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Summer 7-2016

Exploring Latinidad: Latina Voice and Cultural Awareness in a Catholic Female Single-Sex High School

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Latina Voice and Cultural Awareness in a Catholic Female Single-Sex High School

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by

Candy Navarro

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education

2016

Exploring Latinidad:

Latina Voice and Cultural Awareness in a Catholic Female Single-Sex High School
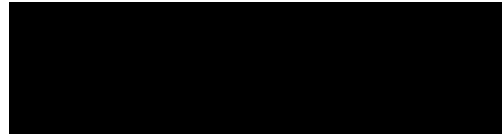
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This dissertation written by Candy Navarro, under the direction of the Dissertation Committee, is approved and accepted by all committee members, in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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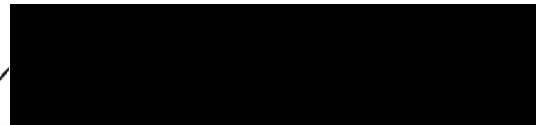
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my participants and my research site. Thank you for opening your lives and hearts. I feel honored to have listened and documented your stories.

Finally, much gratitude to my dissertation committee formed of three critical, strong-willed and intelligent women. Dr. Jill Bickett, my dissertation chair, thank you for always believing in me and validating the need for my ideas to become scholarly material. I appreciate you holding me accountable to maintain a critical perspective and never allowing me to succumb to fear and insecurity. To Dr. Mary McCollough, thank you for teaching me the importance of student voice, meticulously editing and contributing to my work and for reminding me that my story was valuable and that it too needed to be reflected in this work. Lastly, to Dr. Rebecca Mireles-Rios, thanks for accepting to guide me through this work after meeting me at an unrelated event. Your enthusiasm and example as a Latina in academia means more than you will ever know.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work, firstly, to my grandfather, Juan Navarro Moron, a bracero worker. Thank you for providing a positive example of the contribution that Latinos can make to this country. Secondly, to all Latinas in the American educational system, most especially those who have been or who feel voiceless or powerless in their Western-dominant educational environments. May this work inspire you to speak, demand, and strive toward social justice. This fight has not ended!

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ABSTRACT

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This study focused on the perceptions of 16 Latina students regarding their cultural school climate as well as the thoughts of two administrators and six teachers at an all-female Catholic high school. Students revealed that, while they felt very supported by the school's faculty and administration, they revealed that their culture was not fully embraced and/or represented in their educational curriculum and school's practices. Students also alluded to deliberately choosing and valuing to spend their free time with their family over their classmates. Further, they felt disconnected from their school's mission, which emphasized sisterhood among students. Furthermore, bicultural students provided a unique perspective often not fitting the Latina and/or dominant culture at the school.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Having graduated from an elite, private liberal arts college as a first-generation Latina, I have experienced the discomfort of being an "outsider," where the curriculum and social environment did not reflect my cultural background. My most prominent recollections include incidents that occurred within and outside of the classroom. As one of a few Latinas at my college, I consistently sought a "Latina/o" connection in my classes, and at my university. Unfortunately, when I would study my course options, I would immediately turn to the section called "Chicano Studies" only to find one or two classes by the same one professor each term. Sadly, many times, I had already taken one of the classes; however, I sought out those classes because there was little of my culture in my schooling experience that had related to me, and I was hungry to learn more about Latina history and culture. Outside of the school curriculum, I also experienced marginalization. For example, I remember very clearly on one occasion when my Mexican father was mistaken for a school gardener, simply because of the color of his skin.

As a result of these experiences, I am personally committed to further extending the research regarding Latina experiences in the American educational system. Because I majored in psychology and was interested in Chicano Studies, I often spent a great deal of time reading studies about education, Latina/os, identity development, and socioeconomic status. In all of my analyses, I consistently felt that I was reading *my* story, given that a majority of the research evaluated the "culture shock" or cultural disconnect that Latina/os from underprivileged backgrounds feel in their predominantly White colleges and universities. However, as I have developed professionally, I have learned that my experience is not exclusive to higher education

institutions. Over the years in my professional role as high school college counselor, I have observed that Latinas in predominantly White high schools experience a similar degree of marginalization and cultural disconnect regardless of their socioeconomic standing. To negotiate American culture and its educational system, I often felt that I needed to decide between being Latina or American. Most often, the American "side" won out in my daily interactions. In fact, I have only one previous school administrator who encouraged me to embrace my cultural identity, to follow academic and professional pursuits related to my culture, and who has characterized my cultural background as an asset to my "story."

Having worked at prestigious universities as well as respected Catholic high schools for the last eight years, I have witnessed the judgment and ostracizing conditions experienced by Latina students. Anecdotally, students have shared experiences with me of feeling responsible for being the voice of all Latina/os despite their socioeconomic, political, and regional differences. They have complained to me about their friends, who characterize themselves as "color-blind," but, who in the same breath, comment, "You sure don't act Mexican." Throughout the years, many of these students have sought me out as a "cultural" counselor with whom they can reveal their frustrations regarding their friendships with a majority White population and the resulting school dynamics. Thus, I have embraced Darder's (2002) call for a "duty to fight" to provide and encourage a resistance against the injustices that these Latinas face on a daily basis.

This research seeks to hear the voices of Latinas and to address their social and academic experiences in a single-sex Catholic high school in a large urban center of the Western United States. Focusing on this environment and the school population is essential given that more Latinas are attending private high schools with a majority White student body (Cooper, DeCuir-

Gunby, & Martin, 2012). Latina students are attending private schools with rapidly changing demographics as they become more able to access resources previously unavailable to them (Cooper et al., 2012). Unfortunately, Latinas are often marginalized and tokenized in these homogenous environments where they do not see themselves reflected in the school curriculum and feel that they are not taken into account with regard to school practices and/or policies (Aguilar, 2013; Darder, 2012; Marx 2008, 2012b; Sleeter, 2012; Yosso, 2009). It is my intention to provide my students an avenue to express their feelings and share their voice as well as provide research to help advocate for social justice and educational reform for Latinas in school communities.

Defining the Terms

For the identification purposes of this work, I have established the terminology that will be utilized to describe (a) the population that will be studied and (b) the majority group represented in the research setting, and (c) a discussion of the term "culture" as it relates to my research. The historical evolution of terms is evidence of the variety of nomenclature used to describe various ethnic groups. However, for the purposes of this study, I will use "Latina/o" to describe my research population. I will use "White" to describe the majority group in the research setting, and I will define "culture," as it is applied in the research questions and in the study. The following explains my rationale for these choices.

Latina/o or Hispanic?

Defining or creating a uniform terminology for the identification of Americans with a Latin American background is not stable or uniform (Tatum, 2014). Moreover, Tatum asserted that Latina/o labels are "largely dependent on several factors such as geographic location, legal

status, country of origin, and class" (p. 24). Further, According to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) (1997), which falls under the Executive Office of the President, the terms *Hispanic* and *Latina/o* both describe those whose "origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States" (p.1). This definition alludes to the notion that Latina/o is considered an ethnic background rather than a racial identification. Additionally, the term Hispanic refers to a connection to Spanish culture and tradition as well as a shared Spanish language (Mora, 2014). Further, "Hispanic" has been deemed to a carry a more "official, bureaucratic, and conservative [meaning]" (Tatum, 2014, p. 24). In contrast, Latina/o refers to descendants of Latin America who have a shared story of colonization (Mora, 2014). Latina/o is "less mainstream and reflects a more politically progressive view of the world" (Tatum, 2014, p. 24). Regardless of the terms being utilized, each remains controversial as many associate ideological and political implications are attached to both (Mora, 2014; Tatum, 2014).

Though the OMB (1997) first solely used the term Hispanic exclusively, the governmental agency acknowledges use of the Latina/o and Hispanic terms interchangeably in official governmental publications. However, it is important to note that there exists regional preferences in regards to term use (Mora, 2014; Tatum, 2014). For example, according to Mora, who authored a book about the creation of "Hispanic" as well as the evolution of the term "Latina/o," found that inhabitants of most urban areas including the West and East Coasts prefer "Latina/o," versus those living in more conservative states, including Texas and New Mexico who identify as "Hispanic."

Further, according to the OMB (1997), there exist five racial categories including: White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and Some Other Race. Hispanic and/or Latina/o were not included in these categories; thus Latinas/os are expected to racially identify as "White" (Krogstad & Cohn, 2014; OMB, 1997;). This can be considered a marginalizing practice as Latinas/os are not provided the avenue to self-identify and utilize their voice to have their identification acknowledged and/or appreciated.

According to the surveys conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center and the work of Mora (2014), this notion has created conflicts and confusion among Latina/o identities. Moreover, Gonzalez-Barrera and Lopez (2015) deduced, "Census findings suggest that standard U.S. racial categories might either be confusing or not provide relevant options for Hispanics to describe their racial identity" (p. 2). Further, they revealed that in 2010, the Census Bureau attempted to r-direct Latinas/os to not identify using the "some other race" option by adding a note on the questionnaire explicitly stating that "Hispanic origins are not races" (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2015, p. 1), though they later noted that this addition reduced Hispanic responses in this category by 5%. This can be symbolic of Latinas/os not feeling that they are able to see themselves reflected in government-imposed identification categories (Krogstad & Cohn, 2014). The Census Bureau is considering adding Hispanic to the identification categories for the 2020 Census (Gonzalez-Barrera & Lopez, 2015; Krogstad & Cohn, 2014). Whatever title Latinas/os and/or Hispanics choose to embrace, Mora (2014) has encouraged all working with Latinas/os, and Latinas/os themselves to remember that "Hispanic" was a government term rooted in deep

discrimination with a disregard of socioeconomic status and within group differences. For this

reason, I choose to use the term Latina to identify my research population.

White or Caucasian?

According to the Census Bureau (2010), the identifying category "White," "refers to a

person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North

Africa." It includes people who indicated their race(s) as "White" or reported entries such as

Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian. "White" is now currently

utilized for official governmental purposes, and has replaced the now outdated "Caucasian."

According to a writer for the *New York Times*, Shaila Dewan (2013):

> The use of Caucasian to mean White was popularized in the late 18th century by Johann
>
> Friedrich Blumenbach, a German anthropologist, who decreed that it encompassed
>
> Europeans and the inhabitants of a region reaching from the Obi River in Russia to the
>
> Ganges to the Caspian Sea, plus northern Africans. (p. 1)

"White" will be used to identify the majority population of the study, instead of Caucasian,

because the United States Census and the Office of Management and Budget utilize it.

Defining Culture

On a daily basis, students function and engage within various formal and informal

cultures. In its most basic form, *culture* and its values have been defined "as an inventory of

discrete, equally important (neutral) phenomena, or as a complex that includes knowledge,

belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capacities and the habits acquired by members of

society" (Darder, 2012, pp. 24–25). Further, a "culture" can be created in several

settings/situations including home, school, ethnic and/or racial groups as well as among religious

organizations and other environments. According to Darder (2012), the components of culture can "be classified into four commonly utilized categories: (1) cultural values or value orientation, (2) heritage and cultural artifacts, (3) language, and (4) cognitive styles" (p. 25).

These four components apply to the form in which culture is associated with a student's ethnic group affiliation. However, it is important to note that for each culture, there usually exists a dominant culture (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Darder, 2012). More specifically, among students of color, including Latinas/os who come from an ethnic group culture that is different from that of a the general American culture, many develop a bicultural identity that "speaks to the process wherein individuals learn and function in two distinct sociocultural environments: their primary culture, and that of the dominant mainstream culture of the society in which they live" (Darder, 2012, p. 45). In the case of this study, at the research site, Latinas comprised the minority culture, while the dominant population was White. Darder (2012) asserted that school cultures perpetuate dominant group values and/or interests through a hidden curriculum that further marginalizes oppressed groups.

In addition to their ethnic culture, Latinas/os participate in a school as well as a home culture. "School culture" refers to the same traditional definition of culture, but also encompasses a "set of tacit expectations and assumptions that direct the activities of school personnel and students (Hinde, 2004, p. 2). Further, according to Hinde, "School culture develops as staff members interact with each other, the students, and the and the community. It becomes the guide for behavior that is shared among members of the school at large" (p. 2). Given this definition of school culture, it is understandable that the notion of dominant culture also applies in the school setting. In essence, the culture affects all parties at the school and in

order to shift an ideology and/or practice, it may be vital to shift the school culture as a whole (Hinde, 2004).

