College Aspirations and the Role of Parents: Developing Educational Resiliency", and Juan Carlos Gonzalez wrote "Academic Socialization Experiences of Latina Doctoral Students: A Qualitative Understanding of Support Systems That Aid and Challenges that Hinder the Process" in 2006. With educational success of Hispanics a primary focus for many researchers and authors of this time period, factors influencing educational achievement were also a focus of investigation. Jeffrey H. D. Cornelius-White, Aida C. Garza, and Ann T. Hoey, for example, authored "Personality, Family Satisfaction, and Demographic Factors that Help Mexican American Students Succeed Academically" in 2004; in 2006, Bernadette Sanchez, Olga Reyes, and Joshua Singh wrote "Making It in College: The Value of Significant Individuals in the Lives of Mexican American Adolescents." The good news was scholarly attention was focused on the academic success of Hispanic students. Sadly, and despite the increased scholarly focus on academic success of Hispanics, an underlying sentiment of being devalued lurked in the background for the Hispanic. It is what Leaonard A. Valverde discussed in his article "Still Marginalized After All These Years" (2004).

A Myth in the Making

Authors Richard R. Valencia and Mary S. Black (2002) commented, in their article "Mexican Americans Don't Value Education: On the Bases of the Myth, Mythmaking, and Debunking," that in the past and the present, assertions about Mexican American parents not valuing education have been made. These Mexican American parents supposedly pass on to their children the belief that education is not a thing of value, hence the myth and its perpetuation. Valencia and Black discuss the

myth and its birth from three theoretical views: the cultural deficit literature, the at-risk literature, and from a third category they label as "other."

The cultural deficit view grew out of the 1960s. This view suggested there is a deficit, or defect, present that stifles educational growth. One of its primary targets was the Mexican American. For the Mexican American, this defect is the supposed lack of value placed on education by the parents. Consequently, the parents pass on this belief to their children whereby resulting in their poor academic performance. What this view did was place the blame for student academic failure on the victim, holding faultless other factors that may be responsible for lack of academic success such as inequitable opportunity and other schooling conditions.

The term *at-risk* [emphasis added] was popularized in the 1980s and has since become a fixed adjective in much of the educational literature pertaining to students' poor academic performance. A primary interest in this type of research has been factors contributing to low achievement. Although some of this research has investigated factors involving school conditions, such as low expectations, and societal conditions, such as lack of opportunity, a predominant focus is familial characteristics, such as race, and personal characteristics, such as poverty. Consequently, Mexican Americans have consistently been regarded as members of the at-risk population.

Valencia and Black (2002) cite other sources for the myth pertaining to Hispanics and their supposed lack of value for education. The authors pointed to claims reinforcing the myth, but that were unfounded. In particular, the authors criticized claims made, for example, by economist Thomas Sowell in his writings of 1981. Sowell stated as far as education is concerned, Mexican Americans have never made it a goal

nor placed value on it (Valencia & Black, 2002). Valencia and Black criticized Sowell's assertion because it was not only a sweeping generalization, it lacked supporting evidence. Sowell compared high school completion rates of ethnic groups. Noticing Hispanics had the lowest completion rates for the years he investigated, he drew the conclusion that Mexican Americans do not value education. Similar to Sowell, the authors discuss Lloyd M. Dunn's 1987 research in which he too blames Mexican Americans for their educational predicament. According to Dunn, parents of Mexican Americans are not motivated nor dedicated enough to maneuver the educational system so it works in their favor, which, in turn, leads their children to experience problems at school. According to Valencia and Black, Dunn also lacked evidence to support his assertions. Valencia and Black concluded their article with the suggestion of keeping a vigilant eye and ear for these unfounded stereotypes against Hispanics in an effort to bury the myth Hispanics do not value education. According to Valencia and Black, attributing the, "…persistent and pervasive achievement gap between Mexican American students and their White peers to a value orientation of Mexican American indifference to the importance of education is baseless, irresponsible, and racist" (2002, p. 92).

Burying the Myth

After thoroughly discussing causes for the myth, Valencia and Black discussed a history of proof in support of Hispanics' valuing of education whereby falsifying the myth. The researchers attempted to put to rest the myth by providing evidence of Mexican Americans' struggle toward educational achievement. They do so through three veins of evidentiary thought:

a) the historical and contemporary struggle for equal educational opportunity

b) the scholarly literature documenting parental involvement

c) a case study of transgenerational parental involvement (2002, p. 92).

The Mexican American's struggle for equal educational opportunity is not a recent phenomenon. Since the 1930s, Hispanics have fought for equal educational opportunity in various forms. One form has been through lawsuits brought against educational stakeholders. Lawsuits have covered a variety of issues ranging from special education, school financing, high stakes testing, and more. Not every lawsuit ended in victory, but each sought to equalize the educational experience of the Hispanic student. It is well documented, hence, that Hispanics have battled the educational system for the last 70 years whereby verifying their valuing of education.

A second form of striving for equal educational opportunity used by Hispanics has been the formation of advocacy groups. These groups have been instrumental in identifying issues considered problematic for the Hispanic student and working toward improvement. These groups are a critical voice in the Hispanics' historical struggle for equal educational opportunity. Some of these advocacy groups are the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), the Mexican American Legal Defense Fund (MALDEF), and the American GI Forum.

A third form of pursuing equal educational opportunity by Hispanics has been through individuals who have taken on this cause. Some of these include Hector Garcia, founder of the American GI Forum in Texas, Pete Tijerina, founder of MALDEF, and Mari-Luci Jaramillo, pioneering advocate of bilingual education. These individuals

have stepped to the forefront of these battles, and represent yet another piece of evidence to debunk the myth Mexican Americans do not value education.

Political demonstrations have been a fourth form of fighting the battle for equal educational opportunity for Hispanics. These demonstrations have manifested themselves in school walkouts. The first walk out took place in San Angelo, Texas, in 1910. In this event, the Tejano community fought for the right of their children to attend the superior White schools. Similar school walkouts have taken place in Los Angeles in 1968 and in Crystal City, Texas, in 1969. Similarly, thousands of students across the nation walked out of their classes in middle school or high school in protest of Congressional debates presumably criminalizing immigrants who were undocumented in 2006. Despite these walkouts igniting due to the issue of immigration, the underlying message by the protesters echoed civil rights for all.

Finally, legislation has been another form of fighting for equal educational opportunity for the Hispanic. Examples of legislation include efforts in favor of bilingual education and the Top Ten Percent Plan in Texas. The Top Ten Percent Plan became law in Texas in 1998. It allows high school graduates who are within the top 10 percent of their graduating class to be automatically enrolled into a four-year university in the state of Texas. Initiating an effort towards educational improvement and increased educational opportunities for all students, President Barack Obama and his administration implemented the Race to the Top reform initiative in 2009, inviting state governments to implement effective strategies aimed at increasing student educational achievement and success. These examples serve as evidence that Mexican Americans do in fact value education.

Documenting the Valuing of Education by Hispanics

Valencia and Black (2002) cited various studies supporting the notion Hispanic parents do indeed value education. According to the authors, the more recent studies have been powerful testimonials in support of Hispanics valuing of education. Valencia and Black noted a common thread is persistently present in many of the studies pertaining to Hispanics and higher education: Hispanics' strong desire and commitment to educational achievement and high educational expectations for their children. Immerwahr and Foleno's 2000 national survey about the public's attitudes toward higher education served to eradicate the long held myth Hispanics do not value education:

> It is…sometimes suggested that members of these minority groups [Hispanic and African American] compared to other populations, do not place as high a value on higher education. The findings from this study seem conclusively to eliminate this… Higher education is important for all Americans, but it is especially important to African American and Hispanic parents, who are significantly more likely to emphasize higher education than either White parents or the population as a whole (2000, p. 5).

Valencia and Black poignantly and with finality stated, "…it is wrong to say that Mexican American parents don't care" (2002, p. 94).

Researcher Patricia Gandara is highly cited in extensive literature pertaining to educational achievement of Hispanics, and to female Hispanics in particular. She commented, in her significant study titled "Passing Through the Eye of the Needle: High Achieving Chicanas" (1982), one of the reasons academic success by Hispanics is

misunderstood is because of the overwhelming concentration of studies focusing on academic failure by this group (p. 168). She commented that much of the literature regarding the educational achievement of Hispanics has focused on reasons leading to educational failure, but has not shed light on the process of achieving success in education (p. 168).

Gandara, consequently, did not research barriers to educational achievement in her 1982 study. Instead, her intent was to isolate factors that seemingly attributed to the achievement of higher degrees. Her sample included 45 Mexican Americans, 17 of which were women who were 40 years old or younger, having a graduate degree and whose parents had not completed high school. She asked 117 structured questions during tape-recorded interviews. Focusing on the women, interviews revealed these women came from traditionally large families. The women expressed conflict in managing the demands of home and the university, but attributed their academic success to inner strength and ability as well as support from the family. When beginning the research, Gandara did not predict the mother would be singled out as a significant factor due to stereotypes of the mother being passive and home bound. The findings were quite the contrary. The majority of the women viewed their mothers as strongly supportive of their educational ambitions and desiring economic independence for their daughters. Education was seen as the vehicle that would make this happen. The participants, furthermore, described their parents as hard working, set high standards for them, and expected good performance at school. Gandara closed her study by commenting it is time to re-evaluate stereotypes about the Chicana mother as it is clear that she can have tremendous impact on the educational ambitions of her children.

Making the same observation that much of the literature on academic achievement of Hispanics has been about their poor performance, researchers Nolan L. Cabrera and Amando Padilla (2004) also sought factors contributing to the educational achievement of Latinos. The researchers commented, despite the documented factors contributing to their failure, there are Latinos who do succeed in school. Cabrera and Padilla (2004) qualitatively investigated the life experiences of two university students of Mexican heritage who overcame obstacles, despite coming from impoverished homes. A series of semi-structured interviews were held to gain deeper insight into the lives of these two participants. Results indicated these two individuals had strong ties to their Latino culture, had high levels of intrinsic motivation, had a strong sense in their ability to persist through school challenges, and used the support of their families to maintain grounding in their culture and values. In particular, both participants attributed their academic success to the support received by their mothers. Despite their struggles, which included learning English, racism, feelings of alienation, and poverty, these two students sought out ways to become familiar with the knowledge of higher education and took advantage of social networks in order to succeed. Both participants pointed out counselors as helping them navigate the multitude of pre-college preparation criteria, such as filling out college applications, applying for financial aid, and registering for the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) exam. Cabrera and Padilla commented although their study involved only two cases and cannot be generalized, these two cases, "…demonstrated that adversity is not a reason for failure" (2004, p. 167).

In a similar fashion, researcher Carlos P. Zalaquett (2006) conducted a qualitative study of 12 Latina/o university students to investigate factors contributing to

and possible barriers to college access. The participants shared personal stories in their responses to the four questions posed by the researcher:

a) Please, tell us about your life story.
b) What obstacles or challenges, if any, did you have to overcome in order to attend the university?
c) What motivated you to pursue your college education?
d) What would you suggest to other Latino students that are contemplating a college education? (Zalaquett, 2006, p. 37)

Analysis of the data from the stories revealed three barriers to educational access and eight factors positively impacting students' pursuit of a college education. The three barriers included minimal adult guidance, misinformation, and poorly informed choices (Zalaquett, 2006, p. 38). Participants reported not receiving sufficient support from the adults in their lives. For some, parents were not able to help because they did not speak English. For others, school personnel provided very little guidance whereby leaving the pre-college preparation much to themselves. Misinformation resulted from a lack of knowledge about the post-secondary education application process. Again, participants commented minimal adult guidance was provided. With little adult guidance and misinformation, many of these Latino students made poor choices about their post-secondary educational pursuits, resulting in delayed attendance and missed opportunities.

The analysis of the data revealed eight factors considered as positive contributors to students' pursuit of post-secondary education. These factors included strong family support, a belief in the importance of education, achievement as a way to

honor their parents, a sense of accomplishment, interpersonal relationships, community support through special programs, scholarships, and school personnel. Although one of the barriers was lack of adult guidance, some of the participants did indicate a specific person who helped them during their schooling. Furthermore, the sense of accomplishment described by the participants was said to have been important because participants believed it would somehow validate them by positively impacting the way others see them. The participants' belief in education is summed up by a comment made by one of the participants:

> Obtaining a college degree [is] one of the most important achievements in anybody's life. No matter how difficult the journey might become or how many obstacles could be found in the way, with persistence and consistency, the goal of graduating from college will be achieved. (Zalaquett, 2006, p. 45)

Zalaquett closed by commenting understanding factors that impact Latino's college attendance is important being that Latinos continue to be one of the fastest growing minority groups.

Arellano and Padilla (1996) studied 30 undergraduate Latino students enrolled in universities considered highly selective. Like the researcher previously mentioned, these two scholars also pointed out the overdependence and almost exclusive research detailing the causes for failure by the Latino population. They went on to say an over-reliance on these type of studies runs the risk of overlooking what might be learned by focusing attention on Latinos who share at-risk characteristics, but who manage to achieve school success. The researchers reference literature on academic invulnerability written by Alva and Padilla in 1995. According to Alva and Padilla (1995) "Mexican

American students can be described as academically invulnerable, sustaining high levels of achievement, despite conditions and events that place them at risk for academic failure" (p. 4). According to Alva's 1991 study of a cohort of tenth-grade Mexican American students, those deemed as academically invulnerable were students who viewed their intellectual ability positively and who possessed a strong sense of responsibility for their educational future. Furthermore, having social capital in the form of supportive teachers and friends was also found to be characteristic of academically invulnerable students in the study.

In their study, Arellano and Padilla (1996) sought to investigate patterns and themes in relation to academic invulnerability that might be present in the lives of their participants. One of the data gathering techniques was semi-structured interviews. From these interviews, the researchers were able to determine four factors facilitating academic invulnerability whereby contributing to participants' academic success. First, all of the respondents cited parental support and encouragement as a positive contributing factor to their academic pursuits. Secondly, participants had in common an optimistic outlook. This outlook helped them believe no matter what challenges come before them, they would be able to overcome them. Persistence was identified as a key factor to success by most of the participants. Finally, most of the participants cited strong ties with their ethnic backgrounds as a positive motivating force. Upon their analysis, Arellano and Padilla commented Latino parents do indeed encourage academic achievement of their children and consider their education important. They concluded participants were able to develop what they called a success-enabling perspective early in life and a positive sense of self-efficacy due to their identification

as gifted and talented students during their elementary schooling whereby enabling them to be successful students.

Similarly, Graff, McCain, and Gomez-Vilchis (2013) conducted a qualitative study in which they sought factors that contributed to the resilience of five Latinas pursuing a bachelor's degree. The five Latina participants of the study were non-traditional students who had a background involving seasonal farm labor. Data collection was performed via the recordings of two focus group meetings. During these focus group meetings, semi-structured questions were asked. The transcribed recordings were analyzed, and from the analysis, emergent patterns became evident. All five participants faced obstacles along their educational journey. Two of the most commonly named obstacles included language barriers and the pressure from family to work and earn money to help the family versus going to school. All five participants came from a farm working background; however, these women attributed their strength to continue with their studies was partially due to their farm working background. All five participants wanted to be role models for their children and demonstrate the importance of education. In conclusion, the researchers stated, "Academic resilience was manifested through participants' personal drive, a strong internal locus of control, and experiences that strengthened their resolve," (Graff, McCain, & Gomez-Vilchis, 2013, p. 342).

Also qualitatively investigating the lives of Hispanics, researcher Tamara Olive (2014) sought to understand the desire for a higher education of three Hispanic students. The three Hispanic students, participants of the study, were aged between 27 and 40 and were graduate students enrolled in a counseling degree program, one was male, and two

were female. The participants were instructed to describe what it was like for them to want a higher education and to be detailed with their response during the interview, which was held individually for each participant. The recordings from these interviews were transcribed, and the analysis of these transcripts illuminated seven overarching *constituents*, as the researcher described them. The seven constituents included being able to fuel their desire of a higher education through encouragement from respected others, despite not having familial role models; having persistence, resilience, and self-efficacy despite challenges; modeling the value of education to family and practicing self-denial; perceiving a higher degree as an opportunity for betterment; a sense that God influenced their desire to pursue a counseling degree; a desire to help others; and viewing their commitment to the pursuit of a counseling degree as having been reached through a path that was not necessarily linear.

Common Threads Among Studies

After reviewing and carefully considering the studies mentioned above, several themes from the literature emerged. Many of the researchers make similar observations at the beginning of their studies, which included the overabundance of literature focusing on the academic failure of Hispanics as opposed to the lack of literature investigating academically successful Hispanics. As a result, these researchers studied educationally successful Hispanics. Researchers noted the myth that Hispanics do not value education persists. Its existence has been one of the obstacles Hispanics have historically had to overcome. They also observed Hispanics experience difficulty navigating two worlds: home life and university life. Often, functioning in both worlds is problematic and the individual is forced to choose one over the other. Additionally,

many successful Hispanics share similar struggles including poverty, racism, and alienation. Researchers also noted academically successful Hispanics tend to have strong ties to their culture. For many, this strong tie to culture becomes a source of support throughout the educational journey. Researchers, in addition, observed academically successful Hispanic students tend to attribute their success in part to familial support. Most frequently, the mother is singled out as the most influential and educationally supportive person in their life. Moreover, academically successful Hispanics tend to form social networks and muster social capital as a means of enabling their success. Finally, academically successful Hispanics are described as having an optimistic outlook, having a belief in their inner strength and ability to overcome challenge, being persistent, and being academically invulnerable. It is clearly evident Hispanics value education, consider it a thing of importance, and Hispanic parents, the mother in particular, are highly supportive of their children's educational achievement.

Hispanic Achievement

Hispanics do indeed value education as has been established. Ironically, Hispanics do not successfully maneuver through the educational pipeline, as do other population groups. Failing to achieve academically can be attributed to various risk factors, some of which may be unique to the Hispanic population, but the fact remains that Hispanics lag behind other population groups when it comes to educational achievement.

What Hispanic Parents Say and Do

Hispanics do indeed value education as established by the researchers discussed above. Through their studies, many of which involved interviews of the participants,

these researchers were able to determine Hispanic parents are supportive of their children's educational pursuits. Participants made this clear in their responses and narratives shared with the researchers. The literature, however, fails to mention how Hispanic parents transmit this valuing of education to their children.

Miguel Ceja (2004) researched various forms of support and encouragement Hispanic parents use in order to instill a valuing of education in their children. More specifically, he investigated direct and indirect forms of parental influence. Ceja interviewed 20 Chicana college seniors. All participants indicated their parents played an important role in their academic success. However, the means by which they did this was not by specifically indicating college attendance is a requirement. Although not mentioning college directly, participants indicated their parents encouraged them to do well in school and get good grades as a means toward upward mobility. This encouragement served as a direct message that education was the key to success. Indirectly, parents were able to influence a desire for a better future in their daughters. Parents were able to do this by telling stories of their economic, social, and occupational struggles and how they did not want the same fate for their daughters. These Chicana women, consequently, were inspired to do well in school by their parents who helped them view education as the vehicle for opportunity and economic well-being. Ceja concluded that, "…for Chicana students, the role of parents is important in the development of college aspirations" (Ceja, 2004, p. 358).

Focusing particularly on parents, over 600 parents of high school students were specifically asked a question related to college education. The question asked, "Do you think that a college education is necessary for a person to be successful in today's work

world, or do you think that there are many ways to succeed in today's work world without a college education?" The question was one part of an extensive survey conducted by Public Agenda, a research organization investigating public opinion, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, and the Institute for Research on Higher Education in 2000. Of those surveyed, 201 were White parents, 202 were African American parents, and 202 were Hispanic parents. When asked this question, results from the interviews indicated both the Hispanic and African American parents placed greater value on a college education than White parents (Immerwahr & Foleno, 2000, p. 5). Sixty five percent of Hispanic parents of high school students agreed that in order to be successful in today's working world, a college education is important as opposed to 44 percent of African American parents of high school students and 32 percent parents of White high school students (Immerwahr & Foleno, 2000, p. 5).

Although White parents interviewed did feel a college education was important, they shared their belief success in America can still be achieved via other avenues instead of a college education. Some of these parents were quick to point out jobs in which success is not dependent on a college education: sales, for example. Hispanic parents interviewed, on the other hand, felt completely the opposite. They believed a college education is necessary for future success in life. Researchers Immerwahr and Foleno (2000) believed the results of their inquiry put an end to the myth that higher education is not valued by parents of minorities as much as the general public. They commented the findings from this study seem to eliminate this myth conclusively.

The *Great Expectations* (2000) survey is one of the most comprehensive surveys of public opinions on education in recent times. The survey yielded five findings pertaining to the public's opinions on various issues related to higher education:

1. Higher education is more important than ever. A college degree has replaced the high school diploma as a necessity for a good job and a good future.
2. A college degree is more than simply a piece of paper. High expectations for colleges and universities to instill necessary skills and abilities in students are held by the general public.
3. Ultimately, it is the student's responsibility to successfully maneuver higher education, but the public does expect institutions to assist students where possible.
4. Most people believe that college tuition is high, but paying for college is doable.
5. Most people are satisfied with higher education, but do indicate unfamiliarity with the administrative facets of higher education (Immerwahr & Foleno, 2000).

Despite eradicating the myth that Hispanic parents do not value education, and despite establishing the fact, from the results of the study, Hispanic parents, when compared to African American and White parents, place a greater value on the achievement of a college education, these two researchers, like the many others already mentioned, commented on the obvious. The lowest rates of college participation are held by those having the highest regard for college education: the Hispanic! Immerwahr and Foleno briefly mentioned what they called "a host of explanations" why Hispanic college attendance is lowest among all groups (2000, p. 5). Explanations included

poverty, attendance at poor performing schools, which fail to prepare students for postsecondary education, and once again, the lack of value placed on education. At this point, it is important to consider potential causes for dropping out of college and why Hispanics do not achieve educationally at higher rates.

Dropping Out of College

Early pioneering researchers investigating student academic attrition included Tinto (1975,1982, 1988), Astin (1964), and Spady (1970). Tinto's early research resulted in one of the most widely used models for college student departure. Tinto's integration model, also referred to as the departure model, sought to explain why students withdraw from college. Specifically, the model focused on the relationship between the student and the institution. According to Tinto, students depart college due to a lack of fit between their values and beliefs and the values and beliefs of the university. Tinto (1975) commented dropping out of college,

> …can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's experiences in those systems continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways, which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout. (p. 94)

According to Tinto, the higher the degree of social integration and academic integration, the higher the likelihood of college completion and vice versa. When a lack of social integration and academic integration exists, the needs and the interests of the student are not met; Tinto claimed this creates a state of incongruence between student

and institution. This incongruence is one of the reasons students withdraw from college (Tinto, 1975).

According to Tinto (1975), a second form of student withdrawal is a result of isolation. Isolation is when a student does not feel a member of university life. In this case, the student withdraws from the university due to insufficient contact with, in particular, university faculty. Not having established healthy contacts with faculty or other college communities, students feel separated and not a part of university life, and hence, they withdraw.

This incongruence and isolation, which potentially lead to college withdrawal, is similar to Emile Durkheim's early work on suicide, which Tinto references. In his article "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research," (1975), Tinto compared this lack of fit between student and university to the lack of fit between individual and society as described by Durkheim. One of Durkheim's major works was *Suicide*, published in 1897, in which he takes a close look at suicide rates among religious groups. According to Durkeim, there are varying degrees of attachment people maintain toward a group, which he called social integration. If social integration is too low or too high, suicide ensues. On the one hand, low social integration causes a disorganized society, which leads people to withdraw from it by committing suicide. On the other hand, according to Durkheim, high social integration leads individuals to commit suicide to not become a burden on society ("Sociologyguide.com," 2015). Tinto (1975) commented, "one can reasonably expect, then, that social conditions affecting dropout from the social system of the college would resemble those resulting in suicide in the wider society" (p. 91).

Adjustment, according to Tinto, is another reason students withdraw from the university (Tinto, "Student Success," n.d.). For many students, making the transition from high school to college is overwhelming. Students experience an inability to cope with the new academic and social challenges of university life; this inability to cope prevents them from taking positive steps towards successful integration to university life. Hence, failing to adjust, incongruence, and feelings of isolation result in a lack of integration to university life whereby leading to students leaving the university.

For many students, making the transition into university life comes with ease, but for some, it is another matter altogether. Tinto (1988) described a state of *normlessness* [emphasis added] as the time between a student's departure from the old previous life and entry into the new life as a university student. During this transition time, students are neither firmly tied to the past from which they have departed nor firmly connected to the future which they move toward. They have journeyed away from that which is familiar and entered a new environment that is unfamiliar.

Tinto compared this transition to Van Gennep's work on rites of passage practiced by many tribal societies. Van Gennep's most famous work was his 1909 piece titled *The Rites of Passage* in which he discussed rituals honoring various pivotal stages of life such as birth, marriage, and death practiced by tribes. These pivotal events mark the passage from one phase of life to another. This transition from one phase to another, according to Van Gennep, is marked by three distinct stages: preliminary phase (separation), liminal phase (transition), and post-liminal phase (incorporation) (Gennep, "New World Encyclopedia," n.d.). During separation, an individual spends less and less time interacting with past associations whereby separating from the past. During

transition, individuals begin to interact more with members of the groups in which membership is sought. This is also the phase in which Tinto places individuals in a state of normlessness; they have not completely left the old, but they are not completely integrated into the new. In reference to the university, Tinto (1988) commented,

> Having moved away from the norms and behavioral patterns of past associations, the person now faces the problem of finding and adopting norms appropriate to the new college setting and establishing competent membership in the social and intellectual communities of college life. Because social interactions are the primary vehicle through which such integrative associations arise, individuals have to establish contact with other members of the institution, student and faculty alike. (p. 446)

Finally, during incorporation, individuals have established membership into the new group whereby adopting new patterns of behavior and interactions with members of the new group. According to Tinto (1988), a key to integration into university life is social interaction. He stressed students must establish contact with members of the university family, whether it be faculty or other students. Not establishing these social interactions may lead to feelings of isolation, which may ultimately lead to departure. As Tinto commented, involvement, which is at times referred to as engagement, matters.

Tinto thoroughly examined and synthesized the work of other researchers of the 1960s and 1970s in his 1975 article "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research." Tinto examined the available literature pertaining to college dropout from three perspectives: individual characteristics, student interactions

with the institution, and characteristics of the institution. From his synthesis of the literature, Tinto deduced the individual characteristics most related to dropping out of college included family, personal individual characteristics, pre-college characteristics, and future academic expectations.

Where family is concerned, the literature revealed students most likely to drop out of college came from lower socioeconomic status families and lower educated parents. Furthermore, the literature synthesis revealed students are more likely to persist with college when there exists a quality relationship with parents and this relationship is supportive, democratic, and less conflicting. Parents of persistent students have high levels of educational expectations for their children, offer more advice, praise, and interest in their child's educational pursuits (Tinto, 1975).

At the individual level, Tinto's examination of the literature revealed past grade performance tends to be a good predictor of college persistence. From the literature synthesized, Tinto commented performance in high school is a key factor. Whether it is the grade point average or the student ranking, academic performance prior to college was shown to be an important predictor of a student's performance in college (Tinto, 1975). His review of the literature also showed dropouts tend to lack commitment to education and tend to lack flexibility in handling the various challenges change may produce. It was also found that women did not finish a college degree program at the same rate as men (Tinto, 1975).

Finally, Tinto (1975) also examined the literature for goal commitment. From his synthesis, he commented,

> it is [the student's] commitment to the goal of college completion that is most influential in determining college persistence. Whether measured in terms of educational plans, educational expectations, or career expectations, the higher the level of plans, the more likely is the individual to remain in college. (p. 102)

Tinto also discovered women, as opposed to men, tended to have lower levels of goal commitment. However, Tinto commented these goal commitments are reflective of the family and pre-college experiences whereby indicating the decision to stay or withdraw from college is ultimately a result of a reciprocal relationship between family, prior experiences, and the individual. Tinto, therefore, commented one could argue certain advantages, such as higher status background, serve as an enabling factor for persistent students, whereas students from lower status backgrounds tend to expect less of themselves (Tinto, 1975). This could be why Tinto (1982) encouraged research on dropout from college for specific groups, namely, the disadvantaged (Tinto, 1982).

Not only do individual characteristics have an impact on whether a student decides to drop out of college or persist, according to Tinto's synthesis of the literature from various researchers, the interactions between the individual and the institution are also significant influential factors in the decision to persist or drop out. Specifically, an individual's academic integration and social integration with the university bear on an individual's educational decisions. According to Tinto's examination of the literature, researchers have documented grade performance as a significant factor in college persistence. Similarly, researchers have documented intellectual development as yet another influential factor in college persistence or college withdrawal decisions. Grade performance is related directly to a student's grades, whereas intellectual development

relates more to a student's valuing of education as a process for gaining knowledge and appreciation of ideas. Tinto's analysis of the literature indicated both academic integration and social integration as significant influential factors on decisions about college persistence or college withdrawal (Tinto, 1975). Social integration was also found to favorably affect a student's educational pursuits. Tinto's synthesis of the literature revealed that when students experience successful social encounters with others like themselves, with informal peer groups, with faculty, and with extracurricular activities, the likelihood they will persist with college is stronger than without social integration (Tinto, 1975).

Where institutional characteristics and college dropout are concerned, Tinto's synthesis of the literature revealed a few interesting findings. Tinto commented, however, that although the research on university characteristics potentially influencing student withdrawal is not as extensive as the research on individual characteristics, which impact the decisions about college, some general statements could be made from the literature that is available. First, Tinto's analysis revealed when students drop out of college, it is typically due to incongruence between the social climate of the university and the individual; Tinto also asserted that this is more often the case than college withdrawal due to a specific failure on behalf of the student. Second, public institutions tend to have higher dropout rates than do private institutions, and two-year colleges tend to have higher dropout rates than do four-year colleges. Third, the research synthesis conducted by Tinto also revealed higher quality institutions have higher rates of college completion than do lower quality colleges. Among the various components accounting for higher quality, institutions having more faculty members with higher degrees such

as doctoral degrees and institutions having higher rates of income per student were considered to be of high quality and having lower rates of dropout. Tinto's concluding comments suggest ultimately, a student's goal commitment to finish college is directly related to the individual's experiences with the institution's social climate and academic system. Lack of successful integration into these systems leads to incongruence between the university and the student; as previously mentioned, this is one why students withdraw from college. The process of withdrawal from higher education is perhaps best depicted by Tinto's departure model, which essentially parallels the data he synthesized and reported in his 1975 article, "Dropout from Higher Education: A Theoretical Synthesis of Recent Research."

According to Tinto's (1975) model, students bring various characteristics and attributes with them upon entering college. These include family background, individual attributes, and pre-college schooling. These three pre-college entry factors impact the student's commitment(s) to educational goals and to the institution. Goal commitment and institution commitment have a bearing on the integration, or lack of integration, into the university's academic system and social system. Impacting integration is grade performance, intellectual development, peer group interactions, and faculty interactions. The outcomes of the academic and social integration have the reciprocal effect of impacting and causing possible re-alignment of goal and institutional commitment(s). Depending on the individual's fit with the university and its academic and social systems, decisions about college are made; students will either persist or dropout.

Similar to Tinto, Panos and Astin (1968) also researched college attrition. Panos and Astin (1968) reported the findings from a study conducted in the early 1960s by the

National Merit Scholarship Corporation. The study involved almost 250 colleges and more than 127,000 students who provided data for the study. The data included information pertaining to educational aspirations, socioeconomic background, and high school activities and achievements. Follow-up questionnaires were distributed in 1965, four years later, which helped researchers determine student characteristics related to college withdrawal and university factors that may positively influence student persistence. The results of the study revealed the following characteristics for entering college students most likely not to finish four years of college after high school graduation:

- Relatively low grades in high school
- Does not plan at the time of college entrance to take graduate or professional work
- Relatively low socioeconomic background
- Racial background is either American Indian or "other" (Panos & Astin, 1968, p. 64).

On the opposite end, the data also revealed university characteristics associated with college persistence of students. According to the study, students are more likely to complete four years of college if they attend a university where the relationships that are formed with peers embody cooperation, independence, and cohesiveness (Panos & Astin, 1968). In addition, the study revealed students are more likely to stay enrolled if the classroom environment is one that is characterized by a high degree of involvement from both the instructor and the student whereby creating an atmosphere of familiarity.

Incidentally, the data from the study also revealed women were more likely to withdraw from college than men.

In another study, Astin (1964) examined the tendency to drop out of college prior to degree completion of 6,660 high aptitude students during a four-year period. These students were selected from the 1957 National Merit scholarship competition with each student ranking in the top six percent on the SAT verbal ability among the nation's high school seniors. Questionnaires, academic records from high school, and an Inventory of Beliefs were used as data collection techniques. Results revealed that "…students who drop out of college come from lower socio-economic backgrounds, have lower rank in high school, plan initially to get lower college degrees, and apply for relatively fewer scholarships than do students who do not drop out" (Astin, 1964, p. 219). Some of the reasons for dropping out given by the boys and the girls are as follows. Boys dropped out of college because they were unsure about what to study, performed poorly academically, and were tired of being a student. Girls dropped out of college because they could not afford it, they wanted to spend more time with family, and they too were tired of being a student (Astin, 1964).

Of this group studied, it is important to indicate another finding from Astin's research. At the end of the four years, Astin's study showed women had higher drop-out rates than did the men; women had a dropout rate of 13.8 percent while the drop-out rate for men was 8.7 percent (Astin, 1964).

Using a sample of 297 high school senior boys, researcher Spady (1970) investigated the impact of high school peer status on the educational goals and college attainment of these graduating boys. Initial data collection took place during the senior

year of high school. From this data collection, the boys revealed interest in higher education: 16.5 percent hoped to achieve some postgraduate college work, 49.2 percent wanted at least a bachelor's degree, and 8.4 percent wanted some college experience. With a little over 71 percent of these boys wanting to experience college to some extent, after four years, only 60.6 percent of the boys had entered college, and only 48.5 percent had completed more than one year of college. The study's end result determined, according to Spady, "…perceived status is positively related to goals but negatively related to their fulfillment" (Spady, 1970, p. 680). Spady also commented that boys' high sense of personal importance may initially contribute to their high post high school educational aspirations, but this is not sufficient in making the goals of college achievement come true. Once high school ends, these boys are faced with a situation in which the peer support that was present in high school is no longer there; they are faced with the task of maneuvering higher education without the substantial support once readily available. Spady goes on to say when peer recognition was the only form of support for the boys, it was not enough to make future educational aspirations come true. When role models, intellectual accomplishment, leadership development, and family encouragement are present, however, the disappearing of peer status support is less threatening. Consequently, Spady commented that having sounder resources other than simply high school peer status enabled a higher likelihood of college achievement (Spady, 1970).

These early researchers were some of the first to investigate withdrawal from college. The studies, however, did not investigate specific groups of students, with the exception of Spady who specifically looked into college attrition of boys. Consequently,

what unifying patterns or themes does the work from these researchers reveal about the general student body's withdrawal from college? After synthesizing the work of these pioneering researchers, the following themes pertaining to college decisions are found to be common among college dropouts:

- Characteristics of the individual most significant
- Low socioeconomic status / background a contributing factor
- Prior academic standing a contributing factor
- Social support influential factor
- Women more likely than men to dropout

But what does the current literature say about college dropouts? Why do college students from the general population drop out of college today?

Risk Factors

An Internet search for reasons students drop out of college will yield a litany of literature on the topic. For example, in 2007, GoCollege, an online college Internet site, very succinctly summarizes the top 11 reasons students drop out of college:

1. Homesickness and the feeling that you don't fit in
2. Educational burnout
3. Academic unpreparedness
4. Personal or family issues
5. Financial constraints
6. Too much fun – not enough education
7. The school isn't a good academic fit for the student
8. Setting sights on the wrong major

9. No guidance or mentors
10. External demands, particularly within part-time or full time employment
11. Time to move out (deciding to go elsewhere) ("gocollege.com," 2007).

The reasons why students drop out of college remain similar for today's generation as listed on the online website StateUniversity.com (2015):

1. A blind eye and low expectation of academic demand
2. Life situations and other outside demands
3. The party animal
4. Broken relationships
5. Homesickness
6. Job force
7. No individual attention or guidance ("stateuniversity.com," 2015).

In the National Center for Educational Statistic's 1997 statistical analysis report titled, "Confronting the Odds: Students at Risk and the Pipeline to Higher Education," five steps for navigating the post-secondary education pipeline are listed. Step one is simply to have the aspiration(s) for a bachelor's degree. Step two is the academic preparation for college. Step three involves taking college entrance exams. Step four involves the application process and applying to college. Step five is college enrollment (NCES, 1997, para. 3).

The U. S. Department of Education (2003) has identified seven risk factors associated with dropping out of college whereby jeopardizing the successful navigation of the five steps toward college enrollment. These seven risk factors include

- delayed postsecondary enrollment

- part time enrollment
- not having a regular high school diploma
- working full time
- being financially independent
- having children or dependents
- being a single parent (Fry, 2003, p. 4).

Reporting on the examination of a group of 1999-2000 undergraduates in a report titled, "Profile of Undergraduates in U.S. Postsecondary Education Institutions: 1999-2000," the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2002) reports at least three quarters of those examined claimed to have a minimum of one risk factor, and the average number of risk factors by all undergraduates was 2.2. For purposes of this study, it is important to note the NCES (2002) found women averaged more risk factors than men: 2.3 versus 2.1. Furthermore, the NCES (1997) reported students having no risk factors were able to successfully navigate the five steps of the educational pipeline, up to 58 percent of these students, as opposed to the mere 30 percent of students with risk factors who were able to successfully navigate the educational pipeline. But, perhaps the most astounding finding is, as Fry commented, "*on each of the seven factors, Hispanic undergraduates are more at risk"* [emphasis added] (Fry, 2003, p. 3).

In 2006, the Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation reported difficulties experienced by borrowers due to any of the seven risk factors by state and region. Their examination revealed a particular trend remains consistent: a higher percentage of undergraduate college students residing in the southwest experience at least one risk factor as opposed to students residing in other regions of the country. Findings indicate,

for example, 39% of loan borrowers in the New England region experience at least one risk factor whereas 72% of loan borrowers in the Southwest experience at least one risk factor. Furthermore, "Texas, while not as risky as the Southwest region as a whole, still has significantly higher percentages of first generation students, federal loan borrowers, and students with unmet need with at least one risk factor compared to national averages" (Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation, 2006, p. 1). It is clearly evident when it comes to attempting to achieve a college degree, gender matters, ethnicity matters, location matters, and risk factors matter. Consequently, the most unlikely candidate, as supported by the above data, to achieve a college degree would be a female who is Hispanic, living in south Texas, and who has more risk factors than her White and Black counterparts.

To make this picture all the more clear, researchers Solorzano, Villalpando, and Oseguera (2005) analyzed data from multiple sources and depict what happens to a cohort of 100 elementary school students of varied races as they navigate the educational pipeline. Beginning at elementary school, of the 100 Hispanic students, the researchers reported 80 Asian Americans will graduate high school, 84 Whites will graduate high school, 72 African Americans will graduate high school, 71 Native Americans will graduate high school, but only 52 Latinas/os will graduate high school. From these, 44 Asian Americans will graduate college, 26 Whites will graduate college, 14 African Americans will graduate college, 12 Native Americans will graduate college, and 10 Latinas/os will graduate college. Out of these, 17 Asian Americans, 10 Whites, 5 African Americans, and 4 Native Americans will graduate from graduate school, but only 4 Latinas/os will graduate from graduate school. Finally, of the

students remaining from the original 100 elementary students, those that manage to graduate from graduate school and continue, 3.0 Asian Americans, 1.0 Whites, 0.4 African Americans, and 0.5 Native Americans will graduate with a doctorate degree, but only 0.4 Latinas/os will graduate with a doctorate degree (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). At all levels of the educational pipeline, the Latina/o ranked lower than or equal to the other races!

Table 13

Educational Achievement by Race for Cohort of 100 Students

100 students	Graduate High School	Graduate College	Graduate from Graduate School	Graduate with a Doctoral Degree
Asian American	80	44	17	3
White American	84	26	10	1
African American	72	14	5	0.4
Native American	71	12	4	0.5
Latina/o American	52	10	4	0.4

Addressing the issue that at the highest level of educational achievement are to be found the least number of Latinas, researcher Roberta Espinoza (2010) sought to investigate the strategies used to navigate through two worlds, that of home, and that of school, by Latina doctoral students. Espinoza commented that Latinas face what she called a double-edged sword. On the one side, the Latina student must meet the demands of school; while on the other side remain committed to family ties and obligations. Consequently, the Latina student finds herself juggling the tasks, demands,

and obligations of these two opposing worlds in order to maintain the *good daughter* [emphasis added] status and simultaneously progress with her education.

Fifteen Latinas who were graduate students striving for a doctoral degree at universities in Northern California participated in Espinoza's study. The average age of the participants was 27. The participants were women who were not married, did not have children, and claimed to have *familismo* [emphasis added], strong family ties, in their families while growing up. Each participant was interviewed and asked questions that mainly pertained to their experiences during childhood and about relationships with family now that they were graduate students. Some of these questions included, "What was your role in your family growing up?" and "How has your relationship with your family changed since you started graduate school?" The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for emergent themes.

The findings of the study revealed that participants navigate through the world of home and the world of school in two distinct ways: being an *integrator* or being a *separator* [emphasis added]. The integrators were the Latinas who brought two worlds together. Espinoza explained that "integrators blended family and school by first explaining the nature of their school demands, then enlisting their family's support to enhance their academic success" (Espinoza, 2010, p. 325). In contrast, the separators kept the two worlds separate. These women were better able to balance the relationships with family and remain the good daughter with the demands from school by keeping them apart from one another. In either case, participants were able to maintain their familial ties while progressing educationally.

Researchers Castellanos and Gloria (2007) commented that the challenges of

successfully navigating through college are especially unique and challenging for the Latina/o student. In their article titled "Research Considerations and Theoretical Applications for Best Practices in Higher Education: Latina/os Achieving Success," Castellanos and Gloria (2007) commented, among other things, the Latina/o student experiences alienation and discrimination, lack of role models, and are not expected to achieve educationally. Fortunately, there are Hispanics who manage to successfully overcome barriers and risk factors toward degree achievement, even at the highest levels: the doctorate level.

Researcher Juan Carols Gonzalez (2006) conducted a qualitative study of female doctoral students over a four-year period. Participant criteria included being a doctoral student and belonging to the Latina community. Surveys and semi-structured interviews were the method of data collection whereby the author's intent was to gain a better understanding of the lives of his participants. Interview questions were open–ended and inquired about the academic environments the participants had experienced; the survey inquired about, among other things, career paths and how these participants self-identified as far as race and ethnicity were concerned. Gonzalez summarized findings into positive experiences and negative experiences.

Positive experiences included being prepared for the collegiate world at the doctorate level because of positive bachelor's and master's degree experiences, positive K–12 schooling experiences which helped build confidence in their academic ability, and the opportunity to connect with similar faculty and students. The negative experiences shared by the participants included poor academic preparation at the K–12 level, negative master's degree experiences, racism, cultural isolation, tokenism,

dissonance with family and university, hostile climates, lack of mentors, and discrimination (Gonzalez, 2006). Some of the participants commented feeling they needed to work twice as hard to survive and constantly feeling a need to prove themselves. Having a voice at the doctoral level became an endangered characteristic as some of these female doctoral students expressed difficulty in claiming their voice when participating in seminars. Some of these participants, unfortunately, experienced a loss of their voice. Gonzalez commented that for these Latinas who lost their voice, "…[they] lost confidence in their academic abilities and potential for success, talked about rethinking and downgrading their academic career desires" (Gonzalez, 2006, p. 361). It is indeed a sad outcome, but an inevitable one when a Hispanic female student must struggle to overcome, as Gonzalez described, "…oppressive structures such as class, gender, race, and ethnicity" in order achieve (Gonzalez, 2006, p. 354). Where identity was concerned, Gonzalez's research revealed the stronger the awareness and identification with their ethnic identity, the more resistant to academic socialization practices were these female Latina students. These female Latina doctoral students believed the university's socialization practices assumed all students fit the same mold, which mirrored that of a male White student. Therefore, many of these Latina doctoral students found the university to be an oppressive place "…riddled with barriers that prevent or minimize their success," and so they took on a mentality in which they felt they had something to prove to get them through their schooling and ultimately, achieve their dreams (Gonzalez, 2006, p. 362).

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development published an

article in the publication *Educational Leadership* titled "Undocumented- with College Dreams." Although the article focused on the educational plight of undocumented immigrants, their struggle, in many ways, mirrors the struggle of Hispanic Americans. One particular obstacle toward college achievement discussed in the article is successfully passing state high school exit exams. The author commented, "for many students, standardized achievement tests are the litmus test for whether they will be successful in life. Failing the test means failing at the future" (Jewell, 2009, p. 50).

Researcher Frances Contreras (2005) investigated how Latina/o students compare to their peers when it comes to taking college entrance exams such as the SAT and Advanced Placement exams. In her exploratory investigation, Contreras discussed the doubling of AP test takers over the years and the increasing number of high school students taking the SAT exam. She commented, these exams will continue to be a pivotal indicator of who is accepted into college and who is not accepted into college (Contreras, 2005). She indicated in 2003, of SAT takers, 7.2% were African American or Black, 47.7% were White, and 3.6% were Mexican or Mexican American (Contreras, 2005).

Table 14

SAT Test Takers by Race: 2003

2003 Test Takers	Percentage
African American or Black	7.2
White	47.7
Mexican or Mexican American	3.6

Using data provided by the College Entrance Examination Board and from a Student Descriptive Questionnaire (SDQ) for students taking SAT and/or AP exams between the years 1993 and 2003, Contreras's analysis showed the Mexican American and the African American having the lowest scores on both the Verbal and Math components of these exams over the 10-year period. Responses on the SDQ indicated the Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans had the lowest self-rating in mathematics ability. Asian American student responses indicated the highest degree of confidence in mathematics ability. Contreras commented, "…the differences in self-perception suggest that Latino students perceive themselves to be less academically competitive than their White and Asian counterparts" (Contreras, 2005, p. 203). Contreras goes on to suggest much of the negative perception of personal potential and ability Latina/o's have developed has, unfortunately, been shaped by the school system. For example, AP courses have the benefit of exposing students to highly qualified teachers, predisposing students to a college-going mentality, and preparing students for the rigor of college coursework, but unfortunately, the road to enrollment in these courses is often barred or offers limited access for many underrepresented groups such as the Hispanic. Data for AP exam test takers in 2003 are provided in Table 15.

Table 15

AP Test Takers by Race: 2003

Population	Percentage
Mexican American	5.8
African American	5.1
Asian American	11.5

White	65.8

Note: Data retrieved from Contreras (2005, p. 208).

For the Latino taking the AP exams, their passing rates are lower than those of their White peers, indicating access to taking the exams does not necessarily guarantee credit towards college as many do not pass the exams. Contreras also mentioned the data revealed socioeconomic profiles are consistently lower for the Mexican American. However, she commented social capital may compensate for differences in financial resources. Contreras encouraged investment in Latino students and their educational pursuits in order to create a, "more seamless continuum to higher education" (Contreras, 2005, p. 212).

Toward this effort, intervention programs are in place throughout schools, colleges, and universities. Researchers Otero, Rivas, and Rivera (2007) conducted a study in which they investigated variables, both academic and demographic, affecting first-year college attrition of Mexican American students who, because of their failure of one of the sections of a state-mandated entrance to college exam, were participants of a program designed to assist these at-risk students. Researchers used surveys as data collection. A total of 106 Hispanic at-risk freshmen college students participated in the study. Initial surveys were distributed in the spring of 2001 with follow-up surveys distributed in spring of 2002. Responses to the questions on the surveys shed some light as to why some of these students withdrew from college within their first year. Obligation to family, spouse and/or children, was found to be equally contributing to students desire to continue with college as well as to the decision to withdraw from college. Parental support for continuing college was found to be stronger with the

mother. Fathers with more years of formal schooling had a tendency to encourage their son or daughter to withdraw from college, whereas the opposite was true for the mother; the more formal schooling above 9.7 years by the mother, the likelihood of the child continuing college increased (Otero, Rivas, Rivera, 2007). Academic integration via interactions between student and faculty were not found to affect the retention rate of these at-risk students, but social integration was found to be significant. Students who felt socializing with friends on campus was important had a higher likelihood of remaining in college. Finally, students who felt getting good grades was important had a higher likelihood of remaining in college after the first year, which, understandably, led to another finding of the study, which the researchers commented was the most significant in predicting whether a student would drop out of college or not: planning to graduate from the university. According to the researchers, "students who manifest their intention to graduate from this institution have a 42% higher chance of continuing their education at this institution after 1 year when compared to those students who do not plan to graduate from this university" (Otero, Rivas, & Rivera, 2007, p. 170). Among other recommendations, the researchers concluded one way of easily assessing a student's predisposition to college persistence is to determine his or her intent to graduate from the university.

Looking into an entire cohort (1,425 students) of freshmen entering college in 1992, 91.5 percent being Hispanic, researchers Salinas and Llanes (2003) investigated contributing factors to their attrition or persistence. Researchers divided the cohort into five groups:

1. Nonpersisters (non-degreed after 10 years)

2. Community college graduates (having received a degree from a community college)
3. Persisters (still enrolled after 10 years)
4. UTPA Graduates (having achieved a bachelor's degree)
5. Transfer graduates (graduating from an alternate university other than the one in which the study was conducted) (Salinas & Llanes, 2003, p. 83).

Similarities among the groups included financial aid assistance and having experienced academic action of some sort with the persisters group having had more suspensions. Interestingly, the attendance of all groups began to decline just after the first semester of school, except for attendance by the persisters and graduates whose attendance was consistent. Retention rates per year for the entire cohort are depicted in Table 16.

Table 16

Persistence Rates for 1992 Freshmen Cohort

Year	Retention Rate
1	74.3%
2	64.2%
3	53.0%
4	45.0%

Note: Data retrieved from Salinas & Llanes (2003).

Clearly, the attrition rate was greatest after the first year of college: 25.7%. Out

of the entire cohort, 573 students graduated from the University of Texas at Pan American, the university in which the study took place, and 656 students fell within the nonpersisters group. Salinas and Llanes (2003) discovered the semester before students dropped out of college, the academic load taken by students decreased considerably with some students enrolling in only one class. Furthermore, the researchers also discovered about half the students who were placed on some sort of academic probation or suspension did not return to college the next semester. The researchers commented that the probation or suspension may have contributed to the students' feelings of not belonging to the university.

Among other risk factors, low representation in colleges by Hispanics has been due to their lack of preparedness, according to Kim (2003). Following an academic path requiring the basic minimum for high school graduation does not prepare these students for the challenges of university life, but unfortunately, it is the path taken by many underrepresented groups. Kim commented, "…Hispanic students should be encouraged to stay in the school system and to take more rigorous high school courses such as advanced placement courses" (2003, p. 289).

Earlier, it was written researchers Castellanos and Gloria (2007) commented that the road to college achievement for Hispanics is unique and challenging. Among other risk factors common to the Hispanic student, Gloria and Castellanos mentioned discrimination. The Pew Hispanic Center / The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation conducted a survey of Latinos in 2002, attempting to explore the experiences and attitudes of Latinos on a multitude of topics. The survey was conducted by telephone between April 4, 2002, and June 11, 2002, and involved a random sample of 4,123

adults, 2,929 being Latino adults. One particular topic of inquiry was identity. Specifically, participants were asked a series of questions involving their identity and their experiences with discrimination. The Pew Research Center (2002) reported the following results

- When asked about their personal experience with discrimination, a smaller, though still substantial number (31%) of Hispanics report that they or someone close to them has suffered discrimination in the last five years because of their racial or ethnic background. About one in seven (14%) Latinos report personally experiencing employment-related discrimination, including not being hired for a job or not promoted because of their race or ethnicity.
- In addition to those who say they, or someone close to them, has experienced discrimination, many Hispanics report experiencing more subtle forms of unfair treatment because of their race or ethnicity such as being treated with less respect than others (45%), receiving poorer services than others (41%), and being insulted or called names (38%).
- When Hispanics were asked to explain why they believe they have been discriminated against or treated unfairly in the past, they are most likely to say that it was due to the language they speak (35%), though many also attribute it to their physical appearance (24%), or feel that it was a result of both the way they look and the language they speak (20%) (Brodie, Steffenson, Valdez, Levin, Suro, 2002, p. 8).

In his article titled "Historical Trends and Their Impact on the Social Construction of Self Among Hispanics and its Impact on Self-Efficacious Behaviors in Training and Careers," author Douglas P. Johnson (2006) poignantly disclosed what it feels like and the impact of discrimination against Hispanics through a Hispanic first grader's comment: "…[name calling] made me realize, like, I'm different, you know, in a bad way" (p. 78). Johnson goes on to say these messages received by the surrounding culture convey an attachment by the Hispanic to a race associated with violence, crime, or apathy. As the child grows and becomes an adult, these messages manifest themselves in a self-concept that is telling the Hispanic he or she is not good enough; Johnson compared this denigration of identity to that of African Americans. Consequently, when considering higher education, the Hispanic adult sees no value in achieving a college degree, and sadly, the surrounding culture is telling the Hispanic he/she is right; "in fact, they see that sort of achievement as a type of pipe dream, a lottery win," (Johnson, 2006, p.78). Interestingly, Johnson commented that hearing these messages of being bad by society impede self-efficacy, which has already been discussed as a key ingredient for perseverance. Like the salmon, the Hispanic must struggle upstream, despite swimming against the current, the negative messages from society impeding self-efficacy, in order to achieve his or her dreams.

Considering discrimination, Derek Lopez (2005) investigated sources of race-related stress of an entire Latino freshman class in 2000. Using surveys at the beginning of the fall semester and at the beginning of the spring semester, Lopez gathered data on some of the sources of race-related stress. The initial surveys revealed the least form of stress experienced by this group of students was stress due to their race. The greater

amount of stress came, however, from achievements at the college level and stress by members of their Latino community who pressured them regarding how to act and to remain loyal to their race. As time passed, this changed. The students reported race-related stress due to experiencing a hostile campus whose traditions and customs were in conflict with their own, and the stress by the Latino community decreased whereby the Latino community became more of a source of support. Consequently, students *of the margin* [emphasis added] must learn to successfully navigate the two worlds in which they reside: home and its cultural implication as well as the collegiate world. Understandably, this is twice the work for the Hispanic and, for many, it results in choosing one world over the other.