Though research has shown that Latinas have been subordinated in their school settings, they can contribute to the schools via the values and/or customs that they bring to their school from their home culture. "Home culture" is defined as the values that students bring from their homes, which can serve as an asset in their schooling experiences and/or development. The information that students bring from their home traditions, their ethnic cultural values, among others, is referred to by Gonzalez, Moll, and (2005) as "funds of knowledge," which will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2.

In this qualitative research study, "culture" was not only applied to the cultural ethnic group membership of the Latina student in both her home and school culture, but was also part of the discourse centered on "cultural climate" when referring to the school climate and/or school culture. This research is informed by a specific study by Marx (2012) that uses the term "multicultural school climate." However, I have modified use of this term to simply "cultural climate" given the outdated nature of the word "multicultural" in present day educational settings. Altering the terminology of "multicultural school climate" was further validated as a result of an email conversation with Dr. Marx (2012), who developed the term and concept of "multicultural school climate" and later created an inventory to quantitatively measure this phenomenon. In a personal communication exchange via email between Marx and me (2015), she stated:

> I am a professor of multicultural education, so, while I understand the criticisms, I don't
> think it makes sense to throw out the term altogether. I tend to call myself a critical

multicultural educator and all the other multicultural educators I know do the same. At the same time, I wrote up this inventory several years ago when the term wasn't as controversial, so it would make sense that you would adjust [the] term if needed to reflect the approach and perspective you're taking. (S. Marx, personal communication, September 8, 2015)

As a result, I feel confident to alter the name to "cultural school climate" from its original "multicultural" identification.

Background

According to the extensive research of Marx (2008) regarding the Latina/o student experience in the American educational system, White children report more positive academic and personal school experiences than their Latina/o counterparts. Further, Marx (2008) suggested that present day biases and systemic inadequacies that characterize every day schooling for many Latinas/os makes it very difficult for these students to have a positive perception of their school climate. Further, Marx and Byrnes (2012) found that incorporating the cultural needs and strengths of diverse students into the school culture and curriculum "ensures supportive schooling is available to all diverse students in the school at all times, [and] facilitated by all teachers and administrators" (p. 4). Moreover, in order to understand Latina student perceptions about their own school environment, it is essential that students be questioned about the role their cultural background plays in their school experience (Marx, 2008, 2012; Sleeter, 2012; Yosso, 2005).

In addition, according to Darder (2012), educators are in a position to liberate their students of color. This notion directly correlates with the literature regarding school

connectedness, educator-student relationships, and culturally responsive teaching (Cooper et al., 2012; Marx, 2008, 2012). Research has shown that a person who feels connected to her ethnic group and whose feelings are accepted and respected as a member of that group will achieve greater academic and personal social success (Cooper et al., 2012; Marx, 2008, 2012). Addressing the needs and experiences of students from ethnic minority groups, and more specifically, Latinas, is especially critical given the rising number of Latina women attending institutions of higher education and taking active leadership roles (Vasquez & Comas-Diaz, 2007).

Providing students an optimal environment that encourages academic achievement and a healthy personal development should be the mission of the educational system (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Greig, 2003). It is important not to simply provide Latinas an opportunity to attend a "well-resourced" school (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). Rather, Latinas need be encouraged to engage in critical dialogue among not only under-represented communities, but also with the entire privileged population to raise their social and political consciousness (Charmaraman & Grossman, 2010; Darder, 2012; Luna, Evans, & David, 2013). A privileged population is defined as students from the majority group—in this case, White, who derive privilege from a higher socioeconomic status group (Marx, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Latinas/os have historically experienced silence in the American educational system dating back to the colonization of Latinos in both North and South America (Anzaldua, 2012). According to Darder (2012), student voice is "connected to the control of power and the legitimation of specific student discourses as acceptable truths or rejected fallacies, and

consequently determines who speaks and who is silenced" (p. 60). Unfortunately, Latina/o students have not been encouraged to use their voice to express their opinions and needs. As a result, students have been silenced, and thus do not engage in resistance and/or conversations in which they request to be recognized (Aguilar, 2013; Darder, 2012; Mitra, 2008a). In contrast, Mitra (2008a), who argued that schools are not doing enough to encourage student voice, believes "at the simplest level, student voice initiatives give young people the opportunity to share with administrators and faculty their opinions about school problems" (p. 23). In her literature, Mitra (2008a) "consider[s] the benefits of student voice initiatives and raises the question of why such initiatives are not more common" (p. 24). In this research, Latina voices are privileged, and form the basis of the recommendations at the end of this work.

As the Latina/o population has increased significantly in the last decade, the need to highlight and respond to the experiences of Latina/os is clear (Marx, 2012). In fact, according to Umana-Taylor, Diversi, and Fine (2002), Latina/os are the fastest growing minority group and will soon surpass America's White population. Additionally, Latina women have gained more power in the workforce and in educational arenas compared to their Latino male counterparts. For example, the number of Latina women obtaining college degrees has risen 430% especially in comparison to other ethnic groups (Vasquez & Comas-Diaz, 2007). These current trends, suggest that Latinas will continue to gain prominence in this country, and thus it is essential that their cultural values be understood and nurtured (Cooper, 2012).

Latinas who may have felt silenced require a space and a voice to speak about their ethnic identity and how it relates to their potential for leadership success. According to Mazzula (2011), challenges arise for Latinas when they do not have a positive view of their ethnic

identity. It is essential to discuss racial and ethnic issues, as the development of a healthy identity is especially imperative during adolescence (Umana-Taylor et al., 2002). Issues that have arisen in my work context have demonstrated just these kinds of identity issues for Latina high school students. As one of the few Latina professional staff members at my Catholic high school, I have found that Latina students sought my counsel to discuss cultural and climate issues. These encounters suggested to me that Latina students needed a place to safely talk and have their voice heard and valued. Additionally, there were no specific cultural support groups on my campus site other than a Multicultural Club. And, the Multicultural Club did not allow students to focus on the efforts of one ethnic group, because some school administrators believed this to be a divisive practice. While some students fought to have a Latina/o Student Union recognized at the school, the school had not yet agreed to this. This was especially troublesome given that in order to become confident leaders, research has shown that adolescent women require Latina role models who have successfully overcome the challenges of both being a woman in a leadership position, and being a woman ethnic minority in a leadership position (Vasquez & Comas-Diaz, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this research was to examine the perceptions of Latina students regarding their cultural school climate at their Catholic single-sex high school. Another purpose was to assess the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the school climate for Latina students. It was a goal of this study to provide Latinas an avenue and voice to express and describe their experiences. Conducting this type of research in an affluent setting is vital, as the experiences of Latina/os students in education has mainly focused on students in underprivileged communities and/or those who attend under-resourced schools (Kendall, 2006; Marx, 2008).

This approach allowed for understanding the unique context of the experiences of Latina students in a Catholic single-sex high school.

Research Questions

This research answered the following questions**:**

1. What are the perceptions of Latina students in a Catholic single-sex school regarding their cultural school climate?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the cultural school climate for Latina students?

Significance of the Study

This research not only sought to uncover the school climate through the perspective of Latina students, but it also endeavored to elucidate to the school leadership either their successful embrace of Latina students' culture or their potentially marginalizing practices that have impacted their students. In essence, by studying these issues and providing suggestions for the school leadership, the school should be able to create a comprehensive and inclusive plan of practice.

Additionally, this research was necessary, as many studies have mainly focused on the Latina/o population in underprivileged settings (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). However, in contrast, this research adds to the scant scholarship in high socioeconomic communities where Latinas are educated.

Further, this work has the potential for a more significant impact, as I am affiliated with a professional consortium of independent schools with similar demographics to which information can be disseminated widely. It is vital that high schools be aware of the issues that

Latinas face in regards to their perceptions of their cultural school climate. The findings of this work will be shared with the Catholic Archdiocese to provide more information to better serve Latina students. It is vital that all educator populations become aware of the needs of their Latina students. The experience of Latina adolescents cannot be compared or generalized with that of the majority student group (Aguilar, 2013; Vasquez & Comas-Diaz, 2007).

Theoretical Frameworks

This work set its foundation at the intersection of three theoretical frameworks, which included (a) Latina/o Critical Race Theory (Solorzano &Yosso, 2001), an extension of Critical Race Theory; (b) Yosso's (2001) Cultural Wealth Model; and (c) Catholic Social Teaching (Massaro, 2011). These theories were applied to investigate and highlight the cultural school climate in the educational system at a single-sex Catholic high school. Furthermore, these frameworks complemented each other and helped to identify Latina student perceptions regarding the possible perpetuation of inequalities in their cultural school climate (Marx, 2008). Ultimately, this research addressed and presented these social justice issues by rooting the work in a theoretical manner as other theorists including Marx (2008), Yosso (2001), and Massaro (2011) have done.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) acknowledges that racism is deeply ingrained in the American school system and seeks to eliminate oppression against communities of color (Dixson & Rosseau, 2006). CRT has developed in the educational field because its goals are applicable in understanding and addressing inequities presented in the contemporary American educational system (Elenes & Bernal, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). CRT encapsulates various

components and draws attention to embracing counter storytelling as well as rejecting

colorblindness (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

Latino Critical Race Theory

Many scholars, however, felt that the general Critical Race Theory could only be applied

to a Black and White binary (Solorzano &Yosso, 2012). Therefore, more specifically and

purposefully, Latino Critical Race Theory was developed to focus on the experiences, identity

development, and oppressive practices that Latina/os experience. Scholars who have applied this

theoretical framework to their research draw special attention to structural discrimination and/or

inequities (Davila & Bradley, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). Solorzano and

Yosso (2001) defined Latino Critical Race Theory as "a framework that can be used to theorize

and examine the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact on the

educational structures, processes and discourses that affect people of color generally and

Latinas/os specifically" (p. 479).

Cultural Wealth Model

In addition, use of the Cultural Wealth Model by Yosso (2001), revealed

intersectionalities between race, ethnic identity, class, and gender. Yosso's model rejects the

notion of a colorblind society, instead, demonstrating how not acknowledging race can be a

perpetuation of discrimination. Hurtado, Cervantez, and Eccleston (2010) have asserted that the

experiences Latinas/os bring to their schools can be explained through Yosso's (2005) Cultural

Wealth Model. This strengths-based framework presents the different areas in which students

can build strengths, categorizing each as a form of capital: aspirational capital, familial capital,

social capital, navigational capital, resistance capital, and linguistic capital.

Catholic Social Teaching

And lastly, to complement Yosso's (2001) work, and to address the specific context of the Catholic high school, this dissertation included elements associated with Catholic Social Teaching (CST). CST refers to a Catholic social tradition focused on forming just communities and living a virtuous life in modern society even amid the world's constant challenges (Massaro, 2011). It is defined by seven themes, including: Life and Dignity of the Human Person, Call to Family, Community and Participation, Rights and Responsibilities, Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers, Solidarity and Care for God's Creation (Massaro, 2011). This study specifically focused on three tenets: the Life and Dignity of the Human Person, the Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, and the tenet of Solidarity (Massaro, 2011).

In conclusion, given the critical perspectives of these frameworks, the goal of this study was to not only inform the school about potential marginalization in school practices, but also incite a call to action to research and to establish equitable ideologies within the school climate for Latina students. Each of these theories is explored further in Chapter 2.

Methodology

Inspired by Marx's work (2008) entitled "Not Blending In: Latino Students in a Predominantly White School," this qualitative research uncovered the perceptions of Latina students regarding their cultural school climate at a single-sex Catholic high school. In this study, I conducted interviews with 16 11th–12th-grade Latina-identified participants attending a single-sex Catholic high school. Six school faculty and administration members, who self-selected, were also interviewed. In addition, student and teacher participants were asked to

complete pre-interview reflection questions. Also, I maintained reflective and descriptive fieldnotes throughout the interviewing process. At the culmination of the study, perceptions of all three parties are revealed and recommendations are provided.