The struggle is especially challenging for Hispanic women. Carmen Suarez-McCrink (2002) commented, "minority women must walk between two worlds-the one framed by stereotypical traditions of the White dominant culture and the one in which her ethnicity is rooted as part of an all-encompassing ethos" (McCrink, 2002, p. 240). Being Hispanic herself, McCrink struggled to balance achievement and success in the White dominant society and maintain cultural values such as holding family as priority. She managed, however, to successfully maneuver both worlds, commenting, "I have always attributed my success, in terms of career advancement, to positive female role models" (McCrink, 2002, p. 242). Of particular interest, McCrink admits she was not sure, aside from the influence of female role models, what it was that enabled her to persevere and succeed in spite of the challenges she faced as a Hispanic woman. She asked herself if there was some theory that pertained to women, their accomplishments, and the resulting increased self-confidence. She discovered that for her, this theory was

self-efficacy. Although she did not have a name for her actions and her perseverance, she felt there must be some explanation; she realized it was self-efficacy that kept her going in spite of obstacles faced along the way.

Also depictive of the struggle through which Hispanic women must traverse is President Barack Obama's nomination of appeals judge Sonia Sotomayor for Supreme Court Justice. Calling her an, "inspiring woman," President Obama credits Sotomayor with having the experience as a judge, having the respect of colleagues, and being adored by her clerks (Feller, 2009, p. 2). Despite the President's support, Sotomayor endured criticism almost instantly from the moment her nomination became public on Tuesday, May 26, 2009. Reporter Kathleen Parker wrote, "within minutes, a dozen other e-mails tumbled through the hatch enumerating all the reasons why Sotomayor was a terrible pick: affirmative action, identity politics, the Ricci case, double standards, racism, sexism" (Parker, 2009, p. 18). Some of the criticism stems from the Ricci case, a case in which White firefighters from New Haven, Connecticut, sued the city for tossing out a promotion exam in which minority firefighters did not do as well as White firefighters. The White firefighters sued, but Sotomayer, along with two other appellate panelists, backed the lower court's ruling in favor of the city's action to throw out the tests. Other criticism stems from a controversial comment Sotomayor made in 2001 in which she stated a Hispanic female judge would probably reach a better decision than that made by a White judge who has not lived the life she has lived, the life of a female Latina. Unfortunately, critics have commented Sotomayer will "…let racial bias cloud her rulings" ("Critics turn," 2009, para. 2). President Obama defended his nomination and scolded critics, commenting Sotomayor is the right choice and one that would,

"…mark another step toward the goal of 'equal justice under the law'" (Feller, 2009, p. 2). Sotomayor's example, again, elucidates the path Hispanic females must trek in order to achieve.

Albert Bandura (1997) commented that people will experience times in their lives when confronted with conflicting situations. Some of these situations will require decisions to be made, such as the decision to persevere with academic and career goals as experienced by author Suarez-McCrink. Of these decisions, some will not have lasting implications necessarily, but other decisions, especially those made during pivotal periods in one's life, will have lasting effects. When contemplating career paths, for example, Bandura (1997) commented that individuals who have a strong belief in their capabilities will consider a greater degree of career options, will demonstrate higher interest in these career options, will do a better job of preparing themselves educationally for different types of careers, and of significance, will extend a much greater degree of commitment to achieving their goals. As was the case with Suarez-McCrink, could self-efficacy be the undetected, yet enabling factor for Hispanic females from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, who have achieved college degrees?

Conclusion

This literature review was divided into three sections. The first section explained The Theoretical Framework for self-efficacy theory where the impact and influence of self-efficacy in the lives of individuals is established. The second section described Hispanics and Academia where a historical perspective regarding the education of Hispanics is presented in addition to a long-standing myth that Hispanics do not value education. The second section closed with literature supporting the notion that

Hispanics do in fact value education. The final section, Hispanic Achievement, shed light on the unique challenges faced by the Hispanic, and specifically, the Hispanic female, regarding educational achievement; this final section also recognized the Hispanic as the least educated population group. Having established the Hispanic as the least educated at all levels of the educational pipeline, risk factors illuminated within the literature review varied. The risk factors included discrimination, lack of role models, low expectations, standardized exams, limited access to college-bearing high school courses, negative societal messages leading to low self-regard, dissonance with university, dissonance with culture, lack of preparedness, and denigration of identity. Many of the researchers discussed in the literature review, additionally, made reference to the abundance of available literature regarding the educational failure of Hispanics as opposed to the limited research focusing on academically successful Hispanics. Invariably, many of the researchers also included in this literature review chose to investigate factors contributing to, or having influence on, educational achievement, resiliency, and/or academic invulnerability of Hispanics. Some of the common identified factors illuminated by their investigative research included support and encouragement from family and respected others, persistence, sense of accomplishment and/or achievement, cultural ties, personal drive and/or inner strength and ability, and the valuing of education. Easily noticeable is the multitude of identified factors contributing to the educational achievement of Hispanics resulting from the varied research. In consideration, it begs the question, instead of a constellation of factors that have the potentiality to contribute to the educational achievement of Hispanics, is there an overarching and foundational construct that serves as the enabling force behind

educational achievement by Hispanics? In order to discern and establish a prescriptive path, or roadmap, leading towards educational achievement, namely achievement of a college degree, by an otherwise unlikely group, the Hispanic, it is imperative to identify facilitating factors toward educational achievement resulting in a unifying construct that can serve as a personal resource for educational achievement.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Pajares commented (as cited in Madewell & Shaughnessy, 2003),

> *Research supports the notion that, as people evaluate their lives, they are more likely to regret the challenge not confronted, the contest not entered, the risk unrisked, the road not taken as a result of underconfidence and self-doubt rather than the action taken as a result of overconfidence and optimism* (p. 397).

The purpose of this study is to identify influential factors contributing to the successful completion of a college degree by female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, and to determine if these factors are grounded in self-efficacy theory. The specific questions addressed in this research include

1. Which factors enable female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, to overcome barriers and achieve a college degree?
2. Are these factors grounded in self-efficacy theory?

The researcher conducted case study research into the lives of female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, in order to identify the role of self–efficacy as a contributing factor to their success in achieving a college degree. This research will provide insight into what is needed for Hispanic females from the Rio Grande Valley to succeed in achieving a college degree. In addition, the research contributes to a limited body of knowledge on how Hispanic females from this region have avoided becoming an uneducated minority.

Research Design

The investigation into the lives of these Hispanic females was a collective investigation. This is "…known as multiple – case studies [which] involve extensive study of several instrumental cases, intended to allow better understanding, insight, or perhaps improved ability to theorize about a broader context" (Berg, 2007, p. 292). Yin (2003) indicated multiple case studies are frequently viewed to be more compelling and therefore more robust.

Because the intent of this exploratory study was to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon in which little is known qualitatively, the researcher chose to conduct a multiple case study. Twelve participants were individually interviewed; these interviews were tape recorded. The researcher analyzed the data from the transcripts to discern emergent factors. Cross-case analysis of emergent factors was performed to discern overarching themes. Cross-case analysis, additionally, allowed the researcher to determine if these factors illuminated the four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and emotional arousal. At the conclusion of the personal interview, participants completed the 10-item General Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) to determine the strength of self-efficacy, if present. To gain additional detail and further the discussions of the personal interview, a focus group meeting with participants took place; this meeting was also tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

Participants

The researcher distributed an invitation to participate in the study to female educational professionals from various school districts within the four counties of the Rio Grande Valley: Cameron County, Hidalgo County, Starr County, and Willacy

County. The introductory letter (see Appendix A) briefly discussed the study, its purpose, and the criteria for participation. From the responses, the researcher selected a purposeful sample that fell within the boundaries of the selection criteria:

I. Selection criteria for Hispanic female educational professionals

   a. Born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley, TX
   b. Having achieved a minimum of a bachelor's degree from a four-year degree-granting institution
   c. Hispanic or Latina
   d. Female
   e. Currently employed as an educational professional at the elementary, middle, high, or university level
   f. Between the ages of 22 and 65

The recruited participants became the cases for this study. Ten of the participants were employed as educational professionals in either the elementary level, middle school level, or high school level. Two participants were employed as university faculty.

The university participants were recruited from Hidalgo County, the high school participants were recruited from Cameron County, the middle school participants were recruited from Starr County, and the elementary participants were recruited from Willacy County. The researcher questioned each individual who communicated an interest in participating to determine if they met the selection criteria. Only those individuals who met all the criteria were recruited to participate in the study, a total of twelve participants.

- Hispanic female number one (HF1) was very active in high school, joining many clubs and organizations. She was also very academically motivated, having achieved academic awards and recognitions. She remembered being very proud of being admired and appreciated by the adults in her life. Buckling down and studying was challenging for her, but she managed to achieve educationally.
- From an early age, Hispanic female number two (HF2) was motivated to achieve due to her involvement with school clubs and programs. Some of these programs exposed her to community leaders in various professions, such as doctors, which fueled her enthusiasm to pursue a profession. When the time to go to college arrived, she was not able to leave home due to financial constraints; she remained near home, worked, and finished her degree. Her mother's encouragement was one of her strongest motivators to achieve educationally.
- Hispanic female number three (HF3) struggled much while attending college, personally and financially. She became pregnant while attending college, but through the encouragement from family, she was able to achieve her degree despite being a single parent. Her mother, especially, helped with taking care of her child. Achieving a college degree, for her, was a constant goal.
- Hispanic female number four (HF4) described achieving her degrees, especially her master's degree, as very significant events. She carried a full load while achieving her degrees to include working full-time,

raising children, and attempting to finish her graduate level degrees. Because her family was very female oriented, many of her role models were the women in the family. HF4 felt there was always something better tomorrow, and she maintained this sentiment throughout her struggles.

- Hispanic female number five (HF5) participated in many school activities and clubs, and she was her high school's graduating class salutatorian. For her, two of the most influential people in her life were two teachers in particular who constantly encouraged her to progress academically. Finances were a struggle for her, but she worked when she could in order to continue her educational pursuits and help her family financially.
- Hispanic female number six (HF6) grew up in a family of eight children to, as she described them, humble parents who encouraged the children to achieve in school. They taught her from a young age to work hard and never give up. Despite being a wife, mother, and college student, HF6 persevered, and with the help and support of her husband, she finished her degree.
- Hispanic female number seven (HF7) achieved her bachelor's degree near her hometown. Her parents did not want her to leave home to achieve her master's degree, but with the help of a scholarship, she left her hometown to achieve her master's degree. While pursuing her graduate degree, she found herself in unfamiliar territory: away from

home, away from family and friends, and away from the familiarity of being surrounded by others like her, other Hispanics. She considered leaving, but convinced herself to stay and finish, which she did.

- Hispanic female number eight (HF8) always had educational achievement as a goal. This enabled her to persevere during her senior year of high school when her family suffered a terrible tragedy: the death of the oldest son. Trying as this time was, HF8 finished high school, went on to college, and achieved her degree. She is very proud of being the first female in the family to graduate from the university.
- Hispanic female number nine (HF9) started her pursuit of a college degree later in life. This made her nervous at times, but she remembered a professor once telling her that the Hispanics in the classroom were the ones that managed to swim and make it. This type of encouragement, and the support of family, enabled her to continue and achieve her college degree. Finances were a challenge during this period in her life, and she remembers going without eating at times. She and her husband, however, managed to overcome this obstacle.
- Hispanic female number ten (HF10) described being in love with teaching. It did not matter the age level or the subject; she loved it. Growing up on a farm, hard work was a way of life for her. She stated this is perhaps what taught her discipline and enabled her to achieve educationally despite the heavy load of working on the farm, attending college, and attending to family obligations. Achieving her doctorate

degree was especially meaningful to her; she wanted to set an example for her daughters.

- Hispanic female number eleven (HF11) knew she was going to college from a very early age. She had several older brothers who were college educated, so for her, it was understood that college attendance was the expectation. She has been working at the university more than 30 years and feels when she is done working there she will have significantly contributed to her community. She feels she may not be the smartest, but she is the most determined.
- One favorite memory of Hispanic female number twelve (HF12) is reading her first sentence in a book; this was one of the happiest days of her life. A quiet person, HF12 loved to read and loved school; she graduated high school as the salutatorian. Despite having experienced what she described as racism during college, HF12 just kept moving forward until she finished her college education to include graduate level degrees. Some of the most rewarding experiences for HF12 are experiences in which she has been able to help someone else, whether professionally or related to family.

During the initial meeting with all interested individuals, participants signed consent forms to participate in the study, which included a personal interview where semi-structured questions would be asked, completion of a 10-item General Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), and a focus group meeting. The university's IRB (Internal Review Board) granted permission to conduct the study.

Procedures

Recruitment

The researcher mailed introductory letters to principals from schools at all levels within the Rio Grande Valley and to university personnel; the introductory letter detailed information about the researcher and the purpose of the study (see Appendix A). Principals also received a sample invitation to participate in the study, which included contact information for the researcher (see Appendix A). The researcher made follow up phone calls, meetings with principals and university personnel were scheduled, at which point the researcher gained permission to distribute invitational letters to female educational professionals. Interested female educational professionals contacted the researcher who then determined which interested individuals fell within the boundaries of the study and met selection criteria. The researcher and the interested participant mutually agreed to meet at a designated place and time. At the initial meeting, the researcher discussed the study in more detail using the university's Informed Consent Form. If the individual agreed to participate in the study, the participant signed the Informed Consent Form.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data via a personal interview, a focus group meeting, a General Self–efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), artifacts, and observation. The personal interview consisted of a series of questions asked orally by the researcher and the participants gave oral responses. The interview questions were divided into three categories: demographic questions, which asked for name and address, essential questions, which focused on the research questions, and probing questions which

elicited more rich detail. The essential questions of the interview were categorized into four sections: mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and emotional arousal. These categories are the four sources of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The purpose of the personal interview was to gather information through conversation that has a purpose. The researcher followed the interviewer's role and rapport as detailed by Berg (2007, p. 117), which includes

a. Maintain a fluid and flexible format
b. Establish and maintain good rapport – positive feelings
c. Establish common ground
d. Offer self-disclosure (participatory model of interviewing)
e. Maintain non-hierarchical, non-manipulative research relationship
f. Maintain instructional control

The researcher interviewed participants at a location and time agreed upon by the researcher and the participant; examples of sites for interviews included a restaurant or coffeehouse. The researcher used a semi-structured interview format that used predetermined interview questions, but allowed for freedom to digress from established questions. The researcher asked various types of questions: essential questions which focused on the research questions of the study and probing questions which led to more detailed responses. The researcher followed the self – instructions for interviewer established by Lofland, Snow, Anderson, and Lofland (2006):

a. Explain purpose of the study, time constraints, results availability
b. Offer information about yourself
c. Give assurances of anonymity

d. Explain questioning process

e. Extend freedom to interrupt, ask questions, etc.

f. Ask permission to record

g. Secure informed consent

At the conclusion of the personal interview, participants completed the 10- item General Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). At the completion of all personal interviews, the researcher invited all participants to participate in a focus group meeting that was held at a pre-determined place and time. The five participants who came to the focus group meeting answered pre-determined questions for the purpose of further discussion of previously shared information. The researcher observed the interactions and communication of participants when gathered together.

All interviews, to include the focus group meeting, were tape recorded. At the conclusion of the focus group meeting, participants were given a $10.00 Barnes and Noble gift card in appreciation of their participation.

The researcher used the General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE) developed by Jerusalem and Schwarzer in 1981 (Appendix F). Originally created in German, the GSE has been translated and is available in 30 languages. The GSE scale is a psychometric scale consisting of 10 items measuring the optimism and self-beliefs about one's ability to cope with challenges faced in life (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The range of scores one may assign vary from one to four. Scores that are higher are indicative of a stronger sense of self-efficacy. To score the GSE scale completed by each participant, responses on the 10 items were added for a summed score, ranging from 10 to 40. Because there is no cut-off score, the researcher determined a cut–off

point of 30 to be indicative of a presence of a robust sense of self-efficacy. The researcher chose this scale because it specifically refers to personal agency: intentionally performed action. Additionally, the researcher chose to use this scale for triangulation purposes and confirmatory purposes.

Other data collected included the sharing of artifacts with the researcher by the participants. Some participants shared pictures, while others shared awards. These artifacts were discussed and shown to the researcher during the personal interview. The researcher also maintained notes based on observations.

Data Management

Each personal interview was tape recorded on its own cassette tape. These cassette tapes were assigned code names, such as HF1 for Hispanic female number one, HF2 for Hispanic female number two, etc. in order to protect identity. The researcher then transcribed each tape recording of the personal interviews whereby creating an electronic transcript that was password protected. The electronic transcripts were then printed so the researcher could perform cross-case analysis of the data. The printed transcripts were kept in coded folders along with both the corresponding coded cassette tape and completed self-efficacy inventory. The researcher created posters depicting the words, sentences, and paragraphs extracted from the data as well as emerging themes from the cross-case analysis. The researcher kept posters in filing boxes under lock and key. The researcher documented the results of the analysis electronically. The researcher used the same procedures for the data collected from the focus group meeting.

The researcher also collected other forms of data, which included the sharing of artifacts that participants described in the interviews and documented in the transcript. The researcher also kept notes from observations in a reflective journal. To ensure a smooth flow of data collection, the researcher had procedures in place which included gaining access to interviewees (see Appendix B), having sufficient resources while in the field (see Appendix C), and calling for assistance (see Appendix D) (Yin, 2003, p. 73).

Data Analysis

The researcher conducted interpretational analysis on the data in order to explain the phenomenon under investigation. Once interviews for all participants had been conducted and tape recordings transcribed, the researcher analyzed to discover emergent factors. The researcher proceeded to conduct cross-case analysis of emergent factors to discern overarching themes that emerged and to further determine if these overarching themes were consistent among the cases. Following a similar content analysis format as Berg (2007, p. 303), steps included

1. Collection of data takes place; data is transformed into text.
2. Units of analysis determined such as sentences, words, paragraph, etc.
3. Codes emerging from data are inductively determined.
4. Cross-case analysis of coded data is performed to discern overarching themes "…that the researcher searches through the data bit by bit and then infers that certain events or statements are instances of the same underlying theme or pattern" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 28).

5. Conduct constant comparison of the categories and constructs across the cases (cross-case analysis) in order to confirm a link between phenomenon and theory.

The data analysis process involved five steps. First, the data were collected via personal interviews that were tape recorded and made into text via the transcripts. Second, the researcher decided to use words, sentences, and paragraphs as the units of analysis that were extracted from the text to ensure all pertinent information in response to each specific question was extracted, whereby avoiding omission of significant data. The researcher extracted words, sentences, and paragraphs from each participant's transcript and for each response to each question of the personal interview; the researcher recorded extracted units of analysis onto index cards. The researcher created one index card for each question and taped each index card onto posters created for each question of the questionnaire. Third, the researcher coded the extracted units of analysis: family, teachers, lack of money, etc. and recorded codes on post-it notes placed adjacent to the corresponding question (See Figure 2). The researcher determined the codes to be the factors that emerged from the data. Fourth, the researcher conducted cross-case analysis of the factors across the cases to determine if any overarching themes became evident.

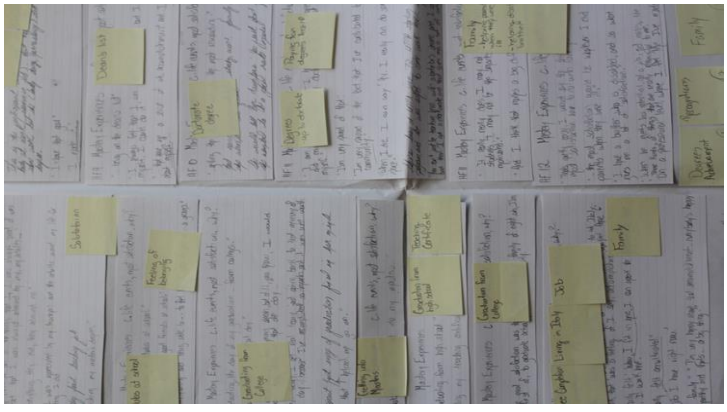


Figure 2. Coding

Fifth, the researcher constantly compared and contrasted the units of analysis, the emergent factors, and the illuminated themes across the cases to determine a potential link between a repeated occurrence among cases and the construct of self-efficacy. For example, if a factor was consistent among the cases, such as educational achievement by way of scoring high on a test, graduation, etc., these events would be classified as mastery experiences, one of the sources for the development of self-efficacy, whereby a link between the phenomenon under investigation (successful achievement of a college degree) and self-efficacy has been established.

Validity

Validity is, "…in qualitative research, the extent to which the research uses methods and procedures that ensure a high degree of research quality and rigor" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 657). Determining validity, according to Creswell and Miller (2002), is essentially establishing the credibility of a research project. In order to establish rigor and credibility of this research, the researcher employed various methods. First, the researcher utilized triangulation of data sources. The correlation between the research questions and the data sources is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Data Sources

Data Sources	Research Question 1: Which factors enable female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley to achieve a college degree?	Research Question 2: Are these factors grounded in self-efficacy theory?
Personal Interview	Participants provided rich detailed descriptions of life	Analysis of data from each interview and across the

	events in response to questions posed	cases was performed in search of emerging factors and themes
Focus Group Meeting	Participants gathered together and answered questions to further the discussions from the personal interviews and provide more insight into the experiences of their life as shared in the personal interviews	Analysis of the data from the focus group meeting was performed to determine consistencies with responses from the personal interview and to strengthen explanation building
General Self-efficacy Scale	Participants answered 10 questions on the scale to discern strength of self-efficacy	Responses compared to analysis of respective personal interview
Artifacts	Artifacts shared were part of the personal interview and provided support and / or further detail of shared experiences	Analysis of personal interview incorporated the sharing of artifacts
Observations	Researcher wrote notes of observations to include comments, feelings, etc. in a reflective journal	Notes from observations were utilized by the researcher to enhance understanding

Second, the researcher used member checking. The researcher forwarded the interpretations to participants in order to confirm findings and enhance credibility of study. The researcher encouraged participants to share comments in support of or against the researcher's interpretations; these comments were incorporated into Chapter 4: Results. Third, the researcher used rich and thick descriptions in writing about the participants and their experiences. Through rich detail, the researcher brought to life the experiences shared by participants, enabling deeper understanding by readers. Fourth, the researcher offered self-disclosure. Personal biases, beliefs, and assumptions related to the study were acknowledged and disclosed early in the research process in order to suspend them and conduct the research as objectively as possible. Before beginning questioning during the personal interview and the focus group meeting, the researcher

utilized bracketing of personal biases, beliefs, and assumptions to objectively move forward. Fifth, the researcher conducted cross-case analysis. Performing cross-case analysis allowed the researcher to determine if findings were consistent among all cases and in support of self-efficacy theory. Sixth, the researcher utilized replication logic in conducting the investigation. Replication logic allowed procedures to be planned and executed in a manner that can be duplicated by other researchers. Finally, the researcher used an audit trail. The researcher documented all activities, decisions, and procedures to include a chain of events for the investigation that are readily available for review. For external validity, the researcher used replication logic and conducted cross-case analysis.

Reliability

When conducting case study research, reliability is established when other researchers arrive at results that are similar to the results achieved by the first researcher when the same procedures are used. To insure reliability, the researcher used case study protocol (consistent methodology with each case), avoided erosion of memory by recording data immediately, conducted coding and member checks, maintained an audit trail, maintained objectivity and avoided misconceptions, and attempted literal replication for future cases.

Trustworthiness

The Random House College Dictionary (1980) defines trust as a "belief in and reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing" (p. 1411). Trustworthy is defined as "deserving of trust or confidence" (p. 1412). Qualitative researchers have the responsibility of establishing the trustworthiness of their research

and of the findings of the research. By incorporating sound measures to ensure reliability and validity of a research project, trustworthiness is enhanced whereby a researcher helps ensure the worth of the study and its findings. According to Lincoln and Guba, as referenced in Cohen and Crabtree (2006) however, trustworthiness may be established via four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Credibility refers to the truth value of the findings. Confidence in the credibility of the findings exists due to precision and accuracy in the investigative process, descriptions, interpretations, and member checking. Techniques used by this researcher to ensure credibility included triangulation of data sources, member checking, cross-case analysis, interview protocol, and self-disclosure. Transferability refers to the degree by which the findings of the study may be applied to other settings and other participants. Techniques the researcher utilized to ensure transferability included an audit trail, replication logic, and thick description. Dependability refers to the quality and consistency of the multiple aspects of a research study such as the data collection, data analysis, and interpretations. Dependability of this research was achieved by the researcher following similar content-analysis steps as Berg (2007) earlier outlined, and the units of analysis came directly from the participants' responses to questions. Confirmability refers to the neutrality of the research and its findings. Findings, furthermore, are the result of data collection and input from respondents and not from the researcher. To ensure confirmability, the researcher self-disclosed personal biases, beliefs, and attitudes and practiced objectivity throughout the research process. Because the researcher identified with the participants as a Hispanic female educational professional, the researcher was

careful to not contaminate the research process or its findings by using bracketing. The researcher maintained the role of interviewer and followed self-instructions for interviewing as earlier described, which prevented reactivity and its influence on the research. In addition, the researcher was vigilant about not sharing or contributing personal beliefs and attitudes that may influence the direction of the participants' responses. The researcher, instead, used a reflective journal whereby documenting in writing the various activities of the research process and personal feelings as they evolved. Therefore, the findings from the study stem from the participants' responses. Finally, the researcher maintained a detailed record of the various steps of the research process as the investigation proceeded.

Ethics

To ensure ethics, the researcher gained approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix G). The researcher secured informed consent from all participants. The researcher was an overt investigator whereby making visits announced. Data were securely protected. Furthermore, the researcher made decisions based on absolute values such as honesty and justice as well as reflecting a caring attitude toward others.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this exploratory multiple case study was to identify factors influencing the successful achievement of a college degree by12 female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, and to determine if identified factors were consistent with Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive theory (1986), specifically, self–efficacy. There were two research questions:

1. Which factors enable female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, to overcome barriers and achieve a college degree?
2. Are these factors grounded in self-efficacy theory?

In order to strengthen the validity of the study, the intent of the researcher was data density; maintaining a posture of independence from the data, the researcher gathered thick descriptions and rich detail from each participant through personal interviews. The personal interviews took place at a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location by the participant and the researcher. The questions asked of each participant during the personal interview were designed based on their significance to the research questions and then structured into a focused questionnaire. To ensure reliability, the researcher used the same questionnaire with each participant during the recorded personal interview. The researcher transcribed recorded personal interviews verbatim. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study and to avoid faulty conclusions, the researcher did not pursue any preconceived plan during the analysis of the data. Maintaining a posture of complete observer of the data, the researcher allowed for meaningful units of analysis to emerge from the data whose interpretation led to

explanation building. The analysis of the data was conducted in a systematic manner. After data were collected and made into text, decision rules regarding condensation of the data were made. Units of analysis were determined to be words, sentences, and paragraphs that were determined to specifically address the question being asked. Codes were assigned to the extracted units of analysis: family, education, etc. The codes were deemed to be the factors that emerged from the data. Cross-case analysis of factors highlighted repeated instances across the cases. The repeated instances that emerged from the cross-case analysis were determined to be overarching themes. Using an emic perspective, the researcher proceeded to reach understanding of the findings by recording the emerging factors enabling participants to achieve a college degree, coding these factors categorically, and discerning overarching themes. Next, the researcher determined if the illuminated factors were grounded in self-efficacy wherefore addressing research question number 2. In addition to the personal interviews, the participants completed a 10-item General Self–efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) to discern the strength of self–efficacy.

Participants for this study consisted of 12 Hispanic females born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, between the ages of 22 and 65, who had achieved a minimum of a bachelor's degree. Study participants were employed as educational professionals at the elementary level, middle school level, high school level, or at the university level within the four counties making up the Rio Grande Valley: Hidalgo County, Cameron County, Willacy County, and Starr County. Personal interviews of each participant were held at a date, time, and location mutually agreed upon by the

participant and by the researcher. A focus group meeting took place after all personal interviews were completed.

The personal interview was semi–structured whereby the participants were asked the same predetermined questions, but the opportunity to conversationally digress from the predetermined questions was allowed. The predetermined questions were structurally organized into a questionnaire, allowing for consistency in conducting each interview. The personal interview questions on the questionnaire were categorized into three sections: demographic questions, essential questions, and probing questions. The demographic questions asked for name and mailing address. The essential questions reflected the four sources of self–efficacy: mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and emotional arousal. The probing questions elicited more detailed information.

At the conclusion of each personal interview, participants completed a 10-item General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE) (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The GSE scale, which measures one's beliefs about capability to cope with challenges, was utilized by the researcher to provide triangulation of data and, additionally, to serve a confirmatory purpose in support of the findings from the investigation.

A focus group interview was conducted after all personal interviews had taken place. The focus group questions sought to further the discussions from the personal interviews and to elaborate the inquiry process in order to incorporate rich detail about the lives of the participants into the findings. Similarly, the use of a focus group meeting provided triangulation of data sources, and served a confirmatory purpose in

regards to the findings from the analysis of the essential questions from the personal interviews.

In order to identify the enabling factors towards degree achievement, it was important to analyze the data from the essential questions of the personal interview one question at a time. The factors and themes that emerged from the cross-case analysis are shown in Figure 4.

Research Question 1: Which factors enable female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, to overcome barriers and achieve a college degree?

Sources of Self-efficacy	Emerging Factors
MASTERY EXPERIENCES • Which events of your life do you consider to be the most significant?	• Family events • Educational achievements
• What obstacles or challenges toward achieving a college degree did you face, and how did you overcome them?	• Obstacles 1. Marriage 2. Doing it all 3. Children 4. Lack of money 5. Work • Overcoming obstacles 1. Support 2. Expectations to go to college from others 3. Determination
• Which events in your life brought the most satisfaction and / or feelings of accomplishment?	• Educational achievement • Membership in groups • Family • Making a difference
• Do you have photos, ribbons, awards you would like to share	• Academic awards

and /or discuss? • Tell me about your K-12 experiences, both positive and negative.	• Positive 1. Support 2. Academic achievement 3. Good feeling about school • Negative 1. Racism 2. School culture 3. Cultural norms
VERBAL PERSUASION • Who were some of your cheerleaders?	• Family members • Others 1. Professor 2. Mentor 3. Friend
• Who was the most influential person in your life and why?	• Who 1. Family members 2. Teachers 3. Friends • Why 1. Supportive 2. Accomplished
• Who were the people in your life who encouraged you to achieve a college degree? What would they say and do to encourage you?	• People 1. Family members 2. Teachers • Say and do 1. Words of encouragement
• Would you say your parents were supportive of your college aspirations? Why or why not? What would they say and do?	• Supportive parents 1. Yes • Why / why not, say and do 1. Wanting what's best for daughter 2. Words of encouragement
• What messages about your culture and ethnicity would you receive from society? From your own culture? From teachers? From	• Society 1. Negative a. Condescending • Own culture

friends? From professors? VICARIOUS EXPERIENCES • Who were some of your heroes, fictional or real, growing up and why? • Tell me about some of your role models. Who were they and why were they your role models?	1. Positive a. Need to say close b. Marriage and children 2. Negative a. Betrayal to culture b. Always going to be less • Teachers 1. Positive a. Encouraging 2. Negative a. Low expectations • Friends 1. Positive 2. Negative a. Wanting to be White • Professors 1. Positive a. Fish that swam 2. Negative a. Low expectations • Heroes 1. Family members 2. Others a. Friends b. Fictional characters c. Notable Hispanic d. Professor • Why 1. Respect 2. Wanting to be like them • Role models 1. Teachers 2. Family members

	3. Others a. Notable Hispanic b. Church member c. Professors • Why 1. Accomplished 2. Encouraging 3. Desire to be like them
• Who inspired you to get to where you are now, and how did he/she do this?	• Who inspired 1. Family members 2. Other a. People who had a high expectation of them b. High school program c. "Bad" teacher d. Self • How 1. Encouragement 2. High expectations 3. Other a. Inspiration b. Be better teacher c. Inner drive
• When it came to academic achievement, how did you feel you compared to others? How did you feel in comparison to Whites and African Americans?	• Inferior • Indifferent
• Tell me about some of the goals in your life. Was there anyone in your life you wished to be like?	• Goals 1. Education 2. Family • Wish to be like 1. Family member 2. No answer 3. Educator

EMOTIONAL AROUSAL • Tell me about one of the happiest days of your life. What made it one of the happiest days of your life?	• Birth of children • Educational achievement • Personal events 1. Wedding day 2. Mother's recovery
• Tell me about one of the saddest days of your life. What made it one of the saddest days of your life?	• Death of loved one • Other 1. Divorce 2. Hurtful words 3. Not offered a job
• How did you overcome difficulties along the course of your life and not let these events discourage you? • Tell me about times when you felt overwhelmed or anxious. How did you manage to persevere through highly emotional times?	• Determination • Faith • Support • Strategies 1. Faith 2. Support 3. Release 4. Other a. Focus on family b. Self-talk c. Slowing down d. Time management
• Were there specifically difficult times during your college attendance? How did you persevere with your studies during these times?	• Times 1. Yes • 12 different answers

THEMES

- **Family**: events involving family members, immediate and extended, such as weddings, births, celebrations; actions involving family members to include communications and the providing of support, references to relationships, roles, and influences of family members

- **Educational Achievement**: events involving notable academic honors such as salutatorian, merit awards, making the Dean's list, and events referencing educational success such as graduations (middle school, high school, university), and educational recognitions such as Student Body President

- **Obstacles/Overcoming Obstacles**: challenging events and / or circumstances that may have been barriers to educational achievement, venues and strategies by which participants managed and overcame obstacles to include support, words of encouragement, determination, and others

- **Support**: events and/or instances by which assistance was provided via varied means to include verbal support, financial support, academic support, etc.

- **Racism**: messages or sentimentality insinuating the Hispanic as inferior, less than, and/or incapable whereby perpetuating the marginalization of the Hispanic to include oppressive institutional practices

- **Cultural Prejudice**: assumptions and actions that negatively convey low expectations of Hispanics in general and regarding educational performance, and assumptions and actions reflecting a betrayal of culture

- **Cultural Norms**: practices germane to the Hispanic culture to include celebrations, role of women (wife and mother), staying close to home, seasonal farm/field labor

- **Hero/Role Model**: individuals identified by participants as someone whom they looked up to, wanted to be like, of accomplishment and influential, and who provided encouragement and support

- **Inferiority**: feelings about self to include being "less than" and/or less capable, notion that Whites are better, lack of recognition, others not believing in you nor having high expectations of you

- **Goals**: aspirations of achievement, hope and desire for a better future, actions conveying a determination to progress/achieve, desired outcome/destiny

- **Faith**: referencing God, Lord and Savior, prayer, Saints, biblical verses, and belief in a higher power

Figure 4: Emergent Factors and Themes

Part A: Mastery Experiences

A predominant factor that emerged across the cases regarding events deemed the most significant was **family**. Having children was the most common response. Comments such as, "…birth of my son, (HF7)" "…having my daughter, (HF3)" and "…the birth of my three children, (HF5)" were spoken by half the participants. Marriage was the second most commonly mentioned response. Three participants identified marriage as a significant event in their life with one participant, HF10, commenting "…probably marriage would have been the greatest event." Other family related events were described as significant, but these events varied. Two participants recalled the death of their father as significant, yet another participant shared an event of significance to her life was "…when my parents became U.S. citizens (HF8)." "Celebrating holidays with my family, (HF2)" "…having the good fortune of being born into a good family, (HF12)" and the "…happiness and health of my family, (HF7)" were singled out as significant events by some of the participants.

Events involving **educational achievement** were the second factor indicative of significant events in life emerging from the data. Eleven participants singled out educational achievements as significant events to include achieving notable academic honors, such as being salutatorian or specifically graduating college magna cum laude; graduating from high school and college were revealed to be of greatest significance. One participant responded "…being the first female in my family to graduate high school, (HF8)" and added "…being the first female in my home to graduate from the university (HF8)" were very important events in her life. Additional comments revealing the significance of education shared by other participants included

"…achievement of my educational degrees, (HF7)" and "…accomplishing my education (HF9)." Obstacles, however, were encountered along participants' educational journey.

All participants, except for two, faced challenging **obstacles** as they attempted to achieve a college degree; five significant obstacles toward achieving a college degree became evident. Two obstacles that fell within the theme of **family** most frequently mentioned by participants were marriage (four participants), and 'doing it all' (four participants). Although marriage was cited as one of the most significant events in the lives of some of the participants, being married came to be challenging for some of the participants because of time spent away from home to attend college or time spent away from husband or family in order to complete university homework. HF3 mentioned maintaining a love life with her spouse became a challenge; whereas HF4 shared dealing with husband's jealousy of her college ambitions was difficult. 'Doing it all' was equally mentioned as an obstacle to achieving a college degree. Some participants stated fulfilling the roles and responsibilities of wife, mother, college student, employee, and running a household on a daily basis as problematic. One participant commented, the "…challenges were to be able to do my homework, to do my studies, take care of my family, my kids…especially with their homework, and making sure everything is taken care of (HF6)." HF10 described waking up at three in the morning to do her studies then as the day progressed, helping her family members get to work, helping the children with their homework, doing housework, and expiring at 10:00 p.m. only to wake up at three in the morning to do all of it over again. A third obstacle to achieving a college degree was having children. Whereas some participants discussed

the birth of their children as significant events in their lives, being a mother while attempting to complete a degree program was indeed a trying situation for some of the participants. HF5 mentioned becoming pregnant while attending the university, and she shared this made finishing her degree all the more difficult. Consistently, quite a few participants, a total of four, mentioned getting their school work done as a daunting task because they also needed to dedicate time to helping their children with their school work. A fourth obstacle to achieving a college degree discussed by four participants was financing their college education. Two of these participants revealed their parents were not able to fund their college education, while another shared her spouse was the only one working while she attended college, so the lack of money was a definite obstacle. The fourth participant explained money was so scarce, that at times she would go without eating. As a result, for some participants, there was a definite necessity to work outside the home in order to continue their college ambitions. However, working outside the home was seen as yet another obstacle by some of the participants. Time, attention, and effort dedicated to family, to the demands of college, and to running a household were already stretching some participants too thin, but the necessity for additional income was present. One participant mentioned she worked whenever possible: "…whenever I had time off from school, during Christmas break, summer vacation, I worked two jobs (HF5)." HF6 shared she would work all day and then attend school at night. Despite these hindrances that could have potentially prevented progress towards degree achievement, these participants achieved a college degree.

Three distinct factors that helped the participants **overcome obstacles** became clear. **Support**, the expectation to go to college, and the sheer determination to achieve

a degree were the three consistently mentioned aides to overcoming potential barriers of academic progress. **Support** from **family**, loved ones, and those close to the participants was described as helpful when navigating difficult times. Stories shared by participants varied from fathers who wanted their daughters to be self-sufficient and, therefore, encouraged them to achieve an education (HF8) to mothers who encouraged their daughters to pursue their studies, do their homework and not worry about helping with the household duties or taking care of children (HF10). Other stories spoke of husbands who provided emotional support and encouragement and insisted their spouse continue until she finished school (HF5) to parents and relatives who provided financial assistance (HF4). Other narratives told of friends who were simply there and were helpful throughout the process of finishing school (HF7). Several participants mentioned going to college was simply expected. One participant shared, "…education was…important and emphasized at home, (HF10)," and another stated, "…you were supposed to go to college (HF4)." One participant shared that her parents did not have an education beyond the sixth grade, yet they valued education enough that going to college was expected, which the children understood. She commented, "…it was like something that we were going to do…it was never a question as to, well, should you go to college or should you work? (HF11)" Her determination to finish school was eloquently described through a true experience. She told of a time when she, a college student living independently, had a doctor's appointment she needed to get to, but the weather outside was ominous and threatening: extreme cold and blizzard like conditions. Not having a car to drive herself to the appointment, the participant contemplated whether to go to the appointment or not. However, she made up her mind

to get to her doctor's appointment. Describing the trek to the doctor's office as pure determination, the participant explained she simply put her head down to avoid the cold blistering wind on her face and, placing one foot in front of the other, she began her difficult trek to the doctor's office. She made her appointment, arriving at the doctor's office on time. Her experience of **overcoming the obstacle** of extreme weather to achieve her goal of keeping the doctor's appointment is analogous to the participant overcoming obstacles in her journey towards achieving a college degree.

Educational achievement, incidentally, was the predominant event bringing the most satisfaction to the majority of participants, a total of 10. The educational achievement varied from participant to participant, but a common thread among participants when asked about events bringing the most satisfaction or feeling of accomplishment was education. Responses ranged from achieving a high school diploma to graduating from college, achieving a teaching certificate, getting into a master's degree program, to achieving a doctoral degree. One participant commented, "I always felt that I was not smart enough, but I proved [to] myself I could do it (HF9)." This participant went on to say, "That gave me a sense of accomplishment, and I felt good about myself (HF9)." Another participant stated, "I am very satisfied that I finished my degrees, that I did my master's and my doctorate by paying for it all by myself (HF11)." A third participant mentioned, "…the most satisfaction was that coming from a family of eight, I'm the first…to graduate…from a university (HF6)." Some participants described receiving recognition of accomplishments as satisfying. One participant explained in this manner, "I do remember one of the things that I was always proud of…the fact that I was always admired by my adults…I was appreciated

by my teachers and the adults around my life for everything I did (HF1)." Some of the specific recognitions mentioned by various participants included making the dean's list, graduating high school as the salutatorian, being a top athlete, and being the student body president. Two participants mentioned membership in groups as producing feelings of satisfaction. Some of these organizations or clubs included being a member of the National Honor Society or Student Council. Events related to **family** were also described as bringing about feelings of satisfaction or accomplishment. One participant explained she was very happy about her family members being happy and healthy. According to her, "…that's a big thing (HF7)." Another participant easily stated, "I would say the things that have brought the most satisfaction have to do with family…whatever I did for my parents when they were ill (HF12)." This participant went on to share she has a brother who is disabled, and "…what I do for him, gives me a lot of satisfaction (HF12)." She explained that some of her happiest days are when her brother, "…meets his potential…those kinds of things…are really meaningful to me (HF12)." She added making a difference was also something that brought about feelings of satisfaction. Another participant shared she has been employed by the educational institution where she is currently for many years and feels when she dies, she can say, "Hey, I really did do something for this place (HF11)." She is very proud of having significantly contributed to her community through the work she has done for the institution that employs her. Experiencing feelings of accomplishment and satisfaction about various life events was common among all participants.

When participants were asked if they had any photos, ribbons, or awards to share or discuss, half of the participants said they did not have any to share. For these

women, responses included, “No (HF4),” “Not right off the top of my head (HF5),” “No, not really (HF6),” “I’m sure I have something, but nothing comes to mind (HF1),” and “…let’s skip that one (HF8).” For the women that did offer a picture or discussion, the number one topic shared in discussion was having **achieved educationally** via an academic award. One participant explained it this way, “…the ones I’m most proud of are my academic awards (HF7).” Some of these academic awards included achieving the English Merit Award (HF2), making the Dean’s List repeatedly (HF3), being in the top 10 of the high school graduating class (HF7), to having been awarded scholarships (HF7). One participant shared, “The only award that I’m really very, very proud of, when I entered [the university] for my bachelor’s degree, of a class of 80, in a physics class, I was an only female (HF10).” Another participant shared the one award she is most proud of is the Mary Maghony Award, which she received because of her work with the Hispanic population in her community (HF11). This participant shared a photo of herself receiving this award. Other photos that were not viewed by the principal investigator but were discussed by two of the participants were photos of children (HF7) (HF11). Additionally, two participants mentioned sports awards (HF2) (HF12), and one participant mentioned a professional award (HF9).

The K–12 experiences of participants were equally distributed between positive K–12 experiences and negative K–12 experiences. The shared positive K–12 experiences included **support**, **educational achievement**, and an overall good feeling about school. The shared negative K–12 experiences included **racism**, school culture, and **cultural norms**. A positive experience common to six of participants throughout their K–12 schooling was **support** received by others. Participants were easily able to

recall and share memories of supportive teachers, supportive parents, and supportive friends. Regarding teachers, one participant shared, "I have fond memories of teachers being very supportive, that would go the extra mile, stay after school to help us out, (HF2)" while another participant commented about her third grade teacher, "…he was awesome, I mean everything he did he did to help us (HF8)." Another participant recalled being encouraged to enter the science fair by her teacher; she stated, "I had one teacher who…he encouraged me to participate in the science fair. I remember having a lot of teachers telling me 'You need to do this because you need to, you need to go into the engineering field because you're really good at math,' just having teachers encourage me (HF7)." Starting her senior year in high school late due to unfortunate family circumstances was difficult for one participant. She recalled one teacher, though, who helped her catch up with all the missed work. Of him, she said he told her, "Okay, I don't know how you are going to do this…you know, we're going to find a way, we're going to find a way for you to catch up, and you're going to make it. Don't worry (HF8)." The participant did catch up and graduated on time. One participant told of a second grade teacher whom she loved. About this second grade teacher, she said this teacher taught her a lot, taught her how to be organized, and taught her how to be ready for learning every day (HF9). Finally, one participant commented she loved school and stated, "I had good teachers (HF12)." Like the stories of supportive teachers, stories of supportive parents were also shared by some of the participants. The participant who shared her story of beginning her high school senior year late due to family circumstances and therefore facing the challenge of completing all missing assignments explained that making up and completing the missing work was greatly dependent on

her staying after school to get the help she needed. However, she rode the bus home after school, and the only way she would be able to stay after school for assistance was if her father, being the only driver in the family, would be able to pick her up from school. The participant continued by saying that her father worked and having to pick her up after school was problematic. However, wanting to help his daughter catch up with her studies, her father spoke to his boss about being allowed to leave work early a few days out of the week to pick up his daughter from school. This was allowed, and consequently the participant was able to stay after school and complete the missing work. Not only was her father supportive and willing to sacrifice some time at work to help his daughter catch up with her studies, so was a friend. The valedictorian for that graduating class heard of the participant's dilemma and offered to help. Of her, the participant stated, "…she was like my angel (HF8)." With the help of her supportive teachers, her father, and a friend, the participant was able to make up missing assignments, catch up with her peers, and graduate on schedule. In addition to support from others, many participants shared **educational achievement** as a second positive K–12 schooling experience.

Educational achievement took different forms to include being enrolled in honors classes, graduating eighth grade with honors, and being moved from one class to a "smarter" class. Being enrolled in honors classes in high school was a definite positive experience for one participant. About this, she commented, "…that was brilliant (HF4)." Where this was a positive experience for this participant, a different participant shared a positive experience for her was graduating eighth grade as the salutatorian (HF10). One participant shared a positive experience for her was being moved up a

grade in elementary school. She stated, “I skipped kindergarten…I was prepared for first grade so they placed me in first grade (HF9).” Another participant recalled writing her name, probably on a piece of paper, and the teacher noticing it. Although this participant does not remember if this happened in kindergarten or first grade, what she does remember is the teacher taking her to a different class. According to the participant, this other class was a “better class (HF5).” So her writing ability at a very young age was noticed and led to her being placed in a classroom that, again, according to the participant, was better. **Support** from others and experiencing **educational achievement** were positive highlights of K–12 schooling for many of the participants; a common thread among much of the shared experiences was an overall happy feeling about schooling.

For the most part, participants described feeling good about their K–12 school experiences. Comments shared by some of the women included, “On the positive side, I loved school (HF12),” “I had teachers who took me under their wing (HF7),” and “I had a great high school life (HF1).” One participant described her teacher as someone who did all he could to help students. She went on to say about this teacher that whenever he saw a student that looked confused, or scared, or a student who was crying, he would help. Of this teacher, the participant also shared he was one of only two, possibly three, Hispanic teachers in the school. The participant related that at the time, she would say to herself, “If I ever [become a teacher], I want to be like him (HF8).” Another participant described a second grade teacher whom she loved and a seventh grade teacher she said was awesome (HF9). One participant described having a brother who was on the faculty of the high school she attended as a positive experience for her

(HF11). Despite having the **support** of teachers, friends, and parents, despite **educational achievement**, and despite having an overall good feeling about schooling, none of these participants completed their K-12 schooling unscathed.

Unfortunately, participants underwent negative experiences relating to **racism**, school culture, and **cultural norms**. Achieving a college degree is difficult enough, but the process is made all the more difficult when one experiences racism. The Random House College Dictionary (1980) defines racism as, "a doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior" (p. 1088). One participant eloquently described this phenomenon when she commented, "…there was always that underlying message that you were inferior, you were inferior, and you had to always be working against that (HF12)." Even the school she attended, according to this participant, was indicative of the racial divide, and gave way to the notion that one race was superior to the other. The participant described this as a complete separation of ethnic groups. For the most part, busses would transport students to either, as the participant explained, the Anglo school or the Mexican school. She attended the Anglo school, but was going to be transferred to the Mexican school, and as she said, everyone knew what that meant: "…the teaching was inferior, the building was inferior, everything was inferior about that particular school (HF12)." Her parents, however, fought the district on this matter, resulting in their daughter remaining at the school she was presently attending. As it was, the participant did experience name calling with remarks like, "dirty Mexican" by some of the Anglo students in school and continued, "…you didn't have friends that were not [Hispanic]…you didn't date across ethnic lines (HF12)."

Where the culture of this school district may have perpetuated the racial divide, another school district seemingly perpetuated **racism** via the oppression of the Hispanics' native language: Spanish. One participant (HF8) described an incident where a teacher spanked her on the calves because she had spoken Spanish. The participant explained she was aware of the rule, but she had spoken Spanish on the playground and not in the classroom and didn't think she'd be in trouble. However, the teacher emphasized Spanish was not to be spoken anywhere at school and proceeded to spank her. Another participant described certain attributes of the culture of the high school she attended as negative. She shared that she was offered drugs beginning her freshman year and commented she would never date someone who did drugs, but she could not find anyone who did not do drugs at that school. Secondly, she described the sheer number of students at that school was negative. She commented, "They moved us around like cows cause we were just such a mass number of students; I hated that (HF4)." Fights were a common sight at her high school and the participant described this as scary. Pregnant girls were also a common sight, and the participant described this as something that freaked her out. She stated she would hear girls speak so nonchalantly of their babies in the bathroom, as if this was normal. The participant commented, "…that's what they were supposed to do. They were supposed to have babies, get married, and it was okay, and they were doing it at that age (HF4)." Where navigating through an unfavorable school culture was challenging for some participants, for others, the challenge was overcoming **cultural norms**.

The habits, behaviors, and traditions of a particular group of people make up their culture. Therefore, culture cannot help but have an impact on one's life. Culture

definitely had an impact on the lives of the 12 Hispanic female participants of this study. Three of these women shared some challenging **cultural norms** that, to some extent, impacted their lives while they simultaneously navigated through their schooling. One participant shared her parents raised her very traditionally. She wasn't allowed to go out very much, and she commented, "I didn't have the normal, I guess, high school experience. I was stuck indoors (HF3)." Another participant echoed the same sentiments by describing parents who were very strict. She added that despite strict parents, she did not necessarily feel the need to go to parties and the like (HF6). Similarly, another participant described her upbringing as being kept in a bubble (HF7). As is the case with many Hispanic families, going 'up North' to work in fields is a regular yearly occurrence. For many Hispanic families, this migration 'up North' takes place during the summer months. Unfortunately, the return home is often after the new school year has begun. Consequently, for the children, this means starting the new school year late. One participant described this by saying, "…I had to enter my classroom late, and I remember standing outside crying (HF5)." Merely entering class after the school year has begun was daunting enough, but it was not the only **obstacle to overcome**. The challenge of having to make up missed academic work was also present. Hence, where the income earned from working in the fields provided necessary financial stability for the family, the children struggled to overcome the emotional stress of beginning school after the school year had begun, and they struggled to academically keep up with their peers in school.

Obstacles that may have indeed prevented the successful achievement of a college degree by these Hispanic females were certainly present. Experiences shared by

participants' reflections indicate instances of **racism**, feelings of **inferiority**, as well as **cultural norms** that became challenges to overcome, to include jealous husbands, lack of quality time with family, and lack of money. These women, despite obstacles, successfully achieved a college degree.

Part B: Verbal Persuasion

When one thinks of cheerleading, one typically envisions a team of cheerleaders who perform stunts and shout words of encouragement and support for the home team. In the same way, when asked who some of their cheerleaders were, meaning people in their lives who provided encouragement and **support**, participants were easily able to name individuals in their life who were their "cheerleaders." The individuals predominantly named as "cheerleaders" fell within the theme of **family**. The individuals mostly named included parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, mother, grandmother, and spouse. More than half of the participants named their parents as their biggest supporters. Where some participants simply named their parents as their "cheerleaders" without going into detail, others elaborated. One participant related the emphasis on education in her home. She commented, "…my parents…they knew that education was very important (HF6)." She went on and stated from a very young age, her parents taught her to always work hard. Another participant echoed this sentiment. She said one particular message her parents would reiterate to her was, "…to never give up, to just keep going, and no matter what we would do, to just keep going (HF6)." In the same fashion, another participant stated that her parents continuously motivated her to keep on going (HF1). In sharing her story, another participant shared that yes, her parents were indeed her biggest cheerleaders, and she added why this was the case. She said,

> My parents always instilled in us that they wanted more for us…They didn't want us to continue working in the fields like they did, which we did too cause we worked; I worked up until I was in twelfth grade. I was still working out in the fields…they cheered for us and they instilled in us that we needed to learn and to move forward (HF9).

One third of the participants named brothers and sisters as "cheerleaders." Of her brothers and sisters, one participant shared they motivated her to keep on going (HF3). In that regard, another participant shared that her oldest sister encouraged her to go back to school. The participant had been out of school for many years, but the encouragement she received from family members, especially her sister, motivated her to return to school after a long absence (HF9). An older brother, in the case of another participant, was a main source of encouragement. Of this brother, this participant shared he would tell her, "You need to do something with your life…and it's not looking for a boyfriend…remember, stay in school…you need to focus…don't depend on anyone…be self-sufficient (HF8)." Equally mentioned as being "cheerleaders" were teachers. In responding to this question, four participants reinforced teachers as "cheerleaders" by incorporating the adverb "definitely" in their responses. Comments made included, "…some of my teachers, definitely (HF2)," "…my teachers, definitely (HF1)," and "…definitely one of my cheerleaders (HF5)." Some participants elaborated their responses and included comments about their teachers like, "…she was just there, and some would call her mom (HF5)," "…she wasn't going to allow me to just do fundamentals of math one, that I had to take algebra (HF5)," and yet another participant said, "I had one in particular that I thank for having taught me in high school how to

write (HF11)." The majority of participants earlier described parents as the primarily named "cheerleader." One fourth of the participants, however, specifically named their mother as a "cheerleader." Most comments about the mother singled her out as the predominant "cheerleader." Of their mother, participants commented, "…she was a strong cheerleader (HF2)," "…my biggest cheerleader (HF6)," and "my mom was probably the most significant (HF11)." Two participants mentioned grandparents as being "cheerleaders" in their life. One participant described her grandmother's effective motivational strategy. When this participant did not want to go to school, she said her grandmother would tell her, "If you don't get up, you're going to go work in the field (HF3)." According to this participant, that was a big motivator. Another participant recalled her parents being pulled in different directions by family. She explained that some relatives would encourage her parents to not let her go to school, but instead, expect her to get married. On the other hand, other relatives would encourage her parents to allow her to go to college. This participant explained that one grandmother in particular definitely wanted to see her granddaughter go to college. Of this grandmother, the participant said she would tell her parents, "Let her go, let her go, let her go to college (HF8)!" According to the participant, the grandmother wanted her to be self-sufficient and be able to survive on her own. Just like the grandmother, two participants name a spouse as being a cheerleader. One participant explained she had not been in school for many years, and when she decided to return to college, she was afraid. She commented, "I was afraid of the unknown (HF9)." That being the case and wanting her to begin school, her husband went with her upon her first visit back to the university to enroll. Another participant described her husband as being her biggest

cheerleader; he always encouraged her to do more. Of her husband, the participant said he would tell her, "Yes, yes you can do it; yes, you can do it cause you're so good at everything you do (HF11)." Where parents, brothers and sisters, teachers, mother, grandmother, and spouse were the most commonly named cheerleaders, other individuals were also mentioned, but to a lesser degree. Some of these other cheerleaders included a professor, a mentor, a daughter, a family friend, and a friend.