While this research was inspired by Marx (2008), and used some of her foundational precepts, it diverged from her initial design in significant ways. First, the literacy aspect of her original work, which included a fluency factor, was not addressed in this work. Furthermore, Marx (2008) surveyed White students, in addition to Latina students, to gain their perceptions about school climate and compared responses between groups. White students were excluded from analysis in this research. Finally, the study by Marx (2008) conducted in rural Utah and this work took place in an urban and more culturally diverse single-sex high school with students who were mostly were not economically disadvantaged.

Student, teacher, and administrator participants were asked to complete pre-interview reflective questions based on a Marx and Byrnes (2012) survey whose instrument was validated in the original work in 2008.

Limitations

This study contributed to research that highlights the experiences of Latina high school students attending a single-sex Catholic high school. However, this study does have limitations to its generalizability. First, this research was limited to one site, and consisted of only 23 interviews. Also, given that I am the Director of College Counseling and Advising, and of Latina descent, my students, the faculty, and administrators may have felt that they had to answer in a certain manner. I attempted to mask any bias, and remained a neutral interviewer in each case. However, given that students and faculty have anecdotally provided many informal stories

regarding their perceptions about school climate, I believe that knowing that I am an "insider" provided an authenticity to their responses. Finally, given the sensitivity associated with some of the questions regarding teacher and administrator perceptions of Latina students, faculty and administrators may not have felt confident to reveal or accept that they could be potentially sending negative and/or unintended messages to Latina students either academically and/or socially.

Definition of Terms

Culture: "embraces what people do, what people know, and the things that people make and use" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 30).

Latina/o: refers to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011).

Multicultural School Climate: "School climate is based on patterns of people's experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching, and learning practices, and organizational structures" (Marx & Byrnes, 2012, p. 2).

Privileged Population: defined as students from the majority group (Marx, 2006). In this study, Caucasian students derived from an upper middle class socioeconomic status formed the privileged population (Marx, 2006).

White:

refers to a person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicated their race(s) as "White" or

reported entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Arab, Moroccan, or Caucasian.

(Ennis et al., 2011, p. 2)

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Given that the purpose of this research was to reveal the perceptions of Latina students regarding their cultural school climate at a single-sex Catholic high school as well as the views that teachers and administrators have of their Latina students' experiences, this literature review provides a general understanding of the present educational conditions of Latina/o students in the American educational system. However, first, before a review of the literature, the theoretical frameworks to be engaged in this study are explored as a foundation for this research. Second, the research review describes the plight of the Latina/o student while providing a brief historical perspective regarding the historical advocacy efforts engaged to meet the needs of Latina/o students. Next, it reveals how different groups have fought against the marginalized and tokenized status of Latinas/os in homogenous environments, including school settings, where relevant curriculum is key to meeting Latina/o student's cultural needs. Further, this literature review presents a summary on school climate literature, including the cultural school climate, and more specifically the necessity to address this issue with marginalized populations. Finally, the importance of educator-student relationships specific to Latina/o student academic and personal success is also addressed.

Though this literature review presents information about the general population of Latina/o students to provide an overall understanding of their educational experiences, it places specific focus on Latinas because their experiences are not necessarily represented in general research. Specific information exploring the important work of Latina women attending single-

sex Catholic high schools and their school climate is also highlighted. In order to explore this important context and its attendant issues, the research questions are the following:

1. What are the perceptions of Latina students in a Catholic single-sex school regarding their cultural school climate?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the cultural school climate for Latina students?

Theoretical Frameworks

This work rests on the intersection of three theoretical frames: Latina/o Critical Race Theory, the Cultural Wealth Model, and Catholic Social Teaching. These lenses provided a basis to critically research and interpret the perceptions of Latina students regarding their cultural school climate at a female single-sex Catholic high school. Each of these theoretical frameworks is important to specific aspects of the study.

First, Latina/o Critical Race Theory, an extension of Critical Race Theory, was utilized to critically analyze the potential social injustices that might occur against Latinas at their school site. Because this research was specifically focused on the experiences of Latina students, Latina/o Critical Race Theory served as a mechanism to further critically explore the individual experiences of this population. Using Latina/o Critical Race Theory provided a platform to highlight the cultural assets, resistant actions, and perceptions of Latina students. The Cultural Wealth Model allowed critical evaluation of the strengths and cultural assets possessed by Latina students, which potentially help them connect with their school both academically and socially. Finally, given that the research was conducted at a Catholic high school whose curriculum and school mission was rooted in the Catholic faith and traditions, Catholic Social Teaching also

provided a foundation for this work. Each category and its intersection are described in the following discussion.

Critical Race Theory

In order to truly understand the evolution of Latina/o Critical Race Theory, it is essential to have a general understanding of Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT was developed by a group of scholars of color seeking to address and combat the structured social injustice and racial oppression in various United States systems—including education—which has been adopted as a normalized practice (Elenes & Bernal, 2010; Revilla, 2004; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). It also highlights the manner in which educational theory, policies, and practices further oppress marginalized communities including Latinas/os (Yosso, Villalpando, Delgado Bernal, & Solorzano, 2001). Further, Davila and Aviles de Bradley (2010) attested that "schools are social systems that mirror the larger society" (p. 39), thus using a critical approach to examine justice in schools is a fitting approach. Moreover, CRT has developed a reputation as a liberating discourse that encourages engaging conversations that address social and educational injustice, and proposes solutions to counteract such engrained discriminatory practices (Elenes & Bernal, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Elements within the CRT framework, which are especially applicable to Latinas/os in schools, are included in Table 1, below:

Table 1

Five Key Elements of Critical Race Theory (CRT) Applicable to Latina/o Students

Intercentricity of race and racism	This component addresses the notion that racism is present and permanent in all spectrums of society. It also further clarifies that racism intersects with other forms of oppression (Yosso, 2006; Yosso et al., 2001;).
Challenge to dominant ideology	By using CRT, individuals can challenge "the traditional claims of the educational system such as objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity" (Yosso et al., 2001, p. 91).
Commitment to social justice	The commitment to social justice refers to informing others, including those from marginalized groups, about discriminatory practices, and to encourage them to become advocates in the struggle to achieve social justice (Yosso et al., 2001).
Centrality of experiential knowledge	CRT understands and embraces the experiences of students of color, including Latinas/os as "legitimate, appropriate, and critical to understanding, analyzing, and teaching about racial subordination in the field of education" (Yosso et al., 2001, p. 91).
Utilization of interdisciplinary approaches	Under this category, individuals are encouraged to consider use of CRT in multiple disciplines to understand the historical and interdisciplinary perspectives involved in understanding racism. Further, by analyzing racism in society using a CRT and Latino Critical Theory lens, it is vital that advocates analyze the historical patterns of racism that have permeated the United States educational system (Yosso et al., 2001).

Yosso and others, including Villalpando, Delgado Bernal, and Solorzano (2001), use

Critical Race Theory in education "to develop a theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and

pedagogical strategy that accounts for the role of race and racism in education and works

towards the elimination of racism" (p. 90). However, instead of using educational strategies to

eliminate racism in the classroom, many educators fall into perpetuating "color-blindness" (Marx

& Byrnes, 2012). According to Marx and Larson (2012) colorblindness is defined as "the

avoidance of talking about race, racism and systematic inequity. It contributes to racial inequality

by preventing useful conversation about race and racism from taking place (p. 265).

Furthermore, taking such an approach propagates inequalities by highlighting the power of

White culture and encourages the disregard for ethnic variances (Marx & Byrnes, 2012). In essence, these elements assert that racism is a prominent and permanent part of American life and that colorblindness and neutrality are unacceptable. The experiences of people of color can be used to understand racial inequality as well as social justice violations. The various tenets of CRT seek to embrace a commitment to social justice by eliminating all forms of discrimination and empowering subordinate populations (Yosso, 2002).

CRT can help to identify educational inequities and uncover the colorblind approach, which further marginalizes people of color in education and encourages the power of storytelling (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Elenes & Bernal, 2010; Matsuda, 1995; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005). To promote the rejection of a colorblind society, CRT embodies and encourages the power of counterstories or voice (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Matsuda, 1995). Voice is seen as "the assertion and acknowledgement of the importance of the personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 35). Furthermore, by providing oppressed communities a platform to speak, they are able to "counteract the stories of the dominant group" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006, p. 35). This resistance to a colorblind attitude and the encouragement of voice to story tell has prompted scholars to create CRT subdivisions including Asian Critical Race Theory, Feminist Critical Race Theory, Tribal Critical Race Theory, and Latina/o Critical Race Theory, which embrace and address the distinct histories and forms of subordination of other underrepresented groups (Yosso, 2006). This research listened to the stories of the Latina women in a Catholic single-sex school, and with those voices attempted to counteract the stories of the dominant group.

Latina/o Critical Race Theory

Solorzano and Yosso (2001) have led the efforts in redefining CRT to specifically address the issues affecting Latinas/os in the American educational system by creating Latina/o Critical Race Theory. Researchers asserted, "Latina/o Critical Race Theory should not be seen as a challenge to CRT, but as an effort to build on its achievements and move in an independent direction to shed additional light on the subordination of Latinas/os (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010, p. 42). The creation of such a focus highlights the need to specifically address the cultural influences, language, immigration status, and traditions associated with Latina/o students and how they can affect their academic and personal growth (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005). Moreover, according to Davila and Aviles de Bradley (2010), "Latina/o Critical Race Theory provides a context for the social, historical and political reception and impact of Latinas/os in the U.S." (p. 40) as well as "a theoretical space to analyze experiences … rooted in resistance and oppression of Latinos/as" (p. 40). When seeking and revealing oppressive practices, using Latina/o Critical Race Theory can also aid in uncovering "race neutral" or "colorblind" practices, which are also a form of subordination experienced by many Latina/o students in American Schools (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Marx, 2008, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Yosso, 2005).

In addition to providing Latinas/os recognition as another population of color that rejects colorblind practices, CRT and Latina/o Critical Race Theory seek to provide people of color a voice to tell their stories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Further, researchers using these frameworks seek to provide Latinas/os a platform to reflect on and to voice their distinct experiences and the manner in which their academic and social/cultural development has been

established. In essence, by providing this voice, researchers seek to have the Latina/o "voice" become a practice with centralized attention that challenges the dominant group's established cultural norms, and so forth (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Such voices are considered testimonies and counter stories to challenge dominant group ideologies and/or perspectives (Elenes & Bernal, 2010).

However, despite its applicability to the vast population of Latina/o students in the precollegiate system, Latina/o Critical Race Theory has rarely been applied to K–12 education despite its relevance (Mora, 2014; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). As a result, this research increases the presence and impact of the scholarship surrounding this important theoretical framework and provides an avenue for high school Latinas/os to "voice" their experiences and resist the dominant ideology that has defined their lived experiences in this society (Elenes & Bernal, 2010; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Cultural Wealth Model

In addition to Critical Race Theory, this research focused on the impact of Yosso's (2002) Cultural Wealth Model in a Catholic secondary female single-sex high school. Historically, Latina/o experiences have not been recognized as valuable to acknowledge or include in the classroom and learning process (Hurtado et al., 2010). The Cultural Wealth Model is a framework that has addressed this issue.

The Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso, 2002) is a strength-based framework that highlights student access and experiences in college in six areas: aspirational capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, resistance capital, and linguistic capital. Each of these is discussed separately.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital refers to a student's ability to remain hopeful that he or she can overcome obstacles and barriers (Yosso, 2005). In her research, which allowed participants to discuss their personal stories and narratives, Zell (2014) found that despite their difficult life circumstances, those interviewed revealed that they were able to create aspirations that contributed to their aspirational capital and that various experiences in their lives fueled their ambitions. Further Zell suggested "aspiration windows reflect the individuals' environmental opportunities and help them envision possibilities for themselves and their future" (p. 9). For example, in her study, Zell found that many of the students interviewed who had a "connection with a health care professional, sometimes occurring at a young age" (p. 9) were able to more readily engage in aspirational behavior and ideation. If we know that an incident such as this at an early phase in life can prove to fuel student aspirations, it is vital that the development of aspirational capital be fueled for all students (Zell, 2014).

Familial Capital

Familial capital suggests that students of color carry a strong sense of community, given their strong ties with and high value for family (Yosso, 2005). Understanding the role of family in Latina/o culture is especially essential as students do not find personal successes as individual achievements, but instead as a family triumph (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010). For Latina/o students, their families provide a strong sense of support and collaboration. The Latina/o culture believes that the activities in which Latinas/os engage should benefit not only the individual, but the entire family unit as well (Rodriguez-Brown, 2010).

Social Capital

Social capital acknowledges that others beyond the family can be a resource to students including neighborhood friends and other diverse relationships (Yosso, 2005). In his literature review of research on social capital, Gonzalez (2013) stated:

> Research on social capital shows that once Latina/o youth understand what it takes to achieve academic success and social mobility, they will actively seek out institutional agents and form relationships with them that allow them to succeed. (p. 8)

Helping Latinas/os build this capital is especially essential given that Latina/os have not historically had access to various mentors and/or individuals to connect them to resources (Gonzalez, 2013; Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez, & Cooper, 2009; Rodriguez-Brown, 2010; Yosso, 2005). One Mexican American student interviewed by Gonzalez (2013) revealed "the White students don't understand because, you know, their parents got to go to college, you know, had an education and they all have jobs" (p. 416). This student was alluding to White students having an easier opportunity to be successful because they have role models that have realized these achievements.

Navigational Capital

Because Latinas/os come from multiple community and cultural groups, they also have navigational capital that allows them to negotiate and effectively connect and maneuver among all groups (Yosso, 2005). According to Liou et al. (2009), "It is important for educators to note that communities of color employ their navigational capital to counteract institutions that inequitably structure their access to high stakes information" (p. 545). Liou et al. (2009) found that the high achieving students whom they interviewed relied on their resources outside of

school, including their church communities, continued to be high achievers using the high stakes information they accessed, and avoided engaging in gangs or other negative influences. In addition, these students felt more confident to navigate their school community to find the resources to become successful in their school and church communities (Liou et al., 2009). Furthermore, Liou et al. found that students from ethnically underrepresented groups "use their community resources and knowledge to navigate places that often work to deny them important information related to the school going process" (p. 536). Using their community resources can set them up for successfully embracing their culture and rejecting that of the dominant group.

Resistance Capital

As part of the Cultural Wealth Model, some students can also create a resistance capital, defined as a student's knowledge and struggle against inequalities (Hurtado et al., 2010). Some students in the research of Liou et al. (2009) have used "marginalization as motivation concept" (p. 546). In other words, students are more motivated by defying stereotypes. The students interviewed revealed being frustrated by the fact that Puerto Ricans were consistently described in a negative manner especially regarding their academic and personal success (Liou et al., 2009). Contrary to previous research, which has claimed that Latina/o students refuse to do well in school, because they may be deemed as "acting White," Bettie (2002) found that Mexican-American students refused to "interpret mobility as assimilation to Whiteness" (p. 416). These findings show that Latina/o students do want to engage in resistance to counteract conventional opinions regarding their abilities and resist generalized stereotypes with which they are being judged. Further, these findings demonstrate that Latinas/os do not see success as a "White" privilege, but as an achievement that they may need to work more feverishly toward than other

groups to attain. Further, as a method of resistance and familial capital, students may also use their native or second language to fuel their cultural assets.

Linguistic Capital

Finally, Latina/o students also possess linguistic capital as they use their second languages to explain their situations and cultural experiences (Elenes & Bernal, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2010). Liou et al. (2009) asserted that it is precisely through student use of their home languages outside of school that these youth of color are able to feel confident about their access to school resources and their ability to academically achieve what would otherwise not have been possible if they had solely relied on institutional agents, such as guidance counselors.

In addition to the Cultural Wealth Model, which seeks to increase student qualities and a sense of cultural pride and influence, this work will draw on the tenets of Catholic Social Teaching to demonstrate other qualities that may influence school climate and student perceptions.

Catholic Social Teaching

The phenomenon of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) was created out of the history of Catholic tradition as a philanthropic tool that seeks to help the poor and vulnerable (Bradey-Levine & Carr, 2015; Massaro, 2011). CST is defined by seven themes, which include the following: Life and Dignity of the Human Person, Call to Family, Community and Participation, Rights and Responsibilities, Option for the Poor and Vulnerable, The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers, Solidarity and Care for God's Creation (Massaro, 2011). One of the main goals of CST is to continually demonstrate the positive and negative role that the actions and

messages from others can have on the development of individuals (Bradey-Levine & Carr, 2015; Massaro, 2011).

While all the tenets of CST permeate Catholic schools, three tenets of Catholic Social Teaching are described in more depth, because of their relationship to the research that was undertaken.

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

Catholic Social Teaching rests on the foundation of its first theme the "Life and Dignity of the Human Person," which urges people to understand and support that all life is sacred, that the lives of others should always be protected, and that agreements should be made in peaceful terms (Massaro, 2011). The "Life and Dignity of the Human Person" calls on all people to be communally engage in various social interactions including, for example, marriage, and causes of social justice, with an understanding and goal of not only forming a community, but also seeking to develop a community and its people in a positive and just manner (Massaro, 2011).

Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

In expanding the responsibility to others, Catholic Social Teaching requires that people participate in the fourth principle called the "Option for the Poor and Vulnerable" by placing the needs of those in disadvantaged situations before our own (Massaro, 2011). For this underrepresented group, the delivery of this facet of CST should be evaluated given that "the struggle for equity in education for Latinas/os has not ended" (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010, p. 40). Taking on the responsibility to address and meet the needs of those in vulnerable positions—including those who make up an ethnic minority in a dominant group can also contribute to another theme addressed in CST, "Solidarity."

Solidarity

Also integral to the mission of CST is "Solidarity," which seeks to encourage all people from distinct backgrounds to acknowledge each other's differences, but also understand that all people of the world are part of humanity and should care for and be loyal to all humans (Massaro, 2011). In a sense, it encourages human beings to acknowledge difference, but to stand in "solidarity" to seek equality. Further, by practicing solidarity, individuals seek to create bonds that are committed to delivering and ensuring "the common good" (Catholic Social Teaching, 2015; Massaro, 2011). All in all, individuals who engage in solidarity engage in not only a principle, but also a moral value that applies to individuals and social institutions including schools (Catholic Social Teaching, 2015). Given this, Catholic Social Teaching including solidarity can be applied to not only address Latina/o educational needs, but also to provide a platform to build Latina/o educational advocacy movements. Because Latinas and women have been a historically underrepresented group, Catholic Social Teaching is an appropriate framework for this study as it is rooted in social justice practices.

The intersection of these three frameworks allowed for a comprehensive review and presentation of the implications of Latina/o heritage and experiences on the perceptions of Latina students regarding their school climate. However, to comprehensively understand the applicability of these theoretical frameworks, it is vital to first understand the history and culture of the Latina/o population, and its relationship to education.

Education and the Growing Latina/o Population

According to the Pew Hispanic Center, in 2012, there were about 12,072,941 Hispanic students in the American educational system. Latinas/os consist of the fastest growing minority

population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2012) and confront various issues in their struggle to negotiate their "American" and "Latina/o" cultural worlds (Marx, 2008; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solorzano, 2009). In addition, because Latinas/os are the immigrant population youngest in age, their impact in America will continue to grow (Marx & Larson, 2012; Valverde, 2014). Between 1898 and 1960 less than 5% of Latina/o students were enrolled in higher education (San Miguel & Donato, 2010). In contrast, according to Krogstad (2015), in 2013 Hispanic college enrollment accounted for 2.2 million students. This accounted for a 201% increase since 1993 (Krogstad, 2015).

The research of MacDonald and Carrillo (2010), which has focused on investigating Latina/o education in the 20th century, has concluded that schools have been used to further strengthen the subordination of the Latina population. Given the increase in the number of Latinas/os in the United States and given that researchers forecast that this minority group will soon be the majority group, it is essential that educators seek to meet the cultural needs of these students (Marx & Larson, 2011; San Miguel & Donato, 2010; Valverde, 2014).

Student Voice

According to several scholars, encouraging student voice can be an empowering tool for all students, but specifically for Latinas/os (Aguilar, 2013; Darder, 2012; Mitra, 2009). Further, according to Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), having students utilize their voice means that they are able to engage in activities that can and do influence policies and practices. Mitra (2009), Darder (2012), and others truly support the encouragement of student voice for educational change. Additionally, Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), whose research focuses on motivation, engagement, and student voice attested that "student voice activities revolve around the development and application of individual students' skills, ideas, and connections to others" (p. 31).

Developing student voice can be very powerful as:

Student voice can describe instances in which young people collaborate with adults to

address the problems in their schools and to improve teaching and learning in their

classrooms. In addition, previous research has shown that "when students believe that

they are valued for their perspectives and respected, they begin to develop a sense of

ownership and attachment to the organization in which they are involved." (Mitra, 2009,

p. 820)

Also, Mitra (2008b) pointed out that most associated student bodies "exercise little power, focus

primarily on social activities, and do not represent a cross-section of the school" (p. 9) Schools

cannot rely on simply just saying that the school is diverse, they must make concerted efforts to

make those perceptions a reality.

Learning Subordination

For more than a century, Latinas/os have participated in an educational system designed

to promote the identities of American students who have been raised with Western ideals

(Spring, 2010; Yosso, 2006). Unfortunately, historically, Latina/o students have not benefitted

from the homogeneous format in which education is conducted in American schools, as they

have been culturally foreign to students from underprivileged groups (Marx & Larson, 2011;

Spring; 2010). Instead, Latinas/os have been part of oppressed environments that have been

"aimed at ensuring the political and cultural hegemony of the Anglo dominant group"

(MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010, p. 3). According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2014), 38% of

Latinas/os born in the United States revealed either having experienced or knowing someone

who has experienced ethnic or racial discrimination.

Latinas/os are oftentimes marginalized and underserved because of their cultural identity, and to ignore these important aspects of their formation jeopardizes their success in school and in life (Gandara, 2013; Valverde, 2014). To help Latina/os, cultural influences must be considered by educators in all realms of Latina/o student educational experiences (Garcia, 1997; MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010; Valverde, 2014). Scholars have asserted that students are not devoid of their cultural backgrounds simply because they are in an educational setting. It is part of who they bring to the classroom, and therefore, it is imperative that cultural heritage be considered in all educational practices (Darder, 2012; Garcia, 1997; MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010; Valverde, 2014). Despite such subordination, it is important to note that according to a National Survey of Latinas/os (2011) conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center, only 33% of those Latinas/os surveyed identified as "American," and the majority, 41% referred to their family's country of origin. These statistics were very similar among first- and second-generation populations indicating that their cultural traits may hold a prevalent role, thus acknowledging their cultural assets and meeting their needs is evermore imperative. Instead of empowering students, scholars, including Freire (2000), have acknowledged "the contradictory nature of education, wherein schools most often oppress and marginalize while they maintain the potential to emancipate and empower" (Yosso, 2006, p. 74).

Funds of Knowledge

One way to meet the instructional needs of Latina/o students and to combat Latina/o underachievement is to understand their funds of knowledge (Elenes & Bernal, 2010). *Funds of knowledge* refers to embracing and understanding the lived experiences of students. More specifically, Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) "refer to the historically accumulated and

culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual

functioning and well-being" (p. 133). Incorporating funds of knowledge into the learning process

can also help Latina/o students as they form their identity (Hurtado et al., 2010; Valverde, 2014).

Unfortunately, historically, Latina/o experiences have not been recognized as valuable to

integrate in the classroom and learning process (Hurtado et al., 2010). Hurtado et al. (2010)

asserted that the experiences that Latinas/os and other students of color bring to their schools can

help Latina/o students develop and become academically and personally successful.

According to Genzuk (1999), educators can use students' "funds of knowledge" to

improve their teaching while including student ethnic group and home culture components. Five

central activities suggested by Genzuk (1999) can help educators, integrate student funds of

knowledge into classroom experiences are listed here:

(1) training teachers in ethnographic methods of collecting information

(2) conducting ethnographic analysis of the transmission of knowledge and skills in the

home and community

(3) analyzing the contents and methods of typical school lessons

(4) conducting collaborative study by teacher/researchers of ethnographic inquiries and

classroom practices where teachers can use community information to experiment with

classroom instruction; and

(5) developing instructional units that use the content and methods of home knowledge to

inform the content and methods of school learning (p.11).