In addition to having "cheerleaders" rooting for them, the participants also had people who had an influence on them in their life. The Random House Dictionary (1980) defines influence as, "the capacity or power to produce effects on others" (p. 683). Individuals mentioned as having been the most influential in their lives included mother, brother, teachers, parents, father, and friend, most falling within the theme of **family**. Almost half the participants, a total of five, mentioned their mother as the person having had the most influence on their life. One participant explained that choosing not to go to college was not an option in her home. About her mother, she explained, "She would always let me know, 'Okay…tomorrow would be another day. Just keep on going. It's just another challenge…it's just a stepping stone (HF3).'" Yet another participant described her mother as being the organizer. Whatever this participant wanted, whatever her goal was, of her mother, she said, "She was on it (HF7)." One participant explained the expectation to study, and to continue studying, was always there. She said her mother insisted they study and not stop studying. She continued by saying her mother reinforced, "You're going to improve, you've got to do better (HF10)." As far as being the most influential person in their life, the second most commonly mentioned person was a brother. One participant explained her brother was

the most influential person because she followed in his footsteps (HF1). Another participant explained that her brother was the most influential because from a very early age, he assumed the father role in her home due to the death of her father (HF11). About this brother, the participant shared that he was working on a master's degree at the age of nineteen, and she said about this, "I think that's pretty big, pretty awesome (HF11)." The brother, however, had to come home when their father died and assume the responsibilities of father. The participant described her brother as having done a great job molding the siblings, including her, and providing them with a role model. The third most commonly mentioned individual having had the most influence on their lives was a teacher. Of one particular teacher, one participant said that while she was going through all her middle school stuff, as she described it, this one particular teacher, "…would be there emotionally …for students (HF4)." She added that this teacher encouraged them to think for themselves. Another participant did not necessarily go into explanations, but she commented that two people having had the most influence in her life would be two teachers (HF5). Two other participants mentioned their father as having been the most influential person in their life. One of these two participants described her father as having been the best person she has ever known. She went on to say, "…his heart was so wonderful (HF12)." Although a second participant mentioned her parents as the most influential people in her life, she elaborated specifically about her father. About her father, she said that although he only had a third grade education, he was so smart. She said, "…he knew a lot, and he accomplished a lot (HF9)." She went on to describe her father as a farmer, and she said, it was through the farming that a belief in her capability was instilled within her. She explained,

> I remember he would plant that seed out in the fields when we were planting beans. So he would make those holes on the rows and we would put the bean in there to grow. So all along I kept thinking, you know that grows, you know, we're nurturing it, you know, we can grow ourselves too (HF9).

Again, although this participant elaborated about her father and not her mother, she did say that her parents were the most influential in her life. Finally, friends were also mentioned as having been influential people. The one participant who did mention friends as having had an influence on her life said that two of her closest friends were going to college. As she explained it, "…and so of course, you kind of want to be like your friends…they were definitely a positive influence on me (HF5)."

Being given **support** and encouragement by others, additionally, helped these women achieve educationally. Encouragement from **family** members was the most common response, a total of 11. Responses arranged according to most frequently mentioned included mother, parents, sisters, whole family, teachers, husband, older siblings, and grandmother. One participant shared her parents were going through a divorce right about the time she was contemplating college. In her home, the father was the one who worked and supported the family; the mother did not work. As a result, when her parents were divorcing, this participant explained that her mother would encourage her to pursue a college degree to not find herself in the same predicament as she was: uneducated and at the mercy of her husband's support. Her mother would tell her, "…don't be like me that you're stuck in a situation that you can't get out (HF2)." Another participant described her mother as taking over some of the household chores so that she would have time to study. She explained her mother would come to her

house and wash the dishes, do the laundry, or would say, "…bring me the kids. I'll take care of them. You go study (HF6)." Although other participants specifically mentioned the mother as a primary encouraging force, their descriptions of what was said is reflective of comments made by both the father and mother. One participant responded, "They would say… 'go to college, you're going to get a scholarship. Keep up your grades (HF12),'" while another participant commented that, "…college was just like the next step. You're going to college and that's it (HF11)." Having said *parents* specifically as the people who provided the most encouragement to attend college, these responses did not segregate what the mother said from what the father said. One participant described it this way, "…my parents never told me, 'You need to go to college, or which college are you going to?' It was just assumed and I think also by role modeling cause my mother went back to school when I was in high school…just by seeing it (HF7)." Another participant described the encouragement she received from her parents tied to their existence. She explained, "…like I said, we were a farming family, and it was just a reality. If you don't get educated, this is what you may end up with (HF10)." The participant was referencing working in fields. Two participants stated it was the whole family who provided encouragement to attend college instead of singling out individuals. One of these two participants naming the whole family as providing encouragement described it by saying, "It was just a given that we were going to college…it was always placed in our heads… 'you're going to get a college degree'…it was just understood (HF1)." Two participants mentioned sisters as the ones who provided the most encouragement to go to college. One participant did not elaborate on this other than to say it was her older sister (HF9), but the second

participant did provide description. Of her sister, this participant shared, "… they always knew I had to always go and pursue that, so I could have a better life for myself and my daughter (HF3)." Teachers were also mentioned as encouraging forces. One participant described a former teacher who was very supportive. Of this teacher, she said he was Hispanic and he would always encourage them to do their best to be successful (HF5). A second participant explained the encouragement she received from her calculus teacher: "I remember specifically, my calculus teacher telling me, 'you need to go into the engineering field. There aren't many women, especially minority women, and you would be a great candidate (HF7)." Other individuals who provided encouragement and were mentioned by some of the participants, but to a lesser degree included husband, brother, grandmother, and older siblings. Of the husband, the one participant explained he would repeatedly tell her to keep going and not stop. He would tell her, "You can do this (HF6)." Of older siblings, one participant said that because her older siblings had already had positive experiences going to college, this was strong encouragement for her (HF11).

When asked if parents were supportive of their daughter's college aspirations, all 12 participants responded with an overwhelming, "Yes." Some participants provided explanation as to why their parents were supportive of their college ambitions. One participant explained her parents wanted what was best for her and her siblings. She said, "…they gave it their all…for their kids to succeed a little bit more in life than they did cause they did not want them to struggle (HF3)." Another participant said her parents emphasized the alternative life if she did not pursue her education. Of her parents, she said, "…they always said that without a college education, you

would…have to end up working on the farm (HF10)." Similarly, another participant explained that her mother would predict she would end up getting married and working in fields the rest of her life. This participant explained she believed her mother used reverse psychology by saying things like that. Her mother was aware her daughter hated working in the fields, and as the participant elaborated, "I hated working in the fields with a passion (HF5)." In response to her mother, the participant would say that no, she was most definitely not going to end up working in the fields the rest of her life. The participant commented, "I was never going to step into a field ever again after I graduated from high school (HF5)." Her mother's reverse psychology had a tremendous impact on this participant's motivation to pursue her education. Working in fields was used as the reason to pursue a college education by yet another participant's parents. These parents, similarly, reminded their daughter she did not like working in the fields, so to pursue a college degree (HF8). Underlying this reasoning, was yet another reason for her parent's desire for her to go to college; attending college was a way to put an end to the pain her family had already endured when a son died in war. This participant explained there were times when she wanted to quit college. She would see her friends with cars, spending money, and having material things. She wanted the same things, but her father continuously reminded her that these things were not important. He would encourage her to continue with her college work; he would tell her, "You need to go on (HF8)." By creating images of a life of hard work by working in fields or in a farm or a life of pain through struggle, participants' parents were able to successfully encourage their daughters to achieve a college degree. Other parents were described as being very direct about their expectations in regards to college. One participant said of her mother

that nothing else mattered to her except her daughter achieving that piece of paper, the college degree. She said her mother would tell her, "…just get it done (HF4)." The participant went on to say her parents would be upset and disappointed if she did not pursue her college degree. Not wanting to do this, the participant pursued her education. Another participant said that although she was already married, her parents encouraged her college completion. Upon visits with her parents, the participant explained that parents would repeatedly ask her if she was almost finished with her degree. They would ask in Spanish, "Ya mero, mija?" meaning, "Are you almost finished, daughter (HF9)?" The participant explained she would respond with a yes, that she was almost finished. Another participant described the situation in her home a bit differently. Where her parents did not verbally express their expectation of her achieving a college degree, her going to college was simply a given. In other words, it was understood she would go to college (HF1). The motivation to attend college came yet another way to another participant. This participant explained that her father was a prolific reader. Of him, she said he would read Shakespeare, Greek mythology, and would attend operas. Consequently, the participant explained, "…just being a part of that family (HF11)," influenced her to go to college. Other participants described conversations regarding college that were held with parents. One participant shared that her parents were, "…very typical Mexican (HF7)." By this she meant her parents supported her college ambitions, but they did not want their daughter to leave home to attend school. Her parents, instead, wanted her to attend a local college. The participant explained she broke down in tears and insisted on knowing why her parents were punishing her by not letting her go away outside of the Rio Grande Valley to attend school. Fortunately, the

participant received a scholarship to attend the university outside the Rio Grande Valley she wanted to attend, and this financial assistance coupled with a change of heart led to her parent's agreeing and supporting their daughter's desire to leave the Rio Grande Valley to attend college. Another participant described a conversation with her father in this manner,

> I would tell my dad, this is one of the things that when you are pursuing an education, to me, it is very difficult. It is something that is in your head. You go to sleep, you worry about it, you wake up, you're worrying about it, you've got to study, you worry about it all the time (HF10).

This participant's father repeatedly reminded her that without a college education, she would end up working on the farm, but the participant made it known to her father that achieving a college education was indeed something that she repeatedly worried about.

Where these Hispanic females received words of encouragement and **support** along the way, they also heard messages that were not so encouraging. These negative messages heard while on their educational journey had the potential to hinder that journey. In regards to society, many of the messages heard expressed a condescending demeanor manifesting itself, seemingly, as **cultural prejudice**. One participant reflected she did not remember too many positive messages coming her way; according to her, not a lot of positive things were said to the Hispanic culture (HF8). Another participant explained that being Hispanic allowed other people to make assumptions about you, assumptions based on ethnicity. She went on to say that, sadly, these assumptions label the Hispanic an inferior ethnic minority. She told of a time when she

served as an intern in a predominantly White community due to a scholarship she was awarded. Where she did receive some support from peers, she also was made to feel as if she did not belong there. According to the participant, "…they didn't think you were going to do very well, or you didn't deserve to be there, you didn't deserve to get a scholarship (HF12)." It is understandable why another participant felt that no matter what one does, as a Hispanic, you always need to prove yourself. She gave an example of competing for a job against an Anglo applicant. According to the participant, it did not matter that she had the same credentials as the Anglo applicant, the Anglo applicant would always be chosen over her (HF8). Society seemed to always have an explanation for the lack of success by Hispanics according to this participant. Explanations typically included parents not caring to parents not being educated. Although this was not entirely the case in the lives of these Hispanic females, society painted this picture as reality, which upset this particular participant; "…they never really looked, I thought, in the actual circumstances…about what was going on in that individual's family (HF8)." She concluded that they, the messages, were always negative.

A vivid memory shared by one participant further substantiates this notion that messages conveyed towards Hispanics by society are belittling in nature and expressive of **cultural prejudice**. The story shared by this participant relayed a time when she went grocery shopping to a local grocery store. She happened to be wearing a shirt that depicted the university from which she graduated. She explained that a tall Anglo man noticed her shirt and asked her if she was alumna. She responded by saying her name and graduation year. The man then proceeded to ask her more questions about her education, not necessarily believing her. After some conversation where the participant

shared her educational achievements to include multiple degrees, the man asked her if she had robbed a bank to finance all of her schooling. This Anglo man, furthermore, proceeded to call his wife to him to "see" this educated Hispanic female. The participant commented that it was, "…like I was on display because I was educated (HF11)." Another story shared by this participant told of a time when she was the only Hispanic at a conference of approximately 20 other attendees. When introducing herself, she explained that other attendees were fawning over her because of her Hispanic name. She summarized her experiences by stating that she believed others have this preconceived idea in which they question how Hispanics could have achieved this or that, how could Hispanics, those with degrees, have achieved their educational accomplishments. She commented, "…it's a little patronizing (HF11)."

In regard to messages participants received from their own culture, the Hispanic culture, the responses were mixed. Two participants commented that most of the messages regarding college achievement they received from their own culture were positive. However, one of these two participants elaborated by stating the positive comments typically came from immediate family (HF3). A few responses shared by participants shed light on messages that conveyed an underlying **cultural norm** of Hispanics. One participant stated it quite clearly, "…women in Hispanic culture…they are meant to stay home and take care of children, and the household…that's one thing I struggle with (HF6)." Another participant described staying home and helping parents as a duty (HF2). A third participant said it was just understood that you were going to get married and that you were going to have children (HF5). Where these messages emphasized a typical role of a Hispanic female, other messages participants received

emphasized yet another Hispanic cultural norm, the necessity to stay close to home. One participant said her family would reiterate, "You can't go, mijita [daughter], you can't go. You know you have to stay here (HF2)." This participant further explained that in order to persuade her to stay close to home, her parents would tell her it would not be easy for her if she went away to attend college and she would not have the support she would have if she remained close to home; it would simply be much easier to stay. Where these messages revealed a more warm and endearing characteristic of the Hispanic culture, that of keeping family close together and the Hispanic female marrying, becoming a mother, and raising her family, other messages participants received by the Hispanic culture itself were quite opposite. One participant explained that most of the negative messages about attempting to achieve a college degree typically came from extended family; she reasoned this was the case because the extended family was not as well to do as her family (HF3). Another participant explained that for her, achieving a college degree was, in a sense, a betrayal. She said, "If you achieve something…you think you're better…and your own culture is telling you that, that's a negative thing. You know, and so it's tough (HF5)." She finished by stating, "…you feel like you're abandoning your culture (HF5)." Being less than was yet another message from the Hispanic culture some participants received. "…it was, I think instilled in you, like you're never going to be better…they're always going to be better than you (HF8)." She went on to share the sentiment that it is sad, so sad that people from her own culture believed this about themselves. One participant summed it up this way, "…we're always going to be second class (HF4)."

Regardless of where the messages participants heard came from, their affective potential is lasting. Participants were easily able to recall messages they received from former teachers as well as counselors, both positive messages and negative messages. One participant shared that despite her ethnicity, she always got positive encouragement from her teachers. According to the participant, her teachers believed in her and her potential to do well in school (HF5). Another participant reiterated by similarly commenting teachers were always positive towards her. "Go out and pursue your dreams (HF2)," was a message conveyed by the teachers of yet another participant who described her teachers as encouraging. On the contrary, some participants remember being told discouraging words.

When contemplating college, one participant remembered being discouraged from attending a four-year university. A school counselor recommended she attend a two-year university because, as it was explained to her, her parents could not afford to send her to school. "It was kind of disappointing (HF9)," commented the participant, especially considering these comments came from a Hispanic counselor. This counselor continued by telling the participant she was going into a field of study that would require her to leave her home. She was told she would not find a job in the Rio Grande Valley with the degree she was seeking so that particular degree would not help her at all. Despite the discouraging messages, this participant did enroll in a four-year university and completed a bachelor's degree. For this participant, the messages received from the counselor were not encouraging, but for other participants, the messages were absent, which in of itself, was a message. One participant shared, "…the counselors in high school dealt mostly with Whites, with the White students, trying to

get them scholarships, trying to get them into colleges (HF10).” She went on to say she received no advisement at all regarding college from counselors.

Other educational professionals having direct contact with students whereby having the potential to influence them are professors. Their words have similar impact on the lives of students. Like the experiences with teachers and counselors, the responses to messages received from professors were mixed. Unfortunately, most of the messages the participants recalled were not positive. One participant remembered doing extremely well on her general exams while working towards a doctoral degree. Instead of receiving a compliment, a professor commented on his surprise at her extremely good performance wherefore hinting at a completely opposite expectation (HF12). Similarly and according to another participant, a professor of hers, “…believed that because we were raised on the border and went to school in a border town, that we didn’t have a good solid language, like to write well (HF2).” She went on to say that because she was Hispanic and submersed in two languages, this professor felt she did not have a good and solid foundation for the English language and therefore, would not be able to write well. Fortunately, there were professors whose messages to the Hispanic students were motivational. A memory that vividly stuck out in the mind of one participant was that of a professor who compared the Hispanics sitting in his class to fish in the sea. As she told the story, the participant stated the professor would say, “…you Hispanics that are here today presently, you’re the ones that swam…out of all the fish in the sea, you swam and the others sunk, so you should be proud of yourself, that you are here and you will be making it (HF9)”.

Participants responded the least to messages received from friends. Three participants provided comments on messages heard from friends. Two of these participants shared the messages regarding college achievement received from friends were positive. The third participant, however, shared that she mostly hung around with Anglos while attending school; two of her closest friends were Anglos (HF5). As she stated, they knew they were going to go to college, and so wanting to be like them, she too desired to go to college. The Hispanic friends, on the other hand, accused her of wanting to be one of them, wanting to be White.

Part C: Vicarious Experiences

Heroes, like mastery experiences and verbal persuasion, have potential to be influential. When asked to name **heroes** in their life, five participants mentioned a **family** member as the person whom they considered to be a hero in their life. Two participants named their parents as the individuals they considered to be heroes. One of these two participants mentioned in regards to her parents, "I look up to them so much (HF7)." The other participant mentioned her parents as her heroes despite the fact that her father passed away while she was young. Although he lacked a formal education, the participant shared that her father was self-educated. In regards to her mother, the participant stated that she wanted to be like her mother who was very bright, loving, and supportive. The participant added that her mother was also a great cook and that her children were her pride and joy. This particular participant also singled out her brother as someone whom she would consider a hero. After her father passed away, this older brother returned home from college and assumed the fatherly role in the household and, the participant continued, he did a great job (HF11).

Two other participants named a father specifically as the hero in their life. One participant described her father as a genius. Of him, she said he did not have a formal education, but that did not prevent her from admiring her dad. She said he suffered discrimination, but this did not handicap him in any way. He did not let things of this nature bother him nor become obstacles. The participant shared that her father would often tell her, "There's a way, you have a head on your shoulders, use it (HF10)." Problem solving, therefore, came easy to her father, a trait she claimed to have inherited from him. The second participant to name her father as a hero in her life stated her father was the best person she has ever known. Of him, she said that he did graduate high school, but she did not recall ever seeing her father read a book. That did not matter to her because, according to the participant, her father had a wonderful heart, which is something she highly values (HF12).

The fifth participant specifically named her mother as the hero in her life. Of her mother, she said she has dealt with much in her life, but that she remained a humble woman. For this participant, her mother would be the hero in her life (HF6).

Where five participants named a family member as a hero in her life, four participants did not have a hero to name. One participant paused for an extended time to consider the question, but she provided no answer. In a similar manner, of these four, a second participant provided no response and did not name a hero in her life. The third participant commented, "Yeah (HF3)," when asked the question, but in contemplating an answer, had none to provide and requested the question skipped. The fourth participant stated, "I don't think I had any real heroes (HF9)," whereby summarizing the sentiment of these four participants.

Three participants named someone as a hero who was an individual in their life that was not related to them. One participant reflected back to her school days and stated her heroes would be her friends. The friends of this participant, being Hispanic, were Anglo (HF5). The participant explained that her family was poor and traveled up north to work. Want for food and other necessities, therefore, was never a problem. She was provided with basic necessities. Her friends, however, had everything. The participant stated that yes, she did indeed have food and was never hungry, but in seeing what her Anglo friends had, it made her want more; it made her want what they had. She stated, "…you see their life, you see the life that families on TV [have]…I love those shows…the perfect family shows…you aspire to that (HF5)." To this participant, her friends represented the type of perfect families she would see on television shows and that she wished she had. This participant did not consider her Anglo friends her heroes in the beginning, but later named them as such.

Other individuals named as heroes but that were not members of the family included fictional characters and notable Hispanics. One of the two remaining participants named two fictional characters as her heroes: Wonder Woman and the Bionic Woman. These characters, according to the participant, "…were women that were very strong and powerful, independent (HF1)." Another participant, she had already named her parents as her heroes, added that for her, Nancy Drew was somewhat of a hero for her. The participant commented she truly enjoyed reading the Nancy Drew books. Of Nancy Drew, the crime detective, she explained that Nancy Drew, "…did so many things and she was so smart and she could figure things out (HF11)." She went on to say she felt this was pretty neat. One participant named a notable Hispanic a hero. Of

this filmmaker, she commented he inspired her because he had ties to her home town. In other words, he was connected to the Rio Grande Valley. She explained she was impressed by this individual's accomplishments. According to the participant, this filmmaker had raised his own money to produce a film and consequently, "…making it happen for himself (HF4)."

One of the two participants to name their parents as a hero also mentioned a professor as a hero. She recalled being amazed by one of her professors specifically. Of this professor, she described him as someone who specialized in collective behavior. As such, this professor was often called upon for assistance to alleviate behavioral disruptions in society. The participant explained that authorities sought the guidance and expertise of this professor during the Los Angeles riots. Being someone of Latino roots, this participant was impressed and awed by the accomplishments and importance of this professor and remembered thinking, "Wow, like he's somebody (HF7)!" She stated that when she got to college, she experienced somewhat of an awakening. While in college, she was exposed to Mexican writers; she commented, "I didn't even know that Mexicans wrote, that there were academic Mexicans (HF7)." She added she enrolled in Mexican American literature courses and was inspired by the Mexican American authors whose works she read. Not only was she inspired by their writings, she was in awe of their success. The participant commented about these literary Mexican Americans that they made it, "…somebody Mexican is doing it, is writing (HF7)."

Participants were also asked if they had **role models**. **"**Teachers" was the answer mostly given in response to this question. Six participants named either one or

more teachers as individuals whom they considered to be role models. One participant specifically named a math teacher as a role model. The participant described this math teacher as someone who had charisma, as someone who motivated her students, and as someone who encouraged her students. She explained this teacher was a good disciplinarian in the classroom and attributed her own skill as a disciplinarian as having been influenced by this teacher. The participant also stated this teacher knew she performed well in math, and would tell her, "You're going to be a good math teacher (HF10)" to which the participant added, "I followed in her footsteps (HF10)." A second participant also specifically named one teacher as a role model. Of this teacher, the participant stated she was a powerful woman who wanted her students to think critically. This teacher encouraged students to think for themselves, and she encouraged this through Socratic discussions where students posed questions, discussed issues, at times, issues that would be considered radical (HF4). A third participant to name teachers as role models did not specifically name any teachers. Instead, the participant described the teachers that spent that extra bit of time to work with students as the ones that stuck out in her mind (HF2). A fourth participant specifically named two teachers as role models. The participant described one of these teachers as perhaps the first individual to instill in her the possibility of going to college. The participant described she did well in math, but she was enrolled in easy math classes. The participant said this teacher was not going to allow her to simply take fundamentals of math; instead, the teacher had the participant do algebra (HF5). The second teacher named as a role model by this participant was a journalism teacher. The participant described this teacher as someone who definitely supported her efforts, was there for her, and the participant

stated that many students would go as far as to call this teacher, "Mom (HF5)." A fifth participant made reference to the teacher she earlier discussed as having taught her how to write. She also identified this teacher as a role model (HF11). Another teacher this participant named as a role model was a woman who was related. The participant described this woman as brilliant; she added this woman taught algebra and trigonometry. The participant continued to describe this role model by saying this teacher, who was related to her, was always dressed perfectly, would always wear panty hose, would always wear pumps on her feet, would have every hair in place, she was good looking, and she spoke softly. In the eyes of the participant, this woman was a role model (HF11). The sixth participant to name teachers as role models named teachers she worked with and not teachers who taught her while she attended school. This participant worked as a para-professional in the classroom whereby assisting students master the content being taught. She explained in doing this type of work, she was able to witness what she described as excellent teachers and some not so excellent teachers. That being the case, when she pursued her degree in education, she recalled those teachers whom she felt were excellent teachers and she wanted to be like them; they became her role models (HF6).

Where teachers were named as a role model six times, **family** members were named as role models six times as well. One participant specifically named her father as her role model. Without hesitation, she commented, "Again, my father. I guess almost every question I can say that (HF12)." A second participant named her mother and her brother as role models. Of her mother, she said that her mother was her very first role model. She was someone she wanted to be like: a loving individual who was very bright

(HF11). The brother whom she considered a role model was a younger brother; he was the brother that assumed the fatherly role when her dad passed away. She said her brother was educated, and he knew they would be educated too (HF11). A third participant stated her older siblings were her role models. The reason they were her role models was because each achieved a degree (HF1). A fourth participant did not go into too much detail describing her role models, but she indicated the role models in her life would be the people in her family who were successful (HF2). The family members that were considered role models for a fifth participant would be the women in the family (HF4). The participant explained that her house was very female-oriented. As such, these women were role models throughout her life. The sixth participant to name family members as role models did not name a father or a mother specifically. This participant included both her mom and dad as role models. Of her parents, the participant stated they were hard working individuals who encouraged the children to always work hard and put forth their best effort. Her parents would encourage them to try and try again until mastery was achieved with whatever was being attempted. To be honest and to have integrity are traits the participant stated her parents instilled in her and her siblings (HF9).

Two participants named two individuals who were not related nor were they teachers as role models. One of these individuals named was a female writer: Sandra Cisneros. Of this author, the participant recalled being amazed after reading some of her literature. She commented, "…she was the first one whose literature I had read that I said, 'Wow, an American Mexican author (HF7)!'" A second participant to name an individual outside the family and not a teacher as a role model named a church member.

The participant described this man as having been an awesome person. She explained this individual was always cheerful and always willing to help. He offered help to individuals in the community, in the congregation, and to anyone who was in need. The participant further explained this church member put forth special attention to the youth, the teenagers. He would encourage them to do good deeds; he would find venues for helping others for teenagers to partake so they would stay out of trouble. Although he did not have a degree, he was very involved with the church and the community, and as the participant explained, eager to do something for someone else. The participant was emotional when speaking of this person (HF8).

One participant named professors as role models. The participant explained one Hispanic professor of hers was a role model because he traveled quite a bit. She said she would see him travel to different places, and she was in awe of this (HF7). The second Hispanic professor she named as a role model was a professor who provided encouragement to her. This professor provided encouragement to the participant by telling her to continue her education and pursue a graduate degree.