By inculcating these practices, teachers can get to know their students and their family at

a deeper level, which places them in the position of the learner (Gonzalez et al., 2005). By

becoming the "student," the teachers can learn to recognize cultural resources that students bring from their ethnic group and home culture (Gonzalez et al., 2005). In addition to recognizing such resources, teachers should respond by altering their practices to provide culturally responsive pedagogy that can use the students' cultural assets and home values/traditions (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Aligned with this theory, distinctive types of community-based schools have developed. These schools use student cultural resources to not only inform school curriculum, but also increase overall Latina/o student academic and personal success.

Latina/o Educational Advocacy

Despite the fact that American schools were created to provide equal opportunity to people from all cultural groups, Latina/o students have experienced and continue to experience marginalization in this system (Darder, 2012; Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; Marx, 2008; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). However, Latinas/os and Latina/o advocates have also shown "a strong history of resistance rooted in community and grass roots organizing" (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010, p. 40). There have been several efforts in the post–Civil War era to help meet the needs of these students through advocacy and simply attempting to meet Latina/o student needs (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010; San Miguel & Donato, 2010). Further, over the course of the years, various advocates have tried to meet the cultural needs of these students in the educational setting in various ways. Advocates have sought additional training to meet the needs of their Spanish-speaking students, and created culturally relatable curriculum (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010). For example, Valverde (2014) suggested that cultural implications should be factored into the school curriculum and that educators must embrace student cultural roots including accepting and integrating their native languages,

celebrating holidays, and engaging the community as well as student families into the whole school experience. Additionally, Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans have historically advocated for legislators to recruit and train more teachers of color (San Miguel & Donato, 2010) because cultural acknowledgment can serve as a motivation for advocacy and a tool to serve the underserved populations. Another remedy for the persistent discrimination and encouragement of assimilation is through legislative advocacy.

Latina/o Educational Legislative Advocacy

Seeking to meet the educational needs of Latina/o students has been a subject of interest for many legislative advocates (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010; MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010; San Miguel & Donato, 2010). In fact, there have been several efforts in the post–Civil War era to help meet the needs of these students through legal advocacy (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2010; San Miguel & Donato, 2010). For example, in 1909, under the pressure of various legislators who were aware that teachers needed additional training to work with their Latina/o students, legislation in New Mexico was passed that called for a school to be established whose main focus was to train teachers to work with Spanish-speaking students (San Miguel & Donato, 2010). Unfortunately, such early advocacy legislation also called for a separatist movement in which Latina/o students attended different schools created specifically for Mexican American youth (San Miguel & Donato, 2010). Further, during the 1960s and 1970s strides were made to create a more inclusive curriculum, but in the 1980s, these efforts diminished as culturally inclusive curriculum and bilingual education programs were contested and in many cases eliminated from American schools (San Miguel & Donato, 2010).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Yosso (2002) asserted that discrimination against Latinas/os in schools has permeated our educational system as "traditional curricular structures, processes, and discourses, reveal a hidden (or not so hidden) curriculum that marginalizes Chicano/a, Latino/a (and other students of color) while they cater to the White upper/middle class student" (p. 94.) Given Latina/o conditions as marginalized people, Sleeter (2012) and Yosso (2002) affirmed that in order for Latinas/os to be successful in private or public education, there must be culturally relevant pedagogy and practices. Culturally responsive pedagogy refers to "a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 382). Further, inculcating such an ideology in teaching can be very helpful in empowering students (Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 2012). In her work, Sleeter has focused on examining various studies and research on the manner in which culturally responsive pedagogy has been unsuccessful. Sleeter found that culturally responsive pedagogy had been relegated to the following perceptions:

    a. Persistent faulty and simplistic conceptions of what it is

    b. Too little research connecting its use with student achievement, and

    c. Elite and White fear of losing national and global hegemony. (p. 568)

Instead of examining culturally responsive pedagogy as a tool for professional development, deficit-centered approaches may explain how schools focus on remedying the gaps in educational outcomes between White students and underrepresented ethnic minorities, rather than scrutinizing the inequalities found in the educational system.

Unfortunately, most educators perceive Latina/o students using a deficit-thinking model instead of through their "strengths regarding language, education, intelligence, native culture,

home life and more" (Marx & Larson, 2011, p. 263). In contrast, Luna et al. (2015) showed that students who felt that their curriculum connected to their culture and identity had higher aspirations for the future and showed better academic achievement. Thus, when culturally relevant pedagogy is authentically operationalized, it can significantly benefit student outcomes.

Sleeter (2012) also stated that to provide Latina/o students with a culturally responsive curriculum, it is vital that the pedagogy not be reduced to simplifications, including cultural celebrations and trivialization. Simply focusing on cultural celebrations separates culture from academic learning, while trivialization of culture diminishes its importance to simply following cultural traditions rather than understanding the culture "as a paradigm for teaching and learning" (Sleeter, 2012, p. 569). By engaging in such superficial methods of cultural engagement, educators essentialize culture, which can be detrimental to student academic success (Sleeter, 2012). Furthermore, in his study, which evaluated the perceptions of White and Latina/o students regarding caring teacher behaviors, Garza (2009) found that students defined caring behaviors with the following dominant themes:

a. Providing scaffolding during a teaching episode

b. Reflecting a kind disposition through actions

c. Being available to the student

d. Showing a personal interest in the student's well being inside and outside the classroom. (p. 297)

Though these findings could be applicable to any ethnic group, Garza (2009) noted that "understanding [White and Latino] distinct perspectives may lead to culturally responsive caring and provide more positive experiences for all students" (p. 298). He also asserted that

understanding the experiences of Latina/o students is evermore vital as Latina/o students "experience more failure than success, and ultimately drop out of school" (Garza, 2009, p. 298). His study found that compared to their White counterparts, Latina/o high school students valued having their teacher be available to help them academically and creating close relationships as strong priorities in their educational journey (Garza, 2009). Furthermore, part of considering Latina/o experiences and the importance of having cultural relevance implies that the students' cultural and/or racial difference cannot be ignored; however, through the implementation and perpetuation of colorblind practices this often occurs (Marx & Byrnes, 2012; Marx & Pennington, 2010; Sleeter, 2012; Yosso, 2002).

Avoiding Color-Blindness

To address specific educational inequities, Yosso (2002) conducted a literature review in which she "analyze[d] and challenge[d] racism in curricular structures, processes and discourses" (p. 93) using Critical Race Theory as her framework. She also urged educators that when they are critically studying their curriculum and the messages that are being sent, they must look beyond "visible" materials including textbooks to also include nonverbal messages they can be sending. In addition, they must be aware of their biases and acknowledge as well as understand their students' ethnic background and its implications on their academic and social development. In essence, White educators should be taught that their status is a privilege and a social construction that influences their actions and/or their perceptions about their students' abilities.

By not acknowledging ethnic differences, educators negate the very essence and core foundation of a person's cultural background (Marx & Pennington, 2010). Further, "colorblindness insures that critical discussions of structural racism do not take place and as a

result, this helps maintain structural racial inequality" (Marx, 2008, p. 59). This assertion demonstrates that being colorblind can actually serve as a detriment to student acceptance and achievement. It is vital that teachers, especially White teachers, understand their inherent privilege because of their ethnic background and seek to meet the needs of their Latina/o students (Marx & Byrnes, 2012; Marx & Pennington, 2010; Valverde, 2014).

Rejecting Assimilation

When educators fail to acknowledge the cultural needs of Latina/o students, the latter's distinct capital and the wealth that they bring to the classroom is erased and they are required to assimilate, which can have a negative developmental impact on both student academic and personal outcomes. Assimilation refers to a "high level of host culture involvement" (Smokowski & Bacallo, 2011, p. 23) in relation to participation in culture and customs. In other words, the adoption of another culture often times leads to the rejection of a student's personal cultural background. Assimilation theory presumes that people who are more "Americanized" are happier, and thus physically and emotionally healthier (Smokowski & Bacallo, 2011). Students can become increasingly assimilated in our current educational structures given that it is focused on conveying traditional and Eurocentric curriculum, which further marginalizes students of color, including Latinas/os. This is directly linked with the fact that, historically, education systems have used schools to "Americanize" students (Yosso, 2002).

Instead of requesting that students assimilate to a Westernized culture, it is vital that students be encouraged to engage in an acculturative process. Acculturation refers to the "overall process of cultural involvement" (Smokowski & Bacallo, 2011, p. 23). It may be important to consider helping students acculturate instead of assimilate (Darder, 2012;

Smokowski & Bacallo, 2011). Assimilation will encourage students to reject their Latina/o culture and fully adopt that of the Western majority (Darder, 2012). Instead, acculturation will allow students to balance both cultures for cultural involvement. Finally, this is an essential factor in the academic and personal development of Latina/o students.

Biculturalism

Biculturalism refers to the "integration of or navigation between the culture-of-origin involvement and host cultural involvement" (Smokowski & Bacallo, 2011, p.12). Bicultural individuals demonstrate a high involvement in both cultures. Further, Smokowski and Bacallo found that bicultural students displayed strong peer and academic competence. According to extensive research by Darder (2012), a fully bicultural individual who is taught in a culturally relevant manner can be very academically and personally successful. In addition, according to the work of Smokowski and Bacallao fully bilingual and bicultural individuals have experienced decreased social isolation, and were more likely to acculturate, thus maintaining a strong connection with their native cultures, yet able to navigate successfully within other cultural groups in an effective manner.

All in all, to truly seek the academic and personal success of Latina/o students, it is vital that the experiences of diverse students be embraced and reflected in school curriculum and activities (Marx, 2008; Sleeter, 2010; Yosso, 2005). In order to achieve this, teachers should be aware of how their own biases are displayed in their teaching styles and the manner in which they assess their students. Further, educators must be aware of their own experiences with people of diverse backgrounds and how those interactions could affect the teaching/relationship with their students (Cooper, 2012; Marx, 2008, 2010; Sleeter, 2012). This is an ongoing process that

will require consistent reflection and personal growth, and educators should consider themselves unfinished as they grow in the profession and in life (Freire, 2000). Engaging in deep reflection will ensure that judgments against students and unfair labeling are avoided (Darder, 2012; Freire, 2000). In addition to possibly changing curriculum design and delivery, multiculturally sensitive practices require that all school staff members, including teachers, administrators, and counselors have high expectations for all students regardless of their cultural and/or economic background (Cooper, 2012; Darder, 2012; Hurtado et al., 2010; Marx, 2008; 2012; Sleeter, 2012; Valverde, 2014).

Latinas in Education

While the previous section addressed a brief history of educators advocating for delivery and establishment of culturally appropriate educational practices for all Latinas/os in American schools, gender considerations must also be considered given that this factor creates a distinct experience for individual students (Cooper, 2012; Luna et al., 2015). In fact, Bernal Delgado (2002) argued that Critical Theory cannot be addressed without looking at both gender and ethnic minority status, which influence one another. Further, regarding Latina women, it is impossible to analyze the discrimination that they experience given their ethnic background without consideration of gender, because it is difficult to separate one from the other.

Latinas needs must be addressed specifically given that in comparison with their White and Asian counterparts, Latinas' strides in academic success are progressing extremely slowly (Cooper, 2012; Elenes & Bernal, 2010; Gandara, 2013). Furthermore, though Latinas/os have made great strides in representation within higher education, they are still the ethnic minority least represented among those who actually earn a bachelor's degree. Further, according to

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Krogstad (2015), only 15% of Latinas/os, from ages 25 to 29, have obtained a bachelor's degree. The inequity in progress can be attributed to many factors, including that deficit theories have portrayed Latinas "as passive and victims of Latino patriarchal cultures" for many years (Elenes & Bernal, 2010, pp. 81–82). Being able to increase Latina academic achievement, including raising graduation rates, is essential because, according to the research of Gandara (2013), "Latinas are the linchpin of the next generation–and how a child fares in school is highly correlated with mother's education" (p. 5).

As a result of this educational gap between Latinas and their White and Asian counterparts, as indicated by Cooper (2012), and the fact that Latinas have felt disconnected to their school curriculum and community, Cooper sought to investigate the role that learning space dynamics play on Latina classroom engagement. In her study in which she conducted several interviews and observations, Cooper concluded that Latinas are most engaged in classroom environments in which they feel affirmed, safe, and productive. Additionally, according to Valverde (2014), educators who have become informed about Latina/o issues and cultural values have understood the need to change their curriculum and as a result have been most successful in truly connecting with their students and delivering culturally relevant, empowering, and appropriate educational practices.

The first step is for educators to understand the complex realities with which Latinas are confronted, including the manner in which perceptions may influence their own personal identity (Revilla, 2004). Revilla proposed a "muxerista" pedagogy, which explains the complex nature of Latina identity, including accepting multiple Latina identities and their lived experiences, challenging norms, becoming involved in political discourse, and engaging in values-based

discussions. Revilla (2004), who situated her work in Critical Race Theory, focused one of her research projects on the members of Raza Womyn. This organization consisted of Latina women, and sought to empower Latinas and encourage them to see their cultural background as an asset (Revilla, 2004). Raza Womyn "embrace feminism as defined by some liberal White women and womanism as defined by Black women. Using these, they distinctly alter both to create a Chicana/Latina feminist identity that more accurately represents their realities" (Revilla, 2004, p. 91).

In her work, Revilla (2004) studied the manner in which Latina women, including those from Raza Womyn, have redefined various terms for their own re-identification as women of color. Some terms have included adopting "Latina" as a form of identification as it was deemed "less political," and more inviting of "women than those of Mexican American origin" (Revilla, 2004, p. 91). This was especially true as the term *Chicana* has been more associated with the political movement (Revilla, 2004). Additionally, according to the OMB (1997), *Latina/o* and *Hispanic* are now used interchangeably, which can demonstrate the more accepted nature of the term "Latina/o." In addition, Revilla found that Raza Womyn also decided to drop the "e" in "women" as a rejection to the male-centered emphasis of Western culture. They refused to have "men" at the forefront of their identification term and instead replaced the "e" with a "y," which appears in Latina literature presently (Revilla, 2004). However, Latinas do not uniformly or universally reject their identification terms; instead they seek to reclaim them to embrace their distinct qualities and reject dominant impositions. In essence, Revilla used CRT to explain Latina/Chicana epistemology by demonstrating that Latinas are influenced by various cultural influences and life experience (Elenes & Bernal, 2010).

In addition to the Latina struggle with identity, the research of Gandara, (2013) commissioned by the Eva Longoria Foundation and supported by the Civil Rights Project at UCLA, provided schools with various recommendations on the manner in which they could address the specific needs of Latina students, and showed the often-negative perceptions that educators have of their Latina students. Their findings solidified the findings of other scholars, which showed that in the classroom, Latinas have to confront and experience a hegemonic educational system that has previously constructed the Latina identity and created ingrained perceptions and assumptions of their personal values and academic abilities (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). In her research, Gandara (2013) also found that Latina women have been seen as submissive participants who do not value an education. Further, historically, they have been perceived as mothers who do not necessarily seek careers or independence. At the end of her report, Gandara (2013) suggested that schools consider making changes to meet the needs of Latina students, including creating a sense of belonging. She suggests:

> Schools need […] to create connections for […] structured opportunities for Latinas to interact with their teachers and counselors and with peers through both curricular and extracurricular activities […] and by consciously creating roles [...] that provide them with visible status in the school. (p. 62)

While Gandara (2013) urged schools to meet the needs of their Latina students while placing importance on creating a sense of belonging, the Catholic school system, which was created with a foundation to meet the needs of those underserved, has always had particular interest in creating community and serving Latina/o students.

Catholic Schools

Deeply engrained in the history of Catholic schools is a philosophy "dedicated to teaching the poor and ethnic immigrant groups" (Litton, Martin, Higareda & Mendoza, 2010, p. 351). As such, it is no surprise that the first Catholic school created in the United States in 1810 was opened with the intent to care for the poor, laying a foundation for Catholic schools to come. Additionally, Catholic schools seek to develop a sense of community as an asset to society by "graduating students who become civically engaged, socially conscious, and economically productive members of their communities" (Huchting, Martin, Chavez, Holyk-Casey & Ruiz, 2014, p. 1). Furthermore, in an interview with a school counselor at a Catholic school, Fuller and Johnson (2014) found that Catholic schools attempted to create a just community in which all students were served in a comprehensive manner by fueling them academically and spiritually. They claimed that schools with a Catholic identity articulated social justice "both in terms of the students served as well as the outcomes the school seeks to foster" (p. 99).

Given that Catholic schools have an engrained commitment to build strong educator relationships, encourage service, and provide a personalized education, these schools also tend to develop a positive school climate (Fan, Williams, & Corkin, 2011). In fact, a study conducted by Loyola Marymount University Center for Catholic Education, in which many Latina/o students were interviewed regarding their Catholic school experience, concluded that one of the benefits of attending a Catholic school "included the benefits Catholic schools confer through a safe and supportive school climate" (Hutching et al., 2014, p.3). A study conducted by Fan et al. (2011), in which students were asked their perceptions about their school climate, revealed that private and Catholic school students reported a school climate that was fair, orderly, and pleasant. In

contrast, students who attended public schools felt the opposite of their private and Catholic school student counterparts (Fan et al., 2011).

"Catholic schools are deeply rooted in a philosophical focus on striving for institutional change," (p. 29), meaning that they hope to evoke change in how our society meets the needs of those who are underserved. Bradley-Levine and Carr (2015) urged Catholic schools not to simply rely on the notion that they represent the church as an indication of their pursuit for social justice. Rather, they assert, "just institutions can only exist when individuals with ethical or moral motivations are acting within them" (Bradley-Levine and Carr, 2015, p. 29). Further, these researchers encouraged Catholic students to "act alongside the oppressed in an effort to end repressive situations and structures" (Bradley-Levine and Carr, 2015, p. 30). Additionally, Hutching et al. (2014) found that Catholic schools looked to embrace differences and teach students to value other's points of view.

In their study, which evaluated the perceptions of students involved in Catholic afterschool programs, Bradley-Levine and Carr (2015) found that participants and their parents agreed that the relationships created with educators were most valuable. The positive gains from such relationships, which focus primarily on collaboration, related mostly to principles of care, solidarity, and community. However, despite the positive attributes of Catholic schools found by some researchers, Aguilar (2013) noted in her research on Catholic female single-sex high schools that Latinas in these contexts may not feel as warmly embraced. She reported that Catholic single-sex school environments may not be meeting the cultural interests or academic needs of Latinas, specifically in relationship to admission to Advanced Placement and Honors classes in Catholic high schools.

Latinas/os in Catholic Education

Contrary to assumptions that Latinas/os attend predominantly public schools, San Miguel and Donato (2010) have claimed that many Latinas/os attend Catholic schools or other private schools.

According to the U.S. Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools Annual Statistical Report (2015), Latina/o students comprise 16.3% of national Catholic school enrollment, with the West Coast having the highest percentages represented. In essence, this vast Latina/o representation has forced Catholic schools to identify and respond to the unique Latina/o needs (Litton et al., 2010; McDonald & Schultz, 2015; University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education, 2009). This may be part of the reason that Latina/o students have graduated at much higher rates from Catholic high schools than Latinas/os enrolled in the public school (Litton et al., 2010). However, McDonald and Schultz (2015) and University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education (2009) recommended that Catholic schools find ways to be even more culturally relevant as Catholic schools pride themselves on being institutions that produce great success for Latina/o students.

Some scholars have asserted that the number of students attending these schools and their high school graduation rates relate to the role that Catholicism plays in Latina/o communities (McDonald & Schultz, 2014; University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education, 2009). At the forefront of Catholic education is the desire to form a community (Litton et al., 2010; McDonald & Schultz, 2014; San Miguel & Donato, 2010; University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education, 2009). This value is directly connected to the Latina/o cultural ideal of *personalismo.* Personalismo refers to building strong interpersonal relationships created

with a strong foundation of trust and care (Anthrop-Gonzalez & De Jesus, 2006). Further, Cooper's (2012) research, which evaluated the perceptions of 10 Latina/o students in relationship to their climate perceptions regarding relatedness and autonomy, found that Latina/o students valued their school's community and "family-like" experiences as they mimicked the strong familial bond found in their upbringing. Through parent and students interviews, Huchting Martin, Chavez, Holyk-Casey, and Ruiz (2014) also found that "students and parents praised Catholic schools' emphasis on establishing caring, supportive, and personal relationships with school personnel and family and friends" (p. 29).

Given the original mission of Catholic schools, they have the power to respond to the needs of Latina/o students, the flexibility to involve more of their cultural pedagogies, and the fundraising strategies to inculcate such changes. However, while there is a call for more research on the efficacy of Catholic schools (University of Notre Dame's Alliance for Catholic Education, 2009), there remains little recent research on the Catholic female single-sex school. Yet, the focus on community and personal commitment to student success found in the Catholic schools is an important component of a single-sex education.

Single-Sex Education

Female single-sex schools were created to provide female students an environment in which they could become more empowered as women and where gender stereotypes would not be further fostered (Sax, Riggers, & Eagen, 2013; Tsolidis & Dobson, 2006). However, not all scholars agree on the efficacy of single-sex education.

Proponents of single-sex education and, in this case, all-female high schools, argue that females studying in all-girl schools, demonstrate improved academic achievement (Sax et al.,

Tsolidis & Dobson, 2006). However, many studies have also come to a different conclusion; for example, in their analysis of single-sex versus coeducational school settings, which consisted of a comprehensive analysis of 2,221 number of individual quantitative research studies, researchers for the United States Department of Education (2005) found that, in general, same-sex schooling neither helped students to be more scholastically successful, nor harmed students. They also found that while females may not demonstrate qualitative leaps in their achievement at single-sex school, qualitatively they alluded to females becoming more involved in leadership positions, being more reflective in their decisions, and feeling more confident. However, the purpose of this research was not to prove the effectiveness of single-sex schools, but to address the environment in which students learn. An added environmental factor for this study was the Catholic context of the research site.

Catholic Female Single-Sex Education

According to the National Catholic Educational Association's Annual Statistical Report (2014), 31.5% of Catholic schools in the United States are single-sex. This is not surprising given that before Vatican II, the Sacred Congregation of the Affairs of Religious called for single-sex education exclusively, and though the numbers of single-sex schools has decreased significantly, there is still a strong presence of them in the United States (McDonald & Schultz, 2015). Similar to the results of the general research on single-sex high schools, Catholic single-sex schools have also been shown to have influenced positive outcomes for their students especially with regards to academics (Sax et al., 2013). In their research, Sax et al. (2013) found that in comparison to students in private co-educational schools, single-sex Catholic school students were more academically engaged. When investigating academic engagement Sax et al.

(2013) investigated "self reported time spent on academic tasks, interactions with teachers, participation in student groups, and interactions with others" (p. 3). By analyzing these factors, Sax et al. (2013) found that women reported spending more time on academic work and reported more meaningful relationships with teachers and others. In other work, Sax, Arms, Woodruff, Riggers, and Eagen (2009) found that "all-girls Catholic schools produce graduates who are more academically engaged and who value a college education more for its intrinsic or academic purposes, and less for its extrinsic or economic function, than do graduates of coeducational Catholic schools" (p. 56). Though the researchers alluded to one of the limitations being that all the student participants were college eligible, which could also represent a selection bias, this circumstance is especially applicable to this dissertation as the student participants in this research attended a college preparatory school with a 100% four-year college admission rate. As stated in previous research, the interaction with others, including friends and educators, is vital for the success of females at single-sex high schools. Thus, an analysis of their "sisterhood" is appropriate to uncover other benefits to such interactions, which may not be specifically academically tied, especially for Latina students.

Latina Sisterhood

In order to combat the machismo deeply engrained in Latina/o culture as well as in society in general, Burciaga and Tavares (2006) have revealed a need to develop a sisterhood among Latina students and with other women from diverse groups. Lorde (2007), writer of *Sister Outsider,* encourages women to engage in conversation and partnership especially with those from different cultural backgrounds. In her book, she calls on women, especially those of color, to confront differences and not misname or distort them. Further, building a sisterhood can

benefit the educational community through social justice education and improve relations among students and educators (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Darder, 2012; Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011). They assert that to truly produce a sisterhood, women must know more about each other on a personal basis aside from a strictly academic relationship.