Other individuals named as role models by participants that were not teachers, related, or professors included friends. One participant once again discussed the two Anglo friends of hers while she was in high school that inspired her and whom she named as role models. Because these two Anglo friends, according to the participant, were destined to go to college, the participant also aspired to attend college and achieve a college degree (HF5).

The inspiration to achieve predominantly came from **family.** Half of the participants named family, or family members in particular, as the individuals who

inspired them to get to where they were presently. Two participants named the family in general as having been inspirational to them. These same two participants each expanded their answer by adding a brother in particular who was inspirational to them (HF11) (HF12). A third participant simply answered, "Just my parents (HF4)." A fourth participant specifically mentioned her mother as the one individual who was her inspiration. The participant stated that her mother insisted she continue with her studies until she finished. The participant explained that many times, she wanted to quit college, but her mother would encourage her to progress forward with her studies. The participant would complain to her mother that she had nothing while her friends had many things. Her mother would tell her to not give up, to not listen to what others say, and to not be influenced to quit by others. The participant became emotional and commented her mother would say, "…you're going to school and they don't want you to succeed so just don't pay attention, just go on, go on and don't listen…one day you're going to be grateful (HF8)." A fifth participant explained her older sister was her inspiration. Of this older sister, the participant commented she had already achieved a degree. As such, this older sister would repeatedly encourage her, the participant, to pursue her degree. This inspired the participant to achieve her college education (HF9). The sixth participant to have mentioned family relations as her inspiration identified her own children and not parents or brothers or sisters. This participant described having worked in the business sector for a number of years. After getting married and having children, she realized working in the business sector was not the best situation for her and her family. Working in the business sector required her to spend many long hours at work and away from family. The participant explained she earned a good salary

working in the business sector, but she decided to pursue a degree in education in order to have more time with family. She commented, "…my children were very important (HF5)."

Instead of naming specific individuals as inspirational people in their lives, two participants identified others who were not part of the family as people whom they considered to be inspirational in their life. One of these two participants discussed that the people in her life whom she felt inspired her to achieve were people who had high expectations of her. It did not matter what the task or job was, because people around her had high expectations of her, she would put forth her best efforts in order to meet those expectations. The participant added she would receive compliments for having done a great job; this encouraged her to set high standards of performance for herself. She commented, "…they were always my influences to always achieve and to keep that level (HF1)." The second participant shared a similar story. She explained she is currently the Dean of Instruction for the school that employs her. When the principal of the school was searching for someone to fill this position, she received several recommendations she hire the participant to fill this position. The participant did apply for the position and was offered the job. The participant commented, "I thought to myself, if these people that really know me well and have worked with me think I can do it, then I think I can (HF7)."

Instead of naming an individual as having been an inspirational force in her life, another participant attributed much of her inspiration to achieve to a program she participated in while attending high school. The participant explained that through this HOSA program, Health Occupation and Science Academy, she was introduced to

various career fields in the health arena. She explained that she, along with the other program members, were taken on field trips to doctors' offices, dental offices, and other medical facilities so that the student members would be exposed to the various professions in the medical field they may pursue. Although this participant pursued a teaching degree and not necessarily a medical degree, she commented, "…through the process of that, I worked with a dentist and he inspired me to pursue…to go beyond, to try my best to get to wherever I wanted to get (HF2)."

Where most of the participants already discussed mentioned their inspiration to achieve came from a family member, other individuals, or a program, one participant mentioned her inspiration to achieve and become a teacher was due to witnessing a teacher reprimanding a student while she worked as a teacher's assistant. The participant explained, "I remember that day; I remember it clearly (HF6)." According to the participant, a student was being reprimanded by the teacher for some wrongdoing. She did not explain what the crime committed by the student was, but she did share she was very bothered by the way the teacher was handling the situation. She stated,

> …I made up my mind that day I was going to be a teacher, but I was going to be a good teacher…and I'm going to treat kids the way…I think they should be treated…and really give them the love and attention and education that they need (HF6).

Self–drive was what one participant explained as having been the inspiration to achieve her professional success. The participant explained that yes, she did have supporters along the way, like her husband and mother-in-law, but she stated that much of her drive came from within. She was inspired internally to pursue her education right

up to the doctoral level (HF10). Of the 12 participants, only one did not respond to the question.

In regard to comparing one's self to others academically and against Whites and Blacks specifically, five of the participants shared a negative view of themselves, a sense of **inferiority**. Of the 12 participants, five others shared sentiments regarding comparisons that are positive, indifferent, or neutral. Incidentally, two of these five participants happen to be the two educational professionals working at the university level. One of these two university employees stated she never thought of Hispanics versus Whites because Hispanics surrounded her growing up and going to school. As she progressed in her education, there were no comparisons necessarily (HF11). The second university educator was somewhat indifferent to any academic comparisons against Whites and African Americans. She commented that she always did well in school; she was always at the top of her class. This continued throughout her post-secondary education. She stated, "…so regardless of whether it's compared to Whites or African Americans, I was still doing quite well (HF12)." The third participant to not mention negative feelings regarding any academic comparisons simply stated she felt she was equal to Whites and African Americans (HF4). The fourth participant did not feel there were any real comparisons; she stated two of her best friends were Anglo, and she typically outperformed them academically. She was the salutatorian of her graduating class, but she explained this came as a surprise to her. According to her, she did not work very hard for this honor. She went on to say that although she did very well in school, she knew she could have done better (HF5). A fifth participant commented that comparing herself against Whites and African Americans was not a

concern nor was it a priority for her. What was a priority for her was working and helping her parents financially. She explained she came from a large family, but her parents did not have a lot of money. To help, she worked. She did finish her degree, but all through that journey, her academics were not her priority; helping her family was the priority (HF6). Where these five women felt positive, indifferent, or equal to Whites and African Americans when it came to academics, the remaining five participants experienced opposite feelings.

Feelings of being less than others, of **inferiority**, were common among the other five participants. One participant described that in her hometown, there were more Whites than Blacks. That being the case, when comparing herself against the Whites, she stated she was not better off than them (HF3). A second participant commented, "I always felt that I was dumber (HF1)." She elaborated by stating that when it came to school work, she did not consider herself to be intelligent. This was the case despite the fact that when she looked at the work she produced and the work her peers produced, hers was better. Her teachers would write positive comments on her work, but she still felt inferior and believed she was not intelligent. She described a time when she had to write a report, and she struggled much to get it done. As she progressed with the report, she continued to criticize her work and felt it was horrible. After turning in the report to her teacher and receiving it back with a grade, she realized she had the highest grade in the class. The teacher went as far as to tell the other students to look at her paper, but as the participant explained, she did not feel she was as intelligent as her peers. A third participant shared that her experiences with African Americans were very limited as there were not that many in her hometown. When referencing Whites, however, the

participant stated, “I just almost felt like maybe my background or something made me lower (HF2).” Because her peers in school while growing up were predominantly Hispanic, she explained that these feelings of being lower than others developed primarily while attending college where she was exposed to a variety of cultures. It is while attending the university that the participant stated when comparing herself against these other cultures, she started to put herself down. A fourth participant remembered constantly being reminded she needed to measure up to the Whites in her school. In a sense, she was experiencing **cultural prejudice** by being told they, the Whites, were better than her. She stated they were told that the White students were going to make it, they were going to be somebody, and they, the Hispanic students, needed to strive to be like them. The participant commented, “…growing up, it’s like ‘what’s wrong with me (HF8)?’” The participant finished by stating, “…you never questioned them (HF8).” A fifth participant shared a memory of a time when her self-confidence was minimized because a teacher’s disregard for her math capability. The participant remembered the teacher would choose captains. She did not elaborate on what it meant to be captain, but this must have been a significant event as the participant three times mentioned the teacher would overlook her and choose someone else to be the captain. She remembered that many times she was the student with the correct answers to the math problems and she was tasked to help the other students, but this did not change the fact that she was not chosen to be captain. Eventually, she began to lose confidence in herself; she commented, “…he didn’t believe in me (HF10).” The participant finished by stating it was a constant challenge to overcome this sort of **obstacle**, others not believing in you. She dared to ask how anyone could do this, but never really getting an answer, she

simply pushed herself to be better than others. Unfortunately, this lower regard for her did not stop while in college. The participant continued sharing the general notions regarding students at the university who were from the Rio Grande Valley were not positive. According to the participant, the general belief about students from the Rio Grande Valley attending her university was that they knew very little; she stated the feeling was, "Those students, you put them in a classroom and they know nothing (HF10)." She finished by stating she took this, the **cultural prejudice**, personally.

The last two participants to answer this question contributed to the conversation regarding Hispanics' low regard for themselves when compared to others, but these last two participants took the conversation a little further by offering, instead, examples and reasons they believe to be partially responsible for Hispanics' sense of **inferiority**. One of last two participants shared she did very well academically while in school. She always strove to do well and achieve. She shared a story of a time when she truly wanted to be awarded the Top Girl Award for her grade level during elementary school. She said she prayed every night that she would receive this recognition, and was overjoyed when she was awarded the Top Girl Award. While she did not necessarily comment on any comparisons against Whites or African Americans throughout her K–12 schooling, she did say it was while attending the university that she realized there are differences among the races. When she enrolled in college, she, being Hispanic, was automatically placed in a student support program for minorities. The intent of the program was to assist minority students develop study skills, among other things, to help them be academically successful. The participant did not see this, though, as a negative thing, but instead, she appreciated the help. When this participant, however,

transferred to a northeastern university to pursue a doctorate degree, she explained that it was there she felt less academically comparable to the other members of her cohort. She commented, "…when I saw how they were writing and how [I wrote], I was embarrassed (HF7)." The participant realized a deficiency in her vocabulary. She then got busy reading as much as possible. She commented, "I ran to the library and got everything I could read…that is what I had to do to increase my vocabulary (HF7)." She went on to say a professor once told her she did not know how to write, and she said, he did not say it in a nice way either. She felt horrible at this point. She commented, "…in comparison, I mean it was real to me, Blacks and Whites, wow, I'm really different here as far as academics…and I thought I was pretty smart (HF7)." Where this participant added to the conversation that her limited vocabulary contributed to her feelings of not being as academically capable as her peers, the last participant also pointed to a limited vocabulary as perhaps one of the issues keeping the Hispanic down. She felt that much of the criticism Hispanics receive is partially due to their limited vocabulary. She stated, "We were always put down in grade school…we were forced to learn the English language…they would actually spank us if they'd hear us speaking…Spanish (HF9)." The participant went on to say she believed because of this practice, it allowed for a sort of oppression of the Hispanic, a feeling that others had more power than them, therefore, placing the Hispanic at a lower place than others wherefore perpetuating **racism**. In addition to a limited vocabulary, this participant stated that the Hispanics of the Rio Grande Valley suffer from limited world experiences. She commented that growing up in the Rio Grande Valley and not venturing away from there is one of the things that keeps the Hispanic back. She stated, "There is so much we've missed

(HF9)." Despite the challenges of overcoming feelings of inferiority and feelings of not being good enough, the majority of participants had goals.

Eight of the participants had **goals** related to **educational achievement**. Each of these eight participants had as a goal to finish a degree program at a college or university. Some of these ladies stated their goal was to achieve a bachelor's degree, others stated the goal was to achieve a master's degree, while another stated the goal was to achieve a doctoral degree. Comments shared by these eight women included, "My goal was to always get through college and finish…ever since I was in high school, I just wanted to do that (HF2)," "My main goal was just, once I started college…definitely to finish (HF5)," and "…getting my degree was one of the…biggest things I wanted to accomplish and I think I did that (HF8)."

Two of these eight participants who had educational goals also mentioned personal goals. One of these two mentioned she wanted to be a principal (HF1). The second participant shared one of her personal goals related to her work. This participant was in charge of a nursing program at the university that employed her, and her goal was to raise the level of performance of the university's nursing program. She commented, "…I got elected into this position nineteen years ago, and so my goal was, and still is to bring [the] nursing program to be on par with other nursing programs and we're almost there (HF11)." This same participant also shared another personal goal of hers was to be recognized as a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing. She stated not very many Hispanics have been inducted into this society. Ultimately, her professional goal was simply to be the best she can be.

The remaining four participants shared different types of goals, except for one participant. This one participant did not answer this part of the question (HF4). The other three participants did provide an answer. One participant commented she did not necessarily have educational goals, although that was the path she followed. According to her, things just turned out that way. Opportunities presented themselves to her, and she had the ability to achieve educationally, so she did. Getting married and having children, indicative of **cultural norms**, were the goal for this participant (HF12). The second participant of the three with different types of goals mentioned her goal had always been to make a better life for herself no matter how hard that was. She continued and stated that her family and children have always come first, and as a result, one leaves one's self to last. She explained that her children are now grown, and so the focus has now turned to her personally. She stated she has always loved photography; this was her true passion. She commented teaching is fulfilling for her, but she is now actively pursuing her true passion of photography. She has bought a camera, has enlisted in photography courses, and has gone to the extent of starting a photography business. She commented, "…that's what I am doing now, is just trying to build up my business and just build it up (HF6)." The third participant to share a different type of goal said, "…my goal is to reach as many students as I can to become educated (HF9)." The participant shared that as a teacher, she does the best job possible reaching out to parents and encouraging them to be very supportive of their child's education. She advises parents to, if nothing else, ensure their child reads. She went on to say that through reading, the student learns and is exposed to many new things and many opportunities. She tells parents that an educated child is a ticket to success.

In regard to someone participants wished to be like, four participants did not answer this question, but eight did answer the question. Of these eight, two participants commented they did not want to be like anyone. Of the six remaining participants, four wanted to be like a **family** member. Two of these four participants commented the individual they wished to be like was their father. Of her father, one participant described him as a man who had great faith. She went on to share her father would advise her to always give back in spite of hurts or injuries others may inflict on her. She said her father would comment, "You don't have to justify everything…there's always a way around it; problem solve (HF10)." He would tell her to have great faith. Another participant, in regards to her home life, identified her mother as the person she wished to be like (HF11). The fourth participant to mention a family member as the person they wished to be like commented she wished to be like her sister (HF3). The sister she identified as the one she wished to be like had attended law school. The participant explained she wanted to be like her sister because she continued her education until she finished her law degree. She commented, "She had that goal, and she kept on going until she had that degree (HF3)."

The last two of the eight participants to name someone they wished to be like identified an educator as someone they wished to be like. One participant named a teacher. The teacher she identified was an art teacher who, according to the participant, traveled, was lively, presented great lessons, and persevered (HF4). The second participant to name an educator as someone she wished to be liked identified a professor. Of this professor, the participant commented he traveled extensively. She stated, "That's what I wanted to do, I wanted to be like him. I wanted to be somebody

that people come to and…when they have questions, they come to me. I'm the authority (HF7)."

Part D: Emotional Arousal

Managing one's thought process has a role in influencing feelings and behavior. Being in control of one's feelings and behavior is especially important because life will often bring about challenging events. Participants were asked to discuss events in their life they deemed the happiest day and the saddest day. The majority of participants were able to name a day they considered the happiest and a day they considered the saddest. Where most participants provided a single event in their life as the reason a particular day was considered to be the happiest day of their life, some participants named more than one event. The birth of children was the event named the most as the happiest day in the lives of these participants; a total of six women said the birth of a child, or of multiple children, was the happiest day(s) of their life, consequently related to the theme of **family**. A few of the comments made by some of these six women included, "…the day my son was born (HF7)," "…when I had my baby (HF3)," "…there were three of them and they were my three children being born (HF5)." Four participants mentioned an event related to **educational achievement** as the happiest day in their life. Two of these participants mentioned simply graduating from college was an extremely happy day for them (HF2) (HF6). One of these two women, however, added that she was so happy to have accomplished a degree, something that not many in her family had achieved (HF2). A third participant shared the happiest day in her life was specifically achieving her bachelor's degree (HF9) while the fourth participant mentioned the happiest day in her life was specifically achieving the master's degree

(HF1). Four participants mentioned personal events as the happiest days in their lives. One of these women shared her wedding day was the happiest day of her life (HF10). The second participant shared the day her mother decided not to be depressed anymore was the happiest day of her life; the mother had been depressed for a long time since hearing the news of a son killed in war (HF8). The third participant recalled a memory from childhood that is still the happiest day of her life. She said, "The one that comes to mind…when I was in first grade and I had read my first sentence in a book, and I came home wanting to share that with my mother and I was so happy, the learning experience was phenomenal for me (HF12)." The fourth participant to share a personal event as the happiest day in her life stated what makes her the happiest is being self-supportive and independent. She commented she is very happy about being able to support herself and her daughters, being able to have her own place to call home, and owning her own vehicle (HF3). Where these women experienced events they consider to be the happiest days of their lives, they also experienced unfortunate events they deemed to be the saddest days of their life.

Five of the 12 participants mentioned the death of a loved one, a **family** member, as the saddest days in their life. Of these five participants, three mentioned the loss of a parent as the saddest day of their life. One of these three also included the death of a sister-in-law as equally sad. Of this sister-in-law, the participant said she was the same age as she was (HF1). One of these five women to mention the death of a loved one as the saddest day in her life mentioned the death of her grandmother, who was an important part of her life, as the saddest day for her (HF2). The last of these five women to mention the death of a loved one as the saddest day in her life indicated the

day her family received the news that a son, her brother, had been killed while serving duty in a war as the saddest day (HF8). She remembered the very night this happened. It was the night in which a party to celebrate her parent's 50th anniversary was taking place at her home, she being a child at the time. A knock was heard at the door, and she was the first to greet the soldiers at the door, followed by her father. The soldiers at the door told her father his son had been killed. The father was in disbelief and told his young daughter, the participant, to tell the soldiers they were not telling the truth and they were to leave, all while her mother was approaching the door. The mother asked what the matter was, there was silence, and the look on everyone's faces told the mother all she needed to know. Realizing her son was not returning home alive, the mother fainted. The participant shared her mother was depressed and sickly for a very long time thereafter. This event, the participant stated, was indeed the saddest day in her life. Two participants did not have a response to this question. One commented she could not think of what would be the saddest day of her life (HF4). The other participant, however, stated, "I don't think I can talk about it (HF7)." She did not. The remaining participants shared completely different events as the saddest day in their life. One participant mentioned a divorce as the saddest day in her life. She explained she and her ex-husband had made so many plans, and the plans, as she stated, "…got chopped down (HF3)." Another participant shared the saddest day of her life was telling her parents she was pregnant. She was not married and stated it was not the sort of news one wanted to tell her parents (HF5). The saddest day for one participant was the day she was not offered a job she wanted. The participant stated it was very frustrating for her to learn she was not going to be hired; she stated she knew she could do the job. She went

on to say she felt the reason she was not offered the job was because she was Hispanic (HF9). Losing someone close was the event mentioned as the saddest day for one participant; however, she did not elaborate on this event (HF6). Finally, a father's negative words left a lasting impression for one participant to the extent that the participant claimed this event to be the saddest day of her life (HF10). The participant described a day when a wedding was taking place; it was her sister's wedding. At the time, she was pregnant. She remembers going to her parent's house the morning of the wedding, she still not dressed for the wedding. Upon seeing his daughter, the father asked the daughter if she was going to the wedding, and she replied that yes, she was going to the wedding. The father then asked her, "Asi, tan fea vas a ir (HF10)?" The father was asking her if she was going to the wedding looking so ugly. The participant commented, "My dad, my dad, whom I love so much just told me I was ugly (HF10)." The participant, who was now crying, continued her discussion and shared that all of her siblings have light complexions like her father, but she has a dark complexion like her mother. She rationalized that her father loves her mother, so he must love her. That being shared, the participant also said about her siblings, "Everyone says they're beautiful. I've never been told I'm beautiful, except by my husband (HF10)." Where these events were some of the saddest days in the lives of these women, these women were able to overcome difficult times in their lives.

When asked how they **overcame** difficult times, the most common response to this question, shared by six participants, related to a sense of determination to achieve the **goal** they were attempting. Some participants commented they would tell themselves to continue and to not let whatever the issue or problem was to deter them

from achieving their degree. One participant commented, "I would just tell myself, 'you can get through this; this is not going to stop you from going to college (HF2).'" She explained this was her way of reassuring herself. Another participant commented she would seek whatever routes necessary for her to achieve her degree. She commented, "…going to college, you just have to find every route to get to where you want to be (HF3)." For another participant, finishing her degree was attributed to her refusal to give up (HF5). Sentiments shared by yet another participant indicated that for her, determination was a matter of simply moving forward; she stated, "Just keep going, going on…you keep at it (HF6)." Similarly, another participant remarked that she has never been a quitter; therefore, she was not going to quit achieving a degree (HF10). One participant stated that she was able to overcome difficult times in her life partially through her desire and determination to always do her best at everything (HF9). Another participant reiterated an earlier response to a question; she stated, "Like I said, you just put your head down, and just keep moving forward (HF12)." She added, though, that when others would tell her she couldn't do something, she would want to prove them wrong. This was a strong motivator for her. She finished by saying, "…you were likely to suffer along the way and it was part of life, and you just were not going to give up because things got difficult (HF12)." One participant attributed **overcoming obstacles** to self-drive; she commented she did not necessarily know where her ability to persevere came from, but she stated it must be intrinsic (HF7). One participant commented she just had this feeling there was something better. She remarked, "I've always had that feeling that there's, you know, something better tomorrow, and it will get better (HF4)."

To some extent, this lends itself to **faith**, which is identified as one contributing factor that helped in overcoming difficult times for two of the participants. One of these two participants specifically stated faith was perhaps the major reason she was able to pull through difficult times. She said, "I've always been told…God doesn't give us anything we can't handle (HF8)." Navigating through difficult times was attributed to faith by another participant who commented, "…believing that whatever difficulty I encounter, there is a reason to it; there is a purpose to it (HF5)." Three participants attributed their ability to overcome difficulties along their life journey to the **support** from **family**. Parents were named as the individuals who, through their support, were one of the main reasons one of the participants was able to overcome her difficulties. The one participant to comment she believed her ability to overcome difficult times to be intrinsic stated that this probably came from her parents and their support of her. Another participant commented that her parents have always been there for her. She stated, "They helped me through the challenges in life (HF3)." Another participant said she attributed her ability to overcome difficult times to the way she was raised (HF12). She commented that people are here, on earth, to be responsible. She added that in addition to being responsible, people are here on earth to be good and to work hard. Two participants mentioned their children as the reason they persevered through difficult times. One of these two women commented, "I wanted to be a role model for my daughter that if you have that dream, you're going to achieve it (HF10)." The second participant said the same thing. In addition to also saying she wanted to be a role model for her kids, she stated that life wasn't about her; life was about her kids. She added, "I need them to understand that there's always going to be obstacles, always, and

you cannot let those obstacles stop you (HF1).” Compartmentalizing things was the way one final participant got through difficult times (HF11).With difficult times a part of life for these women, life at times became overwhelming; therefore, life at times was emotionally trying.

Managing and persevering through trying times and **overcoming obstacles** was made possible through various strategies used by these women. Responses to this question primarily illuminated strategies used by these women to relieve stress, anxiety, or highly emotional times. Four of the participants turned to **faith** as a way to help them get through times that were overwhelming. One of these four women commented it has been her Lord and Savior to carry her through the overwhelming times (HF9). The second participant commented that it was through a lot of praying she was able to get through overwhelming and emotional times. She shared when she felt there was no hope, she would go to a church having a shrine dedicated to St. Jude, and she would just sit there, inside the church, for a while. In doing this, she felt a sense of relief, serenity, and a sense of security that everything was going to be all right (HF8). The third participant commented she would turn to her faith and church during these especially overwhelming times (HF12); the fourth participant stated her faith in God and through prayer, she was able to overcome the overwhelming times in her life (HF10). This fourth participant also mentioned that she would minimize into manageable chunks that which seemed overwhelming. She stated she would conjure up an image of what was, according to her, the whole picture encompassing all that she had to do. She would then set out to accomplish at least one of the pieces, and continue in this fashion. This would give her a sense of accomplishment, by minimizing the overwhelming into small pieces.

Two participants mentioned the **support** from loved ones was what helped them overcome overwhelming and highly emotional times. One of these two women commented it was difficult to attend college while married and raising a family, but she received a lot of support from her husband and her mother. She was, therefore, able to get through her degree even though, at times, life did become overwhelming (HF6). The second participant commented her parents helped her get through times in her life when she needed support. She added, however, that she also resorted to acupuncture as a way to get through some of the overwhelming times (HF7).

Two participants dealt with the overwhelming and highly emotional times by releasing some of the anxiety or stress. For these two women, crying, and crying quite a bit, was a helpful thing to do to overcome the times in their lives where they felt overwhelmed. Both of these women commented that one simply has to get it out. One commented that she was definitely a crier, so she would get it out this way, and afterwards, she would carry on and get to work (HF5). The second participant commented, "I would cry and cry and cry because you have to get it out (HF3)." This second participant also mentioned escaping as a way she dealt with these overwhelming times. She explained she would try to get away from everyone for a bit, sort of like hiding, because if she did not do this, she explained her emotions would come out in a negative way and she would lash out in anger.

One participant commented her **family** was what kept her going forward. She said her family depended on her; this was what would keep her strong (HF1). Another participant practiced self-talk to help her get through overwhelming times. She commented she kept telling herself, "I can do this, I can do this (HF2)." Slowing down

was the way one participant got through overwhelming times. She said, “Slow down, take it one step at a time, figure out what I had to do (HF4).” Finally, the last participant commented she would use time management to help her get through the overwhelming times. She explained she would attempt to schedule her time well in order to juggle everything she had to do (HF11). Where these were some of the strategies used to overcome overwhelming times or highly emotional times throughout life, these women also found ways to overcome difficult times while they attended college.

All participants shared a strategy used to overcome especially difficult times during college attendance and eventually achieve their **goal** of completing their degree. One participant became emotional when asked about difficult times while attending college to the extent she requested the recorder not be turned on while she shared. The recorder was turned off (HF1). A second participant did not name a specific event that was difficult for her while she attended college, but she did share how she overcame difficult times. She commented she would speak to her professors, and she would share what was happening in her life. Through her communication with her professors, she was able to maneuver through difficult situations happening in her life (HF3). The third participant explained her freshman year in college was the most difficult time for her because her parents were divorcing. She shared that it became very difficult for her to concentrate. She contemplated quitting school, but her mother convinced her to continue her studies. The participant said her mother would tell her that her education was her future; her mother did not work. Although her parents did separate, they did not divorce. The participant explained her mother’s persistence that she continue with her education was key in encouraging her to finish her degree (HF2). The fourth participant

explained that having enough time to complete her college work was especially difficult. She explained she participated in debate. As such, she would constantly travel. As a result, she found herself spending long hours into the night to complete college assignments. She explained she did this to herself, but she knew she had to finish college (HF4). The fifth participant shared being pregnant and having a baby her junior year of college was difficult for her. She explained, once the baby was born, she did what she had to do. She would sleep when the baby slept, complete her assignments at 2:00 a.m., and if necessary, take the baby to class with her. Again, she did what she had to do to finish her degree (HF5). A sixth participant commented the difficult time during college for her was when her close friend left college to return home. The participant explained this friend was her source of home. The participant was able to move forward and get through college through social networks. She explained she had quite a few social networks and that these social networks have been a constant theme throughout her life. She said she is able to persevere, "…as long as I have somebody that I feel is taking care of me or I have somebody to go to (HF7)." The seventh participant shared the most difficult time for her was the time her mother was ill. Because her mother was ill, this participant took over many of the household duties. She looked after her siblings, did the cooking, and other jobs that would typically be done by her mother. She added she also had a part-time job outside the home while she took care of the household duties and attended college. She said **faith** is what helped her get through these difficult times. In addition to faith, the participant shared she would think of the future and imagine a better tomorrow. She would tell herself, "I have to do something with myself; I'm not going to let it get to me (HF8)." The eighth participant

commented that for her, the desire to work was a challenge. Her siblings were working and she was not. She explained that it was a "brain thing (HF10)" to not let this bother her. She explained she contributed with the family farm by budgeting her time. She would dedicate a certain amount of time every day to helping out with the family farm and dedicated a certain amount of time in her day to work on her college assignments. The ninth participant explained that her marriage suffered while she attended college to pursue a doctoral degree. She had two children at the time. The participant explained that her marriage really got into trouble because she was having difficulty juggling time with her children, time with her husband, and time for college. Despite the challenge to her marriage, the participant explained her husband helped her a lot by taking care of the children while she went to school (HF11). The 10th participant explained that one of the things she struggled with was the minimal number of Hispanics on her campus. She explained that the janitors at the campus were Black and the employees hired to take care of the lawns were Hispanic. She explained this sent her, along with everyone else, a strong message. The participant continued and commented this situation would feed the negative stereotypes held by Anglos. She commented, "…I just felt so badly that this was the state of affairs (HF12)." The participant explained this made her persevere because she had been given an opportunity, and she was not going to throw it away. The 11th and 12th participants shared that for them lack of money was the primary difficulty while attending college. HF6 explained that she made sure to have gas money to put gas in the car to drive to school. HF9 shared that she would often go without eating. She added she just drank a lot of water, and that from time to time, a friend would treat her

to lunch. Neither of these two participants, however, let lack of money deter them from achieving their **goal**: a college degree (HF6) (HF9).