Though Burciaga and Tavares (2006) did not study a same-sex environment, in their research they found that by creating a sisterhood with their Latina counterparts, female students were able to reconcile their different histories, enhance their respect for one another, and appreciate their diverse backgrounds with the goal of becoming allies to confront social justice issues. Though this sisterhood pedagogy developed as a result of their experiences in higher education, their findings may be relevant to high school settings. The goal of such sisterhood ultimately is to unite despite differences to foster personal identity and bond as sisters (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Lorde, 2007). Finally, establishing such a collaborative approach allows all women, especially women of color, to reject institutional patterns that promote individualistic learning, engrain patriarchal values, and encourage insulated research practices (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006). In essence, Latina peers can help serve as cultural mentors to one another as the acculturative process is lived (Smokowski & Bacallao, 2011).

The concept of sisterhood is consistently marketed in all-female schools and is a factor that resonates in the mission of a single-sex education. However, this perception of a positive sisterhood may not be a reality for all Latina students in single-sex high schools. In her dissertation on a Catholic female single-sex high school, Aguilar (2013) studied the phenomena of "sisterhood" and noted that this phenomenon was consistently reiterated at the Catholic school to demonstrate a sense of inclusion. Unfortunately, Aguilar (2013) found that while "Latinas

may have experienced a gendered solidarity, the other aspects of their identity that made them different were not recognized or celebrated" (p. 204). This finding can be especially alarming given that the recommendations of Burciaga and Tavares (2006) demonstrate the need for a sisterhood among Latinas. Further research on this subject is especially critical as such differences in perceptions among students regarding sisterhood can also show vast differences.

School Climate

To understand whether the school culture and the current educational system and schools are helping Latina/o students feel encouraged and embraced, it is necessary to address Latina/o student perceptions regarding their school climate (Marx, 2008, 2012). According to Marx (2012), researchers have not yet adopted a universal definition of school climate, but many scholars define school climate loosely as the "*atmosphere*, *feelings*, *tone*, *setting*, or *milieu* of the school" (p. 18l). Further, Marx found that some researchers more broadly utilized the definition of school climate established by Cohen, McGabe, Micgelli, and Pickeral (2009), as "the quality and character of school life" (p. 182). They further explained that the climate is created based on people's school experiences regarding their school life, which reflects the goals, values, and interpersonal relationships between students and the school staff as well as the school's physical environment (Cohen et al., 2009).

However, school climate research has mainly focused on violence and bullying prevention (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Sustained positive school climate is associated with a host of other positive outcomes, including positive child and youth development, effective risk prevention and health promotion efforts, student learning and academic achievement, increased student graduation rates, and teacher retention (Cohen et al.,

2009). The U.S. Department of Education has developed and funded the Safe and Supportive Schools project, which attempts to enhance positive school climate. This project supports developing a statewide school climate assessment system and evaluating the school climate improvement process over several years to support understanding about "what works" (Thapa et al., 2013). This movement by a governmental agency demonstrates the national priority to ensure a positive school climate in the schools. However, the narrow focus on bullying and violence prevention may demonstrate the limited scope of research designated to address the cultural needs of students of color in the school system.

Personal goals, values, and perceptions of relationships vary based on people's personal circumstances. Fan et al. (2011) has strongly encouraged researchers not to create generalizations about overall school climate perceptions. Instead, Fan et al. (2011) recommended that a variety of students within a school be interviewed, as other "research has suggested that variations in students' perceived school climate exist not only among schools but also among individuals within a school" (p. 633). In essence, school staff may perceive that they are readily and respectfully meeting the needs of their students and embracing their diverse cultures; however, students may not have the same perception (Marx, 2008; Thapa et al., 2013; Yosso, 2002).

To address this issue, the researchers evaluated individual and school-level factors that may influence perceptions regarding school climate (Fan et al., 2011). When evaluating different individual perceptions, they found that Latina/o students had less favorable perceptions regarding school order, safety. and discipline than students from other ethnic groups. This finding as well as others associated with various cultural groups allowed Fan et al. (2011) to confidently contribute to previous findings demonstrating that "student gender and race are associated with

student perceptions of school climate" (p. 633). While most studies concerning school climate have focused on the general experience of students within their school environments, Marx and Byrnes (2012) are some of the first scholars to expand the definition of school climate to include a multicultural perspective. In her study, Marx (2008) sought to discover the comparative perceptions of Latina/o students and White students about their school climate. She was particularly interested in addressing the differences among the perceptions of Latina/o and White students regarding the role that their culture, language, and ethnicity played on their overall school experiences. She found that White students had more positive perceptions of their school climate experiences, and that teachers and administrators surveyed had more positive views about their White students' ability.

Unfortunately, there may not have been many studies considering this same subject matter or using Marx's multicultural climate measure. The main focus of Marx and Byrnes's study (2012) consisted of "considering the role of culture on [student] lives and the schooling experience" (p. 3). By expanding this definition to include the role of the multicultural education considerations, they constructed the following definition of school climate:

The quality and character of school life for diverse schoolchildren, including interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning, and organizational cohesion that ensure equity, happiness and success in schooling. (p. 5)

Due to their limited ability to reference other multicultural school climate instruments, they chose to reference the concepts of multicultural education. Furthermore, through their research, they asserted that the ideal multicultural school climate is "a whole-school investment in the successes of multicultural students led by the school leaders" (p. 4). All in all, as found in the

research by Schneider and Duran (2010), because ethnicity has been found to be an important factor influencing perceptions of positive school climate, it is essential that educators understand and compare the school climate perceptions of students from various ethnicities. Additionally, educators must engage in active reflection regarding their relationships with their Latina/o students and the effects that such perceptions have on Latina/o student scholastic achievement and their personal development.

Educator-Student Relationships

School climate is directly correlated to educator-student relationships as "the process of learning is fundamentally "relational" and "research has shown that race itself is a significant factor in perceptions regarding school climate" including establishing relationships" (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 7). Furthermore, as cited in the research of Thapa et al. (2013), "Safe, caring, participatory, and responsive school climates tend to foster a greater attachment to school and provide the optimal foundation for social, emotional, and academic learning for middle school and high school students" (p.7). This goal can be achieved through the development and establishment of solidified and caring educator and student relationships.

However, teachers and other school personnel can sometimes unknowingly be advocating for assimilation or a homogeneous environment especially given the racial mismatch with minority student and educator relationships. Thus, teachers must become aware of their own biases given that their interactions with students can directly affect student's behavioral and emotional engagement in the classroom (Thapa et al., 2013, p. 7). Building respectful and culturally sensitive relationships is imperative to help students in their own personal understanding (Antrop-Gonzalez & De Jesus, 2006; Gandara; 2013; Kendall, 2006; Marx &

Byrnes, 2012). Teachers must create strong and caring relationships not only with all of their students, but especially their students of color. According to the research of Anthrop-Gonzalez and Carr (2006), the educational success of underrepresented students can be significantly enhanced if the student perceives that he or she is "engaged in a caring relationship with an adult at school" (p. 411). This notion urges teachers and schools in general to engage in meaningful relationships and understand the distinct needs of their Latina/o students.

In order to work toward social justice and educational reform in our school system, educators must be invested in constructing and maintaining strong connections with students, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds (Antrop-Gonzalez & De Jesus, 2006; Gandara; 2013; Kendall, 2006; Marx, 2008; Marx & Byrnes, 2012). Being committed to not only challenging social justice issues, including "colorblindness and Whiteness," requires great commitment not only to a person, but also to an organization. By acknowledging students' backgrounds and validating as well as incorporating their experiences into class discussions and educator-student relationships, teachers can help students build their social capital, and Latina/o students can identify "peer and other social contacts [who] can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (Yosso, 2002, p. 79).

Becoming allies with their students can further their commitment to social justice, which is essential in systems with ingrained discrimination (Kendall, 2006). Kendall advocated for "building a relationship of love and trust" (p. 140). According to Kendall, being an effective ally will also inevitably help people develop into change agents, as they will not only be concerned with altering and evaluating their own practices, but also those of the organization as well. This assertion is in line with what Yosso (2001) has referred to with regard to students building social

capital, as once students have used their social contacts to seek an educational opportunity, and fight an inequity, they can usually use such experiences to aid their own social networks. Furthermore, a true ally is self-aware and does not feel guilt or shame about his or her position of power. Instead, an ally engages in conversations about his or her White privilege (Kendall, 2006). If this does not occur, a person cannot truly be an ally or change agent; thus he/she will likely fall into further prejudices and unjust practices (Kendall, 2006). Becoming an ally of Latina/o students can be especially critical given that, as Schneider and Duran (2010) found, for Latina/o students, personal relationships were more important than modeling positive behaviors.

According to Marx (2008), given the homogeneity that exists among teachers, it is possible for students, and in particular, students of color, to spend their educational journey not having one single teacher of color. Additionally, Marx and Pennington (2010) found that the White teachers with whom students are working oftentimes have not engaged in discussions regarding racial issues in their teacher education programs much less in their daily classroom instruction. In fact, to overlook these issues may help White teachers reinforce their negative or deficit views of their students of color (Marx & Byrnes, 2012; Schneider & Duran, 2010). In her study Marx (2008), interviewed White teachers regarding their interactions with their Latina/o students. Her questioning focused on uncovering the ways in which teachers felt that they could relate with their Latina/o students and the areas in which they could not relate to their Latina/o students. Participants were requested to reveal if the effects of their Whiteness impacted their ability to relate to this demographic of students. Marx (2008) found that teachers felt very comfortable relating to their students as "human beings," yet their revelations about how they

could *not* relate were either directly or indirectly associated to their cultural background (Marx, 2008).

In sum, Marx (2008) found that the White teachers had deficit views of their Latina/o students. Further, her research showed that teacher perceptions regarding students' culture and abilities were based on stereotypical interpretations. Finally, Marx (2008) found that the teachers interviewed felt that being colorblind in their practice was commonplace, and they felt that they did not need to acknowledge their students' racial background to understand them. However, their perceptions regarding these students and their actions when interacting with them proved otherwise. The results of the study conducted by Marx (2008) clearly demonstrate Kendall's (2006) point that being an ally does not simply consist of working with underprivileged populations, but requires making a legitimate commitment to identifying and fighting against injustice. It is vital that educators question and attempt to dismantle practices that perpetuate White privilege and power dynamics (Kendall, 2006; Marx, 2008; Yosso, 2005).

Conclusion

In this literature review, I began by framing this research using the intersection of three theoretical frameworks: Latina/o Critical Race Theory, the Cultural Wealth Model, and Catholic Social Teaching. I started by introducing the growing Latina/o population in the United States and in the American educational system. After establishing the significant and growing presence of Latinos in schools, I addressed the history and continued need for Latina/o advocacy in the educational system. In order to demonstrate the necessity for Latina/o educational research, I explored the impact of Latina Sisterhood, the importance of student voice, funds of knowledge, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the need to avoid colorblindness in American schools.

Following this, I provided information on the advantages of attending a same-sex as well as Catholic school. Additionally, this literature review presented the research surrounding school climate. Finally, I concluded the review by summarizing the importance of educator-student relationships for all students, but especially for Latina/o students. All in all, this literature review served to focus on and further establish the need for research surrounding Latina student voice.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Rationale

Using a qualitative approach, which included an analysis of interviews with students, teachers, and two administrators, as well an examination of pre-interview reflection question responses and a consideration of my research journal containing descriptive and reflective field notes, this study sought to determine the perceptions of Latina students regarding the cultural school climate at a single-sex Catholic high school

This study used the research of Marx (2008) titled "Not Blending In: Latino Students in a predominantly White School" as a foundation for this study. My study was not, however, a replication study, as several of the original study's methodologies and foci were not utilized. In addition, the study took place in a significantly different context, as it was conducted in a Catholic, mainly affluent, and predominantly White high school with approximately 13% Latina students. The setting in the original study was a rural co-educational public high school with a White population of 95% and 5% Latina/o students.