Triangulation Across Data Sources

In order to confirm the findings from this investigative study, the researcher utilized multiple methods of data collection. A personal interview with each participant was held at which point participants answered a series of pre-determined questions. The predetermined questions consisted of demographic questions, which asked for name and address; essential questions, which addressed the four sources of self-efficacy; and probing questions, which elicited more detail about the lives and experiences of the participants. A focus group meeting was also utilized. The intent behind the focus group meeting was to allow participants another opportunity to share their life experiences; this allowed the researcher to determine consistencies, or lack of, between responses from the personal interview and responses from the focus group meeting. A General Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) was also utilized as a data source; the intent behind the use of the General Self-efficacy Scale was to discern the strength of self-efficacy beliefs of the participants. The essential questions and the probing questions asked during the personal interview, the focus group meeting, and the General Self-efficacy Scale provided a platform by which the researcher was able to validate findings of the study. Additionally, participants shared artifacts to include items such as pictures with the researcher; these artifacts were discussed verbally during the personal interview. Finally, the researcher's observations were documented as notes kept by the researcher.

Probing questions. The researcher chose to ask participants probing questions during the personal interview in order to elicit additional rich detail about their life experiences. Responses to the probing questions were found to be consistent with the responses to the essential questions revealing the same overarching themes whereby validating the initial findings. Despite the desire to pursue a college education coming at different times, the majority of participants had achieving a college degree as a **goal.** Participants chose to enter the field of education for various reasons, and 11 of these women applied for financial aid to assist with financing their education. Three of these 11 women did not receive financial aid, but they found a way to overcome the financial **obstacle** and pay for their college attendance.

Upon entering college, each of these women had expectations. These expectations varied. Expectations included fear (3 women), to finish (3 women), lack of understanding and surprise at how things worked at the university (2 women), and to continue to enjoy learning and expand knowledge (2 women). One participant expected an orientation, but sadly did not receive one whereas the final participant expected college to be like high school, but soon found out it was not. Despite these varied expectations these women remained committed to **educational achievement**.

While attending university classes, the majority of participants commented their interactions with faculty were **supportive**, seven of the 12 participants. One other participant, unfortunately, felt professors were just there and did not really care about students. The four remaining participants commented the interactions with faculty depended on the professor. In regard to participating in college social activities, seven participants partook in social activities while five did not. Even though some

participants had supportive interactions with their professors while others did not, and some participants participated in college social activities while others did not, all 12 participants remained focused on their educational pursuits.

The participants of this study managed to achieve a college education despite being born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, a high poverty area. When asked, however, if they believed the Rio Grande Valley has an impact on college degree achievement of Hispanic females, the responses were mixed. Seven participants believed the Rio Grande Valley does have an impact on college degree achievement of Hispanic females in a negative way, whereas three participants agreed the Rio Grande Valley does have an impact on college degree achievement of Hispanic females, but in a positive way. Two participants did not believe the Rio Grande Valley has an impact on college degree achievement of Hispanic females. The majority of the seven women who felt the Rio Grande Valley has a negative impact on the educational ambitions of Hispanic females felt it was primarily due to **cultural norms**. One participant explained this by saying,

> I guess yes, in some way we grow up with a certain culture, with a certain feeling and…most of us that grow up here stay here or we come back…there is like this feeling of…or importance of family…in our culture.

On the contrary, three participants felt the impact of growing up in the Rio Grande Valley was a positive one. One participant explains, "I think that living here has…exposed us to…a lot of that [poverty]…and has enabled us to want to do better so we get out of that cycle that a lot of people…remain in." The remaining two participants did not believe growing up in the Rio Grande Valley has any impact on whether a

Hispanic female decides to pursue a college degree or not. One of these two participants commented, "I just believe each individual, when they set their **goals**, can achieve regardless of their situation." She added, "So it doesn't matter…who you are or where you come from, you need…desire." The second participant reiterated, "…just because you live here, you know, they…still do have those abilities."

Focus group. The focus group meeting was held shortly after all personal interviews were complete. A location, date, and time was determined and agreed upon by the participants. Five participants of the study attended the focus group meeting. At the focus group meeting, the participants were asked a total of eight questions, to further gain insight into the lives and experiences of these women in regard to college degree achievement. Additionally, responses to the questions posed during the focus group meeting were compared to the responses of the personal interview essential questions and found to illuminate the same overarching themes whereby establishing consistency of responses.

Considering participants had achieved a college degree, the question was asked as to how they felt about this. The discussion revealed these women were especially proud and felt a sense of satisfaction about their **educational achievements** because of their difficult path towards that end. Participants commented **obstacles** were a part of that journey towards degree achievement, but despite the obstacles, they made it. One participant stated it this way, "…it's a great accomplishment to, to be able to finally make it, do something with your life, despite all your obstacles growing up." It was also shared in the discussion that it is not only a sense of pride in self, but also a sense of pride felt by the parents. One participant stated that getting an education is what parents

want for them, and when they achieve it, the parents feel very proud of them. Considering Hispanics are the least educated minority, the participants chimed the same sentiment. “That is a sad situation,” was the first comment shared by a participant. Reiterated in the focus group discussion was the topic of a persistent cycle that is not often broken among the Hispanic **culture**. The cycle is that of the Hispanic children not leaving home and opting to begin the life of work versus the life of college in order to contribute financially to the **family**. Having achieved her education, this same participant commented she hopes other Hispanics will hopefully realize achieving an education is possible. She continued about a college degree, “…that’s everything because you’re beginning to find out that if you don’t have that degree, you don’t get a job.”

“I think there’s also a sense of intimidation,” commented one participant. She shared, once again, the story of being one of two Hispanics in a doctoral cohort of about 11 students. She recalled degrading comments made by the other students, whom she said were Anglo. Comments made by these Anglo students, according to the participant, were, “She graduated from Tamale Tech,” insinuating a **cultural prejudice** that students graduating from a college in the Rio Grande Valley did not understand the material being taught to the cohort.

Being the least educated in comparison to Whites and African Americans, one participant commented Hispanics do not achieve college degrees at the same pace as their White or Black peers because of money, or rather, lack of money. Another participant commented it is because the **Hispanic culture** is very conservative and protective. A third participant stated, in regards to culture, that the Hispanic family is

not so quick to send off their children; she commented, "…we're more **family** knitted." She continued by stating that many Hispanic children are afraid to explore, never having traveled outside of the Rio Grande Valley. A different participant added to the discussion by explaining many Hispanic children that do go off to college end up coming back home to be close to family. She finished by saying this is sad as they could have so much more.

Continuing the discussion that Hispanics are the least educated population, the researcher shared with participants that a report titled "Hispanic Women in the United States: 2007" written by Felisa Gonzales states that at the highest level of education there will be found the least number of Hispanic females, and at the lowest levels of education will be found the highest number of Hispanic females. Almost instantly, one participant responded, "Women are still having to be super people." The participant explained that being married, raising children, and pursuing an education means women have to be super moms, and explained this is extremely difficult. She added it was sheer determination that helped her get it all done. Another participant added that coupled with determination is **support**; without it, she explained, it is very difficult. The participant explained that for Hispanic women, as is the **cultural norm**, the husband's expectation is for the wife to stay home and take care of the kids. If the wife seeks a college education, the participant explained that many times, jealousy gets in the way. She said, "…you're the one that stays home, you're the one that takes care of the kids, …you can't have a better education than the man." She reiterated that without the **support** from the husband, it is very difficult to achieve a college degree.

"It's almost as if we've had to fight for the rights that we have," echoed another participant. She explained that for her, it has been a struggle to do the things she has really wanted to do. An aspiring photographer, this participant opened up her own business, but explained once again, it has been a fight to have what she has truly wanted, all the while still being super mom.

Having mentors, explained a different participant, is one way of changing the mentality in Hispanic girls. She explained that by having mentors that are women like themselves, educated and successful, other Hispanic women would see that there is something different out there for them, something that would help them better themselves and provide a better life for their **family**.

In regard to striving towards a higher degree, one participant explained that without encouragement from others, one would not strive for that higher degree. The participant explained that indeed, **family** is very important in the Hispanic culture, which is why many Hispanic women get married and are satisfied with a bachelor's degree. In their eyes, she continued, they're doing okay, they're providing for their family, and they are able to maintain a good lifestyle. She added that for these women, they become tired of constantly overcoming obstacles. Instead of constantly battling **obstacles**, these women begin to question whether they really want to pursue a master's degree or a doctoral degree. They convince themselves that life is okay as it is and do not continue their education. One participant stated, "…you decide either between family or a career."

The importance of a college education, however, was reiterated during the focus group. Participants began to share stories about their mothers and the help with school

work their mothers would try to provide. In regard to the importance of a college education, one participant commented that for her, a college education is a sense of security, something she can fall back on. She added her college degree has opened many doors for her. Another participant shared a college education is, in a way, self-defense. She added it enables one to carry on in life as a constructive citizen. Other participants joined the discussion and added a college education is extremely important, it brings satisfaction, it provides security, and it empowers you. One participant elaborated on the empowerment, stating that a college education prevents you from being dependent, specifically, from being dependent on a male, for example, the husband. She continued by stating that, unfortunately, in life, one sometimes finds themselves in a bad situation and because they are dependent on others, finds themselves with no way out. A college education, she stated, is one way to prevent this from happening. Throughout their life course, these women steadily remained on course toward **educational achievement**.

Participant resounded an overwhelming, "Yes," that anyone who seeks a college education can make it happen. One participant stated in Spanish, "Querer is poder." This essentially means that one who desires something has the ability to make it happen. The participant explained it this way; she stated for her, it means where there is a will, there is a way to make it happen. She added her father would always tell her this. Another participant commented that if a person really wants it, a college degree, "…you can do it." The road may be difficult for some more so than for others, another participant commented, but she too added, "It is doable by everyone." She added it may very well be the struggle of their life, but it can be done. One participant added that it is

never too late. She explained that she is the perfect example of this as she went back to achieve her college degree after many years, and she did it; she achieved her college degree. She explained she encourages other Hispanic women to achieve their degree and to not give up. She tells these women, "Once you quit, you have destroyed that perseverance, so do not quit." She tells them to always continue, even if it's in bits and pieces, to just continue. The participant concluded she internalized the very same advice she would give these women; in bits and pieces, she was finally able to achieve her doctoral degree. Suffice to say the perseverant effort of these women, to include all participants, and the belief in their capabilities enabled them to achieve their desired outcome: college degree achievement.

Just like these women had "cheerleaders" rooting for them and encouraging them along the way, they too had words of encouragement to share. If given the opportunity to speak to a group of teenage Hispanic females about college, one participant commented she would tell them, "Don't let anyone tell you you can't." The participant went on to say this is one of the most important things she would tell other Hispanic females striving towards a college degree. She commented she, along with the other participants, are living proof, that despite being told by others they would not make it, there they are: educated Hispanic females. A second participant stated she would tell Hispanic girls to set goals. She explained she does not believe the Hispanic culture teaches children to set **goals**. She added that by teaching children to set goals, even if they are small goals, and encouraging them to achieve these goals, one can then tell these children after achieving the goals, "You did it…you did that, you can do more." In addition to setting goals, this participant stated that having **faith** is also

important. She cited scripture, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” The participant commented that one must have a greater faith that comes from above, that He will help you. She stated, “…endure and go in faith.” Another participant explained when she is told she cannot do something, she is motivated to achieve that thing she was told she could not do. In the same manner, she stated the doubt cast upon her by others is just one of the many **obstacles** one will face, but despite these obstacles and the many others one will face, she commented one must just keep going and not quit. The participant elaborated by stating that at times, when obstacles arise, one begins to doubt themselves and their ability to continue and begin telling themselves, “I’m not going to make it.” She added this doubt and fear of failure will at times cause one to quit; she stated, “…from quitting…all you’re going to learn is regret.” The participant commented that persistence is another thing she would tell Hispanic females pursuing an education. Another participant added she would tell Hispanic women to think critically, learn to be resourceful, be self–efficient, and learn to problem solve. She commented, “With that, you can tackle anything, be empowered, and be a success.” Two other participants agreed and reiterated the importance of not only setting goals, but also achieving those **goals** and to not give up, while another participant reiterated having faith is important. Being more independent is something one participant stated she would share with other Hispanic females because being independent is important. Have wisdom is the advice one participant said she would share. The participant commented that life is knowledge, and so to gain knowledge because wisdom comes with that. Finally, one participant closed the discussion on this question by commenting,

that yes, at times, one will have to juggle multiple things, but it's important to always keep going. She ends by stating, "…you know, you just dust yourself off, and go on…"

The participants of the focus group prescribed the following ingredients necessary for degree achievement: commitment, goal setting, persistence, work ethic, seek mentors or role models, critical thinking, resourcefulness, determination, perseverance, faith, trust in self and others, problem solver, not quitting, fight, wait for marriage, break free of cycle, and empowerment.

General Self-efficacy Scale. The results of the General Self–efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), which measures the optimism and self–beliefs about one's capability to cope with challenges faced in life, were in support of a presence of a robust sense of self–efficacy within each of the 12 participants. Table 17 shows the sum score of each participant on the 10-item scale.

Participants	HF1	HF2	HF3	HF4	HF5	HF6	HF7	HF8	HF9	HF10	HF11	HF12
Score	39	38	36	35	36	40	37	35	32	37	37	30

Table 17: General Self-efficacy Scale

Participants were able to choose one of four possible statements as an answer on each of the 10 items on the scale: 1 = not at all true, 2 = hardly true, 3 = moderately true, and 4 = exactly true. Because there is no cut off score on the General Self–efficacy Scale, the researcher chose 30 as the minimum score indicative of a presence of self–efficacy; because 3 is indicative of moderately true, 30 was determined to equal a moderate presence of self–efficacy. Scores that were 30 or higher were deemed to be indicative of a more robust sense of self–efficacy.

Research Question 2: Are these factors grounded in self–efficacy theory?

According to Bandura (1997, p. 79), one's self–efficacy beliefs are derived from four sources: mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological and affective states (emotional arousal). The enabling factors that emerged from the data analysis of the essential questions from the personal interview regarding mastery experiences for the 12 female Hispanic educational professionals indicated events by which participants experienced success existed in their life, including educational achievement, academic awards, and family events. These events where success was the outcome are grounded in self-efficacy theory as mastery experiences. Bandura (1997) states, "successes build a robust belief in one's personal efficacy" (p. 80). In addition to experiencing successes, the participants also experienced obstacles along their educational journey. Some of these obstacles included cultural norms, family life, and racism. Despite these obstacles, these women persevered until a college degree was achieved. Bandura states, (1997) "a resilient sense of efficacy requires experience in overcoming obstacles through perseverant effort" (p. 80). Consequently, the factors that emerged from the analysis of the essential questions pertaining to mastery experiences are grounded in self-efficacy theory.

The enabling factors that emerged regarding verbal persuasion are indicative of the presence of significant others who provided encouragement in the lives of the participants. Some of the significant others who provided words of encouragement included family members and educators. According to Bandura (1997), verbal persuasion is yet another way of, "…strengthening people's beliefs that they possess the capabilities to achieve what they seek. It is easier to sustain a sense of efficacy, especially when struggling with difficulties, if significant others express faith in one's

capabilities" (p. 101). Condescending messages were also heard; however, the positive and encouraging messages were louder and had greater impact. Consequently, the verbal persuasion factors indicative of the presence of significant others conveying faith in the capabilities of these women through their words of encouragement are grounded in self-efficacy theory.

The enabling factors that emerged regarding vicarious experiences indicated that there were people, fictional or real, that modeled successes or achievements whereby serving as aspirational role models in the lives of participants. According to Bandura (1997), "efficacy appraisals are partly influenced by vicarious experiences mediated through modeled attainments. So modeling serves as another effective tool for promoting a sense of personal efficacy" (p. 86). Some of these models in the lives of participants included people they deemed as heroes in their life. Some of these heroes were family members, friends, fictional characters, notable Hispanics, and professors. Individuals specifically named as role models included teachers, family members, and others such as notable Hispanic, church member, and professor. In both cases, participants named these individuals as heroes or role models because these individuals were accomplished, and for some participants, wanted to be like them. According to Bandura (1997), people actively search for models that are proficient and have the competencies they seek. Additionally, Bandura states these aspirational models steer and encourage self-development. Consequently, the emergent factors enabling participants to achieve a college degree through vicarious experiences are grounded in self–efficacy.

According to Bandura (1997), emotional states have an influence on judgments of capability. People with a robust sense of self–efficacy will respond to emotional states in a more positive and energizing way whereas individuals with self–doubts will view their emotional arousal as a debilitating force (Bandura, 1994). Participants certainly experienced emotionally arousing times in their lives. Some of these especially emotional times included the birth of children, educational achievement, and death of loved ones. In order to weather highly emotional times, these women used strategies to help them cope: faith, support, release, and other strategies. While attending college, all 12 participants experienced especially difficult times; however, each participant was able to overcome these difficult times in her own way. Consequently, these women were able to approach highly emotional times in a positive way thus facilitating their pursuit of a college degree. The emotional arousal factors are grounded in self–efficacy theory.

Summary

The 12 female Hispanic educational professionals who were born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, an area characteristic of poverty, and who were the participants of this study achieved a college degree despite obstacles along their educational journey that may have been detrimental toward that pursuit. Analysis of the responses to the essential questions revealed factors found to be grounded in self-efficacy theory. Factors that emerged were indicative of instances and life experiences that are demonstrative of the four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and emotional arousal as has been established. Factors were further analyzed to deduce overarching themes across the cases. The 11

overarching themes that emerged included **family**, **educational achievement**, **obstacles/overcoming obstacles**, **support, racism**, **cultural prejudice**, **cultural norms**, **hero/role models**, **inferiority**, and **faith**. The responses to the probing questions and the responses to the focus group questions revealed the same overarching themes as those discerned from the essential questions whereby confirming findings. The results of the General Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) determined each participant to have a robust sense of self-efficacy by which, and additionally, confirming findings. Validity of findings was established through the use of triangulation of data sources and cross-case analysis among the cases. In addition, the researcher practiced bracketing of personal experiences and feelings in order to not sway or bias the results in any direction. Findings, furthermore, of the study stem solely from the verbal responses turned transcripts of the essential questions of this investigation. Finally, the researcher utilized member checking whereby forwarding results of the analysis of the essential questions to the 12 participants for their review. Two participants responded; HF9 replied,

> So glad to hear from you. I really feel blessed to have served in your study and hope it will provide the Hispanic female an open door to their success. If ever you need a mentor, I will be more than glad to serve as one. My desire is for every Hispanic child to become educated and live a life of abundance. Thank you for such an opportunity to help you. Many blessings.

HF10 replied, "Congratulations and once again I will shout it out loud and clear NEVER QUIT!... It appears that the statements that appear to be on my behalf were interpreted correctly." Because factors that emerged from the analysis of the responses

to the essential questions, confirmed by the findings of the probing questions and the focus group questions, and further substantiated by the results of the General Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), were found to be grounded in self-efficacy theory, it can be deduced that self-efficacy was the enabling force behind participants' educational achievement of a college degree.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary of Research Questions and Methodology

The final chapter of this exploratory study provides a recapitulation of the research questions, the methodology, and the findings; also included in this chapter are implications and recommendations, the role of the researcher to include reflection, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research regarding self–efficacy theory. There were two research questions for this exploratory study:

1. Which factors enable female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, to overcome barriers and achieve a college degree?
2. Are these factors grounded in self–efficacy theory?

The chosen methodology for this study was to conduct a qualitative multi–case investigation. The qualitative multiple case study approach was used in order to garner rich detailed information about the lives of the participants which allowed insight into the phenomenon under investigation wherefore building an explanation.

Participants for this study included 12 female Hispanic educational professionals who fell within the boundaries of the selection criteria:

1. Born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas
2. Having achieved a minimum of a bachelor's degree from a four-year degree-granting institution
3. Hispanic or Latina

4. Currently employed as an educational professional at the elementary, middle, high, or university level
5. Between the ages of 22 and 65

Participants were recruited from schools within the four counties of the Rio Grande Valley, Texas: Cameron County, Hidalgo County, Starr County, and Willacy County.

The sources of data for this study included a personal interview, which consisted of demographic questions, essential questions, and probing questions, a focus group meeting, a General Self–efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), artifacts, and researcher observations. The recorded personal interviews took place at a date, time, and location mutually agreed upon by researcher and participant. After completion of all personal interviews, the recorded focus group meeting took place at a designated place, date, and time established by the researcher. Participants completed the General Self–efficacy Scale during the personal interview. The researcher gave the participants the scale to complete after all the personal interview questions were answered. Artifacts shared and verbally discussed with the researcher took place during the personal interview. The researcher used observation notes to enhance comprehensive understanding of shared experiences of participants and to enhance validity of the researcher's interpretations. Data analysis consisted of the extraction of units of analysis from the interview transcripts, coding of the extracted units of analysis to discern factors, and cross-case analysis of factors to discern overarching themes.

Discussion of Self-efficacy Theory

The development of self-efficacy is derived from four sources of information. These four sources of information are mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious

experiences, and physiological and affective states (emotional arousal) (Bandura, 1997). Mastery experiences relate to events or activities in which people engage where success has been achieved. These experiences help to build one's belief in their capabilities. Vicarious experiences refer to the appraisals of capabilities one gives himself / herself when conducting comparisons to others who model desired behaviors. When one sees others successfully performing desired tasks, beliefs in the capability to do the same is promoted. Verbal persuasion refers to the verbal messages given by others conveying faith in one's capabilities to perform and succeed at tasks, which have the potential to be influential. Physiological and affective states (emotional arousal) refer to the judgments people impose on their sense of capability, their strength, and their susceptibility to ineffective functioning. These four modalities influence human functioning in a multitude of ways.

According to Bandura, the efficacy beliefs people hold about themselves guide the lives they live (Bandura, 1997). The effects of these beliefs are diverse in that efficacy beliefs play an influential role in decisions people make throughout their life course. Self-efficacy has the potentiality to affect action taken or not taken, the extent of exerted effort on pursuits, perseverance through challenges and set-backs, the amount of resilience one is able to sustain when faced with adversity, management of thoughts, the stress level during exceptionally trying and demanding times, and the extent to which one realizes accomplishments and / or achievements (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs, which are "…beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments," are at the root of one's realized life (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Consequently, it serves an overall beneficial purpose to

determine if the vehicles by which each of the four modalities develop and convey influential information are present in the lives of individuals wherefore potentially providing a prescriptive path toward attainment of desired outcomes.

Chapter 2 surmised various studies about the construct of self-efficacy as well as studies relating to educational achievement. Some of these studies incorporated self-efficacy measures while others did not; in the majority of studies, self-efficacy was determined to be a positive influential factor or a positive contributing factor to the phenomenon being investigated. The studies that did not necessarily incorporate a self-efficacy measure used, for example, interviews as one of the data-gathering sources. These studies similarly determined self-efficacy to have been a positive contributing factor to the phenomenon being investigated. Studies that did not directly assess self-efficacy but instead investigated topics related to educational success found, in most cases, self-efficacy to be a positive contributing or influential factor. Consequently, the construct of self-efficacy and its potentiality for positive influence has earned its place in the literature related to educational achievement.

In addition to self-efficacy, many of the studies discussed in Chapter 2, further determined other factors to have been positive influential forces upon the phenomenon being investigated. Some of these factors included persistence, support from others, expectations from others, encouragement, etc. Incidentally, many of these factors can be linked to one of the four sources of self-efficacy. Encouragement from others, for example, falls within verbal persuasion. Because many of the accumulated factors influential for educational achievement from the multiple studies discussed in Chapter 2 stem from information conveyed via veins that fall within one of the four sources of

self-efficacy, a concise and overarching theme of these findings is the positive influential potency of self-efficacy on behavior. This being established, this researcher sought to specifically investigate enabling factors toward degree achievement of 12 female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, who have achieved a minimum of a bachelor's degree to determine if the illuminated enabling factors were grounded in self-efficacy theory wherefore promoting self-efficacy as a unifying and holistic construct facilitating the ability by which individuals can "…control the events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1997, p. 1) namely, and in relation to this study, educational achievement.

Findings

The findings of this study support self-efficacy as an overarching and holistic influential construct towards degree achievement. The factors which enabled the female Hispanic educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, to achieve a bachelor's degree that were illuminated by the analysis of the essential questions from the personal interviews, and validated by the illuminated overarching themes from the probing questions and the focus group meeting and further confirmed by the results of the General Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), were found to be grounded in self-efficacy theory, indicating the presence of the four sources of self-efficacy: mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological and affective states (emotional arousal) in the lives of participants.

Mastery experiences are considered the most influential of the four sources of self-efficacy because they provide the most authentic evidence that one has or can gather whatever is necessary to succeed at a given task (Bandura, 1997). These

successes then help to build one's belief in her capabilities. An overarching theme emerging from the cross-case analysis of the illuminated factors regarding mastery experiences was educational achievement. For the five mastery experience questions asked, educational achievements were considered to be some of the most significant events in the lives of these participants as well as events that brought the most satisfaction. Because successful performance helps to build efficacy, the educational mastery experiences of these women helped to build their belief in their capability to achieve educationally whereby contributing to their successful completion of a college degree. These women could have given up at any time when circumstances became overwhelming, but as Albert Bandura stated, a sense of self-efficacy that is most resilient is one in which obstacles have been present but "perseverant effort" helped to overcome them (Bandura, 1997, p. 80). "By sticking it out through tough times, [these women] emerge[d] from adversity stronger and more able" (Bandura, 1997, p. 80).

Bandura (1997) commented when one is undergoing difficult times, it helps to overcome these difficult times when others that are significant in their lives express a belief and faith in their capabilities to overcome these difficulties. People's belief in their capabilities to achieve what they seek is further enhanced through verbal persuasion. When encouraged verbally, people are more likely to engage proactively and exert more effort toward success. Verbal persuasion helps build self-efficacy. Regarding the questions referencing verbal persuasion, all participants had individuals in their lives that were their "cheerleaders" and conveyed encouraging messages and supported their college ambitions. Where negative messages coming from various sources, such as society, were also present, the positive messages were heard louder and

had greater impact as these women continued their educational pursuits until they achieved their degree. The positive verbal persuasion experiences of these women were indeed an influential factor on their efficacy, consequently enabling their educational achievement.

Vicarious experiences, similarly, impact one's beliefs about their capabilities. When assessing one's capabilities, people often compare themselves to others. When these social comparisons are made against individuals who are similar and who are performing similar tasks and who are successful at performing these tasks, one then judges these successful performances as indicators of one's own capabilities to successfully perform similar tasks (Bandura, 1997). These observations of others performing successfully have the tendency to raise one's efficacy beliefs that the capabilities to perform similarly is within them. According to Bandura (1997, p. 87),"They persuade themselves that if others can do it, they too have the capabilities to raise their performance." Each of the participants was able to name someone in their life whom they considered to be a role model. The two primary role models in the lives of these women were family members and educators. Bandura (1997) stated individuals seek role models that are proficient and have competencies they desire; by observing the behaviors and ways of thinking, which are displayed through action, observers are able to learn skills for effectively managing demands of the environment. Personal efficacy beliefs are raised by the transmitted and learned skills; hence, "aspirational modeling guides and motivates self-development" (Bandura, 1997, p. 88). Bandura, additionally, commented that vicarious experiences through models are achieved not only through observed behaviors, but also verbally. When one witnesses someone who

is considered a role model struggling through circumstances, these role models may verbally express hope and determination that convey the message that goals are within reach and problems can be overcome. According to Bandura (1997, p. 88) "Models who express confidence in the face of difficulties instill a higher sense of efficacy and perseverance in others." The role models in the lives of these women, consequently, had a hand in developing their efficacy beliefs.

Bandura (1997) stated that people with a higher sense of self-efficacy approach problematic situations that produce stress in a much bolder way. They are able to manage their thought processes more effectively whereby influencing their feelings and behaviors. Bandura (1997) likens this process to a Chinese proverb: "You cannot prevent the birds of worry and care from flying over your head. But you can stop them from building nests in your hair" (p. 145). The participants certainly experienced times in their life that were highly emotional, overwhelming, and/or challenging; however, birds of worry did not make a home by building nests in their hair. These women were able to navigate through these highly emotional times successfully and achieve their college degrees. They possessed what Bandura calls "masterful resilience" (Bandura, 1997, p. 173).

Findings from the probing questions resulted in the same overarching themes discerned from the cross-case analysis of emergent factors from the essential questions. Responses to the probing questions, which were asked to garner more rich detail about the life experiences of participants, were germane to the response of the essential questions from the personal interview. Overarching themes illuminated by the responses to probing questions included educational achievement, obstacles/overcoming

obstacles, support, cultural norms, and goals. Similarly, findings from the focus group meeting resulted in the same overarching themes. Overarching themes illuminated by the focus group meeting included family, educational achievement, obstacles/overcoming obstacles, support, cultural prejudice, cultural norms, goals, and faith. The results of the General Self-efficacy Scale (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) supported self-efficacy theory. Each of these women possessed a robust sense of perceived self-efficacy whereby corroborating and confirming the results of the analysis of the essential questions, the emergent themes from the probing questions, and the emergent themes from the focus group meeting.

Implications and Recommendations

The results of this study have a number of implications. Below are recommendations for consideration when addressing the educational achievement of the least educated minority, the Hispanic.

Educators. For those working as educators, it is important to acknowledge the supportive effects or debilitating effects of messages communicated to students. Bandura commented that people will exert more effort, and they will sustain this effort when verbally persuaded to believe in their capabilities to achieve tasks (Bandura, 1997). Furthermore, Bandura commented that individuals who enter their adult life with "nagging doubts about their capabilities find many aspects of their adult life aversive, full of hardship, and depressing" (Bandura, 1997, p. 184). Because words have a lasting and a significant impact on the lives of individuals, the recommendation is for educators to be ever so vigilant of the messages they convey to students and to take advantage of opportunities to encourage the development of self-efficacy in their students through

verbal persuasion that is meaningful and pertinent, and avoid negative commentary that has the potential to retard effort and minimize students' belief in their capabilities.

Schools. Many comments shared by participants shed light on unfavorable practices of schools: not educating its students or parents of the fundamentals related to college attendance. Because information relating to college was lacking, the path to college enrollment, attendance, and degree completion was, as Patricia Gandara has commented, like passing through the eye of a needle (1982). Because being knowledgeable of the intricacies involved with college enrollment, college attendance, and degree completion helps to facilitate this process, the recommendation is for schools to create atmospheres promoting college attendance and to establish programs that reach out to students and parents in order to provide assistance in navigating through what may be a complicated process thus facilitating a belief that educational achievement at the post-secondary level is attainable.

Counselors. Some comments shared by participants indicated the lack of guidance provided by the counselors at their school. As evidenced from this study and literature cited in this this study, Hispanics do care about education. Not assisting Hispanics, a population already considered the least educated minority, in pursuing a college education helps perpetuate the notion Hispanics do not care about education. Because opportunities to pursue a postsecondary education are open to all, the recommendation is for counselors to reach out to include Hispanic students and encourage college enrollment. Assisting in this process has the potential to fuel educational ambitions and strengthen beliefs in capabilities to achieve educationally.

Collegiate world. The college experiences of students vary from group to group. That being the case, the college experiences of the Hispanic are unique and pose challenges that might be unique to this population. Because we live in a world consisting of a collage of races and ethnicities, the recommendation is for colleges and universities to review and establish programs that encourage the recruitment and retention of diverse populations, including Hispanics, and to review and establish programs that help diverse populations better assimilate to life in college. Providing programs and venues by which diversity is appreciated and valued has the potentiality of creating a mosaic collegiate community that is all inclusive whereby promoting a sense of belonging and a sense of personal efficacy related to academic success in people.

Families. Maintaining family and cultural ties is of significance to the Hispanic population. Because a common theme made among the cases was the negative sentiments about Hispanics in general and Hispanics and education from a milieu of sources, the plight of the Hispanic to achieve educationally is a formidable task. Because of this, the recommendation for Hispanic families is to reinforce the value of education, encourage educational achievement, and convey messages of belief in the capabilities of their children in order to overcome the debilitating and potentially hindering messages from outside telling the Hispanic he/she is not good enough. In doing so, self-efficacy is encouraged which in turn fuels the motivation to succeed educationally.

Role of the Researcher and Reflection

I, the researcher of this study, once sat in a classroom full of college students pursuing a doctoral degree. I remember a discussion about educational achievement taking place; I recall the professor commenting Hispanics are not to be found at the doctoral level of education. I, being a Hispanic female in pursuit of a doctoral degree, raised my hand, the professor called on me, and I quietly spoke, "But sir, I'm a Hispanic." Surprised, the professor responded, "Well, you're the only one." I smiled; the class clapped for me. This event was the catalyst for this researcher's desire to know more about the educational plight of Hispanics. In researching this, I learned Hispanics were the least educated population at all levels of educational pipeline. Sadly, much of the literature I found discussed reasons for the educational failures of the Hispanic. I told myself, "But I made it. I have a bachelor's degree. I have a master's degree. I'm pursuing a doctoral degree." This researcher took interest in discovering others like myself: Hispanic females who have achieved a college degree. Enrolling in a doctoral program overseas became the vehicle by which I sought to discover what enabled Hispanic females to achieve educationally.

I was born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. I was one of five children born to humble parents. Because finances were tight, my family traveled north to work the fields of crops during the summer months. This yearly migration instilled the value of hard work within me at a young age. Coupled with my parent's expectation that the children do well in school, the time spent working in fields fueled the desire to achieve educationally.

Participants for this study were recruited from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, because it is an area strewn with poverty, which provided an all the more challenging

backdrop for someone wanting to achieve a college degree. This researcher chose to use females because, as has been discussed, culturally, the Hispanic female's role is to stay home and take care of the family, yet another obstacle, in a sense, to overcome if one wants to achieve a college degree. This researcher recruited twelve participants who were willing to share their educational journey.

Because I was able to personally identify with the participants by meeting all the selection criteria, rapport was established with them. I was careful, however, to maintain the role of interviewer and researcher throughout the investigation. Although I sought to collect rich and detailed description, I maintained study protocol with all participants, provided self-disclosure at the forefront of the investigations, and practiced bracketing to not taint the investigative process. More-so out of respect for participants, I did not hire any outsiders to assist with the transcribing of tape-recorded interviews; I performed all transcribing as well as the analysis of the data. Because of the elapsed time of this project, I stayed connected and immersed with the study and intimate with the data.

This researcher has learned that research is a meticulous process. The overall goal, nonetheless, was to discover enabling factors that helped Hispanic female educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, achieve a college degree and to discover if these factors were grounded in self-efficacy theory whereby potentially providing a prescriptive path, or theoretical context, by which degree achievement might be realized in the hopes that more Hispanics achieve educationally. This desire turned passion fueled me to partake in this qualitative study, which in turn, has led me to respect the tenets of qualitative research. Because participants shared

intimate details about their life, and because they too hoped their participation in this study would encourage other Hispanic females to achieve educationally, I feel an obligation and duty to them, the participants, to finish this project.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher was able to identify four limitations of this study. One, the study focused on a particular setting: the Rio Grande Valley, Texas. The researcher chose to use the Rio Grande Valley because poverty is characteristic of this setting. This begs the question if similar findings would be achieved in other states and/or affluent settings. A second limitation was gender. Participants of this study consisted of only females wherefore limiting the generalizability of the study to one gender. A third limitation was the profession of participants. The researcher focused on participants employed as educational professionals. Similarly, choosing to use only educational professionals for this study limited the generalizability to other professions. Focusing on Hispanics presented a fourth limitation; other ethnicities were not included in this study. Considering the specific use of Hispanic participants begs the question if cultural beliefs, customs, and/or norms may have influenced findings and if studies with other ethnicities would arrive at similar findings. The limitations to this study lend themselves to future research recommendations.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research regarding enabling factors toward degree achievement and whether these factors are grounded in self-efficacy should be conducted. One consideration for future research would be to involve participants from other races and other ethnicities. It would be interesting to find out if the enabling factors towards

degree achievement determined for these other races or ethnicities are similar and are similarly grounded in self-efficacy theory. A second consideration for future research would be to include males. This study focused on females; are the enabling factors toward degree achievement the same for men as well as women, and are these identified factors grounded in self-efficacy theory? A third consideration for future research would be to involve other settings. This study focused on a particular area in Texas. Would a similar study reveal similar results in a different setting? Finally, another consideration for future research would be to involve other professionals. This study focused on educational professionals. All other variables remaining the same, would enabling factors toward degree achievement for other professionals be similar and would they similarly be grounded in self-efficacy theory?

In summary, this study sought to determine the enabling factors toward degree achievement by Hispanic female educational professionals from the Rio Grande Valley, Texas, and to determine if these factors were grounded in self-efficacy theory. Chapter 1 set the stage for the necessity of such a study as the one performed by this researcher. It discusses the educational shortfalls of Hispanics as well as the lack of qualitative research on the educational achievement of Hispanics. Chapter 2 reviewed literature regarding the educational progress of Hispanics to include a historical perspective, self-efficacy and its influential impact, educational achievement of Hispanic women, and the need for qualitative research on self-efficacy. Chapter 3 covered the methodological process by which this investigation underwent. The design of the research, recruitment of participants, data collection, and data analysis are discussed. Chapter 4 presented the findings of the study to include illuminated factors and overarching themes. Chapter 5,

the final chapter, surmised the findings of the study, provided implications and recommendation, and offered suggestions for future research.

While the findings of this study add to and support current literature on self-efficacy and educational achievement of Hispanic females, much more research can be done to cement self-efficacy as a foundational and holistic source of educational achievement and cultivating its development. Why is this important? It is important because "…people are partial architects of their own destinies," (Bandura, 1997, p. 1) and "people have always striven to control the events that affect their lives" (Bandura, 1997, p.1). Making this possible, Bandura commented, "…the overriding message of self-efficacy is enablement" (1997, p. 33).

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APPENDIX A

College of Education
Hardman Center for Children with Learning Differences

University of Oklahoma
Advanced Programs
555 E. Constitution
118 Building 4 SC
Norman, Oklahoma 73072

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a student at the University of Oklahoma currently working on a doctoral degree in organizational leadership. My research study seeks to determine influential factors that may have contributed to the successful attainment of a college degree by Hispanic females. I chose this area of research because Hispanics do not achieve a college degree at the same rates as their White and Black peers; they are significantly behind their peers in attaining a college degree.

My study is qualitative. I would like to conduct interviews of Hispanic female educators born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley who are now employed as teachers. In addition, I would also like to conduct interviews of Hispanic women from the Rio Grande Valley who began a university degree program but withdrew from college and have not earned a college degree. Data obtained from these audio-taped interviews will be analyzed in order to potentially illuminate factors influencing the achievement of a college degree by participants and for comparison purposes, barriers that may have prohibited the completion of a degree program.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to volunteer, it will be only with your full consent. If, at any time, you no longer wish to participate, you may withdraw from the study without penalty. This study will be conducted during the most convenient times for you.

All data that is collected will become property of the researcher and all necessary safeguards will be undertaken to protect your privacy and identity. By participating in this study, you will help clarify factors that may have the potential of increasing the number of Hispanics achieving a college degree.
If you are interested or have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at 956-968-5791 or rosalva.m.bumgardner-1@ou.edu
Thank you,

Rosie Bumgardner
"The University of Oklahoma is an equal opportunity employer."
IRB Approval #: 12701

Letter to District
OFFICIAL SCHOOL LETTERHEAD
University of Oklahoma
Advanced Programs
555 E. Constitution
118 Building 4 SC
Norman, Oklahoma 73072

Dear School Principal:

Hello, my name is Rosie Bumgardner. I am a doctoral student with the University of Oklahoma. As part of the requirements in achieving a doctoral degree, I am working on a research project pertaining to Hispanic female educators. The area of interest with Hispanic female educators is factors contributing to their successful attainment of a college degree.

Current literature on the successful attainment of a college degree by Hispanics reveals a somber picture. Unfortunately, Hispanics are not achieving college degrees at the same rate as their White and Black peers. This is true on a national level as well as at the state level in Texas. As you know, however, Hispanics do achieve college degrees. I am interested in determining which factors contributed to their successful attainment of a college degree.

It is my hope to identify factors contributing to the successful attainment of a college degree by Hispanic females specifically. The research will be based on grounded theory and will involve multiple case studies of female educators.

Participation in the study will be completely voluntary. This study has been approved by the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board. Furthermore, provisions for privacy and identity protection will be maintained. All data will be kept in the strictest of confidence and become property of the researcher.

By participating in this study, participants will have contributed to the body of knowledge investigating college attainment by minority groups. Being a Hispanic educator born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley, this research is especially endearing to me as my ultimate goal is to help raise the numbers of Hispanics who earn college degrees.

With your permission, I would like to forward an introductory letter similar to this letter to female educators in your school in the hopes of recruiting volunteers to participate in the study. The introductory letter will first be presented to you for your approval. It is my intention to work collaboratively with you in all respects of this research.

Please expect a follow up phone call from me, the principal investigator, in a few days. I would like to schedule a date, time, and location for us to meet to further discuss the

research study. If you would like to contact me prior to my phone call, please do not hesitate to do so.

Thank you for your time,

Rosie Bumgardner
Principal Investigator

Rio Grande Valley Contact Information:	Rosie Bumgardner 1204 E. 2nd St. Weslaco, Texas 78596 956-968-5791
Home e-mail address:	rosie.bumgardner@earthlink.net
University of Oklahoma e-mail address:	rosalva.m.bumgardner-1@ou.edu
International Address:	Rosie Bumgardner CMR 420, Box 1996 APO, AE 09063 011496224174640 (phone #)

"The University of Oklahoma is an equal opportunity institution."
IRB Approval #: 12701

Letter to University
OFFICIAL SCHOOL LETTERHEAD
University of Oklahoma
555 E. Constitution
118 Building 4 SC
Norman, Oklahoma 73072

To Whom It May Concern:

Hello, my name is Rosie Bumgardner. I am a doctoral student with the University of Oklahoma. As part of the requirements for achieving a doctoral degree, I am working on a research project pertaining to Hispanic female educators. The area of interest with Hispanic female educators is factors contributing to their successful attainment of a college degree.

Current literature on the successful attainment of a college degree by Hispanics reveals a somber picture. Unfortunately, Hispanics are not achieving college degrees at the same rate as their White and Black peers. This is true on a national level as well as the state level in Texas. As you know, however, Hispanics do achieve college degrees. I am interested in determining which factors contributed to their successful attainment of a college degree.

It is my hope to identify factors contributing to the successful attainment of a college degree by Hispanic females specifically. The research will be based on grounded theory and will involve multiple case studies of female educators. For comparison purposes, I will be interviewing Hispanic females who began a college degree program but withdrew from the university prior to degree completion.

Participation in the study will be completely voluntary. This study has been approved by the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board. Furthermore, provisions for privacy and identity protection will be maintained. All data will be kept in the strictest of confidence and become property of the researcher.

By participating in this study, participants will have contributed to the body of knowledge investigating college attainment by minority groups. Being a Hispanic educator born and raised in the Rio Grande Valley, this research is especially endearing to me as my ultimate goal is to help raise the numbers of Hispanics who earn college degrees.

Please expect a phone call from me, the principal investigator, in the next few days. I would like to schedule a date and time to meet. I would be more than happy to travel to your university office. If you would like to contact me prior to my phone call to you, please do not hesitate to do so.

Thank you for your time,

Rosie Bumgardner
Principal Investigator

Rio Grande Valley Contact Information: Rosie Bumgardner
1204 E. 2nd St.
Weslaco, Texas 78596
956-968-5791

Home e-mail address: rosie.bumgardner@earthlink.net

University of Oklahoma e-mail address: rosalva.m.bumgardner-1@ou.edu

International Address: Rosie Bumgardner
CMR 420, Box 1996
APO, AE 09063
011496224174640 (phone #)

"The University of Oklahoma is an equal opportunity institution."
IRB Approval #: 12701

APPENDIX B

Access to Interviewee #:_____

Checklist

1. Date, place, and time of meeting / interview
2. Contact phone numbers
3. Pertinent schedules / time constraints
4. Consent forms on hand
5. Resources for documentation available
6. Assess environment's conduciveness to interview and / or observation
7. Adherence to site, local, district, etc. regulations, policies, and procedures
8. Familiarity with cultural intricacies
9. Unassuming and non-threatening demeanor

APPENDIX C

Resources in the Field

Resource Checklist

_____Writing paper / tablet
_____Pens
_____Pencils
_____Highlighters
_____Fine tip markers
_____Erasers
_____Tape recorder
_____Cassettes
_____Batteries (extra)
_____Reflexive journal
_____Cell phone
_____Contact information (back up, participants, schools, etc.)
_____Money / credit cards
_____Laptop
_____Laptop battery / charger
_____Contact sheets for note writing
_____Questionnaires for interviews
_____Water bottles
_____Gift certificates

APPENDIX D

Calling for Assistance

1. Chris Gonzalez

   1015 N. Texas, Suite 20
   Weslaco, Texas 78596
   956-756-2853
   (w) 956- 969-6637

2. Angie Gonzalez
   1015 N. Texas, Suite 17
   Weslaco, Texas 78596
   956-351-9257

3. Cameron County Schools

   A. Port Isabel High School
      101 Port Road
      Port Isabel, TX 78578
      956-943-0030
      Principal: William Roach

   B. La Feria High School
      901 North Canal St.
      La Feria, TX 78559
      956-797-1353
      Principal: Dennis Amstutz

   C. Los Fresnos High School
      907 N. Arroyo
      Los Fresnos, TX 78566
      956-254-5300
      Principal: Ronnie Rodriguez

   D. San Benito High School
      450 S. Williams Road
      San Benito, TX 78586
      956-361-6500
      Principal: Dealia Weaver

4. Starr County Schools

E. Veteran's Middle School
2700 W. Eisenhower Rd.
Rio Grande City, TX 78582
956-488-0252
Principal: Joel Trigo, Jr.

F. Ringgold Middle School
1 S. Fort Ringgold
Rio Grande City, TX 78582
956-716-6849
Principal: Adolfo Pena

G. Grulle Middle School
18 Rodolfo St.
La Grulla, TX 78548
956-487-5558
Principal: Pablo Martinez

H. Ramiro Barrera Middle School
P.O. Box 187
Farm Road 649
Roma, TX 78584
956-486-2670
Principal: Carlos Gonzalez

I. Roma Middle School
2047 N. U.S. Highway 83
Roma, TX 78584
956-849-1434
Principal: Abraham Gonzalez

5. Willacy County Schools

J. Lyford Elementary School
13094 High School Circle
Lyford, TX 78569
956-347-3911
Principal: Dina Escamilla

K. L.C. Smith Elementary School
700 North First St.
Raymondville, TX 78580
956-689-8172
Principal: Gilbert Galvan

L. Pittman Elementary School

1 Bearkat Blvd.
Raymondville, TX 78580
956-689-2471
Principal: Antonio Guerra

M. Lasara Independent School District
11932 Jones St.
Lasara, TX 78561
956-642-3271
Principal: Sulema G. Osuna

6. Hidalgo County Schools

N. University of Texas at Pan American
S. J. Sethi, Phd.
Assistant Director
Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness
U.T. Pan American
1201 West University Drive
Edinburg, TX 78539
956-292-7312

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

Demographic Questions

A. Name?

B. Mailing address?

Essential Questions

A. Mastery Experiences

   a. Which events of your life do you consider to be some of the most significant?

   b. What obstacles or challenges toward achieving a college degree did you face, and how did you overcome them?

   c. Which events in your life brought the most satisfaction and /or feeling of accomplishment? Why?

   d. Do you have any photos, ribbons, awards you would like to share and / or discuss?

   e. Tell me about your K – 12 schooling experiences, both positive and negative.

B. Verbal Persuasion

   a. Who were some of your "cheerleaders?"

   b. Who was the most influential person in your life and why?

   c. Who were the people in your life who encouraged you to achieve a college degree? What would they say and do to encourage you?

d. Would you say your parents were supportive of your college aspirations? Why or why not? What would they say and do?

e. What messages about your culture and ethnicity would you receive from society? From your own culture? From teachers? From friends? From professors?

C. Vicarious Experiences

a. Who were some of your heroes (fictional or real) growing up and why?

b. Tell me about some of your role models. Who were they and why were they role models for you?

c. Who inspired you to get to where you are now and how did he/she do this?

d. When it came to academic achievement, how did you feel you compared to others? How did you feel in comparison to Whites and African Americans?

e. Tell me about some of the goals in your life. Was there anyone in your life whom you wished to be like?

D. Emotional Arousal

a. Tell me about one of the happiest days of your life. What made it one of the happiest days of your life.

b. Tell me about one of the saddest days of your life. What made it the saddest day of your life.

c. How did you overcome difficulties along the course of your life and not let these events discourage you?

d. Tell me about times when you felt overwhelmed or anxious. How did you manage to persevere through highly emotional times?
e. Were there specifically difficult times during your college attendance? How did you persevere with your studies during these times?

Probing Questions

A. When did you realize you wanted to go to college and become a teacher?
B. Did you apply for financial aid? Why or why not?
C. What were your expectations upon entering college?
D. Were your expectations about college life accurate? Please explain.
E. Describe your interactions with faculty? Would you say they were supportive or not supportive? Please explain.
F. What college social activities did you participate in while enrolled in college?
G. Did you feel living in the Rio Grande Valley has an impact on college degree achievement of Hispanic females? Why or why not?

Focus Group Questions

A. How does it feel to have achieved a college degree?
B. Studies have shown that at every level of the educational pipeline, Hispanics are the least educated population. What is your response to this?
C. Why do you believe Hispanics do not achieve college degrees at the same pace as their White and Black peers?

D. A 2007 report titled *Hispanic Women in the United States: 2007* written by Felisa Gonzalez states that at the highest level of education there will be found the least number of Hispanic females, and at the lowest levels of education, there resides the highest number of Hispanic females. What is your response to this?

E. In your opinion, how important is a college education?

F. Is a college degree doable by all who seek it?

G. If you had the opportunity to speak to a group of teenage Hispanic females about college, what would you say?

H. If you could decide on three ingredients for successfully completing a college degree, what would those three ingredients be?

Potential Request

A. What is a favorite quote, famous or not, of yours?

APPENDIX F

General Self – Efficacy Scale

by Ralph Schwarzer and Matthias Jerusalem.
A number of statements are presented below. There are no correct or incorrect answers. Your responses will be kept confidential.
Please circle your response.

1. A can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough.

   1= not at all true 2=hardly true 3=moderately true 4=exactly true

2. If someone opposes me, I can find the ways and means to get what I want.

   1= not at all true 2=hardly true 3=moderately true 4=exactly true

3. I am certain that I can accomplish my goals.

   1= not at all true 2=hardly true 3=moderately true 4=exactly true

4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events

   1= not at all true 2=hardly true 3=moderately true 4=exactly true

5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I can handle unforeseen situations.

   1= not at all true 2=hardly true 3=moderately true 4=exactly true

6. I can solve most problems if I invest the necessary effort.

   1= not at all true 2=hardly true 3=moderately true 4=exactly true

7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties because I can rely on my coping abilities.

   1= not at all true 2=hardly true 3=moderately true 4=exactly true

8. When I am confronted with a problem, I can find several solutions.

   1=not at all true 2=hardly true 3=moderately true 4=exactly true

9. If I am in trouble, I can think of a good solution.

   1= not at all true 2=hardly true 3=moderately true 4=exactly true

10. I can handle whatever comes my way.

    1= not at all true 2=hardly true 3=moderately true 4=exactly true

APPENDIX G

The UNIVERSITY of OKLAHOMA

Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects

Approval of Continuing Review – Expedited Review – AP0

Date: July 02, 2014 **IRB#:** 0764

Principal Investigator: Rosalva M Bumgardner **Approval Date:** 07/02/2014 **Expiration Date: 06/30/2015**

Expedited Category: 8

Study Title: Factors Influencing Successful Completion of a College Degree by Hispanic Female Educators

Based on the information submitted, your study is currently: Active, closed to enrollment. On behalf the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I have reviewed and approved your continuing review application. To view the documents approved for this submission, open this study from the *My Studies* option, go to *Submission History*, go to *Completed Submissions* tab and then click the *Details* icon.

As principal investigator of this research study, you are responsible to:

- Conduct the research study in a manner consistent with the requirements of the IRB and federal regulations 45 CFR 46.
- Obtain informed consent and research privacy authorization using the currently approved, stamped forms and retain all original, signed forms, if applicable.
- Request approval from the IRB prior to implementing any/all modifications.
- Promptly report to the IRB any harm experienced by a participant that is both unanticipated and related per IRB policy.
- Maintain accurate and complete study records for evaluation by the HRPP Quality Improvement Program and, if applicable, inspection by regulatory agencies and/or the study sponsor.
- Promptly submit continuing review documents to the IRB upon notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date indicated above.
- Submit a final closure report at the completion of the project.

You will receive notification approximately 60 days prior to the expiration date noted above. You are responsible for submitting continuing review documents in a timely fashion in order to maintain continued IRB approval.

If you have questions about this notification or using iRIS, contact the IRB @ 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu.

Cordially,

E. Laurette Taylor

E. Laurette Taylor, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board