In her study, Marx (2008) completed a comparative survey analysis of the perceptions of Latina/o and White students regarding their school climate and the role that culture, language, and ethnicity played in their overall school experiences. My research focused singly on Latina students perspectives; I did not do a comparative analysis. In addition, whereas Marx focused on literacy and fluency issues in her study, I did not. She found that White students had more positive opinions about their school climate experiences than the Latina/o students and further, the teachers surveyed had more positive views about their White students' academic ability and

language fluency, in comparison to their Latina/o students. Further, Marx opted to incorporate a teacher component to further deepen her work and provide context to her findings, which I did as well. However, Marx (2008) did not gain permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to interview the student participants and thus could not consider the qualitative perceptions of her participants. In contrast to Marx's work, I received permission from the school site, and the IRB to interview both students and administrators.

After my proposal defense, I requested IRB approval for student and administrative data collection. The IRB was particularly careful about granting access to minors, and required me to initiate several safety measures to ensure their confidentiality and comfort. These measures are further detailed in the participant section of this chapter. Students and administrators were provided confidentiality, clarity about the nature of their participation, and final approval of the data reported in this document.

After Marx completed her study on Latina/o students in a predominately White school, she returned to the same research site to evaluate school progress based on the recommendations of her initial study. For this follow up study, Marx (2008, 2012) joined with Byrnes (2012) to create a measure to evaluate the perceptions of school climate of all students. In building their measure, they relied heavily on many of the same survey items Marx had used in her original study in 2008. In fact, the majority of the same survey questions utilized by Marx (2008) in her initial study with Latina/o students were incorporated into the new measure. Marx and Byrnes (2012) also sought to expand school climate literature by creating a school climate inventory "through a critical understanding of multicultural education with attention to culturally and linguistically diverse school children" (p. 1).

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By intersecting multicultural education, critical race theory, critical studies of Whiteness and school climate literature, Marx and Byrnes (2012) created a definition for "multicultural school climate" and developed the 22-item Multicultural School Climate Inventory (MSCI) scale. Their goal of the MSCI is for educators and researchers to utilize this measure to not only understand student's perceptions of their school's cultural climate, but also apply it when "improving multicultural school climate from the perspective of diverse students" (Marx & Byrnes, 2012, p. 1). Consequently, the intent of their revised multicultural protocol was to measure the perceptions of diverse students and not exclusively Latina/o students.

Given that the MSCI was not built to address the experiences of students attending Catholic and/or single-sex schools, in this case, an all-female high school, and given that Marx (2008) was unable to conduct student interviews, providing this study with an exclusively qualitative focus allowed further investigation into the roles of these vital factors that affect school climate and revealed further depth to the previous research findings. Finally, by interviewing the school administrators and teachers, I explored the connection between student perceptions about their cultural school climate and what the teachers and administrators believed student opinions to be. Focusing on a qualitative approach allowed me to acquire in-depth descriptive data to answer the research questions (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009).

In order to truly understand the stance of Latina female students, I provided them an avenue to voice and express their experiences, concerns, and recommendations (Aguilar, 2013). Students were given the opportunity to share their voice through interviews and their pre-interview reflection questions. This was especially crucial given that these young people formed part of two traditionally marginalized groups: women and as ethnic minorities. Moreover,

conducting student interviews with this historically marginalized population also fulfilled an important goal of qualitative studies, which is to "best convey the trends and voices of marginalized groups or individuals" (Creswell, 2009, p. 121). All in all, this rich qualitative approach sought to encourage an advocacy of student voice. This was especially true given that Latinas self-selected to participate in an interview, which allowed for more candid responses to address sensitive topics. Being able to allude to student voices is very informative when presenting findings to school personnel and other educational change agents (Creswell, 2009). In sum, student and educator perceptions are critically important, as the audience that this research ultimately is intended to impact is teachers and schools. It seeks to help these parties better understand how their Latina students feel at their school with regard to their cultural school climate.

Finally, according to Creswell (2009), a qualitative approach allows a researcher to "follow up with a few individuals to help explain results in more depth" (p. 121). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) asserted that qualitative research is more descriptive, as it "has actual settings as the direct source of data," and that "researchers go to the particular setting under the study because they are concerned with context" (p. 4). Given the concern about Latina student perceptions of cultural school climate at the school site and the recommendation of Creswell, I utilized multiple research approaches to reduce the biases of using a single method. This goal was achieved by incorporating interviews with an administrator and various teachers to complement the findings from the student reflections and interviews, as well as the analysis of my field notes.

Research Questions

This research sought to answer the following questions:

1.   What are the perceptions of Latina students in a Catholic single-sex school regarding their cultural school climate?

2.   What are the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the cultural school climate for Latina students?

Setting

This research was conducted in a suburban setting, with female students, and occurred at a single-sex Catholic high school in the Western United States. St. Wheeler Academy, a pseudonym, was established by a Roman Catholic female religious order whose mission informed and permeated all aspects of the school. According to the St. Wheeler Academy's website, the school is governed by several parties including the president, principal, and governing board. The president was responsible for all marketing, admission, public relations, and development projects, while the principal was accountable for the high school affairs including the administration, faculty, curriculum, extracurricular activities, and daily life of the school. The governing board consisted of current and past parents, alumnae, and community leaders. The president and the principal depended on the governing board to aid the school in meeting its academic and monetary goals as well as maintaining its financial security.

The school profile for St. Wheeler Academy indicated that it had a total student population of 385, which included 57 boarding students who came mainly come from international countries including China, South Korea, India, and Mexico. In terms of ethnic diversity, according to the school's most current archdiocesan census report, the school strove

for student ethnic diversity. Most recently, the student population was comprised of a White majority at 44.76 % of the school population; the second largest group was Latina students with 18% representation; and Asian students (international and American) at 15%. The remaining ethnic groups had lower percentages of representation. Further, Black students formed the smallest ethnic minority population, accounting for only 1.6 % of the student body. While this percentage may seem low, St. Wheeler Academy received several accolades from various Western private school organizations for its Latina percentage, as it had a much higher representation than other similarly situated independent schools.

School records also showed that the school had attempted to increase its geographic diversity. Students commuted from a larger suburban area and came from mainly Catholic, and independent middle/elementary schools. Some students traveled 50 miles each way to attend the school. Further, over 60% of the student population identified as Catholic and/or Christian. Finally, most students came from households with married parents or divorced remarried parents.

In addition to having ethnic and religious diversity, records showed that St. Wheeler Academy had enrolled students from various socioeconomic backgrounds. The WASC accreditation report (2011) revealed that the majority of students came from zip codes with families from upper middle class backgrounds, while the remaining students were mainly from a lower middle class socioeconomic background. The boarding students—mainly international students—generally came from upper class households, as their tuition and room and board expenses were over $43,000 yearly and they were not entitled to financial aid.

According to school documents, the majority of day student families paid the $22,000 yearly tuition. About 28% of students were on some form of financial aid including need-based

scholarships from a Catholic organization for families who were considered "low income." However, 60% of financial aid funds derived from the school's operating budget. In addition to need-based financial aid, the school offered several competitive academic scholarships to incoming freshman.

One of St. Wheeler Academy's main goals was to prepare young women for college. One hundred percent of each graduating class was accepted to at least one four-year college. In the five years previous to this study, graduates had attended University of Notre Dame, Stanford University, University of Southern California, and Princeton University, among other prestigious institutions. College acceptances to these prestigious institutions were in line with the school's academic expectations. The school had rigorous graduation requirements; however, the school did not exclusively admit students who demonstrated an academic superiority. The school had an extensive program to meet the needs of students with disabilities, and in part because of its Catholic background, the school was committed to holistically evaluating students in the application process and meeting the academic and personal needs of all of its students.

According to school records, there were 48 faculty members at the time of the study at St. Wheeler Academy. Also, according to WASC accreditation reports, the school site attempted to hire for ethnic and gender diversity amongst its faculty; 68% of the faculty population identified as White, 22% identified is Hispanic, and 0.04% identified as Asian. At the time of the study, there were no black faculty members. In terms of gender, 61% of the faculty consisted of women and 39% was male. Interestingly, there was a higher percentage of Latina/o faculty members at the school than there were Latina/o students.

In terms of faculty retention, school records showed that 44% of the faculty members had been at the school for six or more years, and 48% of the faculty members had over a decade of teaching experience. Also, according to the school's records, 56% of faculty members had been at the school for five or fewer years, and 31% had been in the educational field for five or fewer years. Moreover, marketing materials touted that students were provided an individualized education given that the faculty-to-student ratio was 1:10 and, in general, classes were no larger than 18 students.

Besides being committed to providing a personalized education, the high school prided itself on its rigorous curriculum, which emphasized social justice values, research opportunities, and a strong emphasis in the STEM fields. The school required that students complete two year-long research projects in the senior and junior year beyond their four core academic subjects: math, English, science, and religion. Students needed to choose a topic, construct a thesis, and design a research plan as well as present their data in a formal presentation to the students' research committee. Given the school's Catholic foundations, students were required to focus on a topic informed by a social justice perspective. Some student projects included the diverse experiences of women of color in their professional careers, the manner in which Disney Studios has portrayed women, as well as contemporary topics including rape culture on college campuses. The purpose of these projects was to demonstrate to students that their spirituality and Catholic development could inform their academic development and that living Catholic values influences their daily life.

Young women were also encouraged to discover and pursue male-dominated fields including engineering and the health sciences. There were several opportunities to engage in a

rigorous science curriculum, through exclusive internship opportunities at prestigious science and technology organizations. However, across the curriculums, students were encouraged to be women of faith and life-long learners who consistently analyzed and critiqued information, and gave voice to marginalized communities.

To expand on its Catholic influence, the school's mission was committed to forming young women who not only developed an unwavering faith, but also cultivated a philanthropic spirit. To achieve this goal, faith traditions were incorporated into all aspects of the school including a graduation requirement to complete 100 Christian service hours and a full-time weeklong service project in the senior year. Students were also required to attend a multiple-night religious retreat each year as well as engage in monthly mass with the entire school community. Furthermore, students engaged in daily prayer and were encouraged to discuss their faith in all of their classes, including the sciences. The school's mission was to produce young women who would be prepared for college and graduate with a strong religious faith that allowed them to engage in a virtuously based lifestyle.

Participants

Students

The opportunity to participate in the study was open to all self-identified Latinas in the 11th–12th grade, a population of approximately 45 students at St. Wheeler Academy. According to IRB instructions, all 11th- to 12th-grade parents were provided information via email about the study and were informed that all juniors and seniors would be receiving an email soliciting the participation of self-identified Latinas at the school. They were asked to contact the researcher if they preferred that their daughter opt out of the study. No parents opted out. Twenty-four hours

after this email, all junior and senior students were emailed asking for students who identified as Latina to volunteer by responding to my email address.

Over a three-week period, 16 interest emails were received, consent forms signed, pre-interview reflection questions completed, and 16 interviews were scheduled. Self-selected Latinas represented various Latin American heritages including Salvadorians, Mexicans, Guatemalans, as well as Cubans. However, it is important to note that all students were born in the United States and represented second- and third-generation Americans. More specifically, half of the participants were on financial aid to attend St. Wheeler Academy. Further, one student was on significant financial aid and would not be able to attend the school without the substantial monetary assistance. The self-selected participants all had aspirations to continuing in higher education and felt that attending St. Wheeler Academy was playing a significant role in the opportunity for admission to selective colleges. The fall of the study, many of the seniors would be attending selective colleges including the University of Southern California, Duke University, Baylor University, and some University of California schools among others. Additionally, five students would be first-generation college students. Participants and their pseudonyms are listed below.

Table 2

Ethnic Self-Identification and Grade Level of Participant Students

Name	Ethnic identification	Grade level
Alyssa	Latina	Senior
Amanda	Latina	Senior
Brittany	Latina	Junior
Carolina	Latina/White	Junior
Crystal	Latina	Senior
Denise	Latina	Senior
Diana	Latina	Senior
Jessica	Latina	Senior
Kathy	Hispanic	Senior
Melissa	Latina	Senior
Michelle	Latina/White	Junior
Nancy	Latina	Senior
Nicole	Latina	Junior
Rachel	Latina/White	Senior
Stephanie	Latina	Senior
Veronica	Latina/White	Senior

Once Latinas expressed their interest and submitted their consent forms and pre-interview reflection questions, they were provided an opportunity to participate in an in-depth and a one-hour-long in-person interview that was recorded and later transcribed. The consent form informed parents and students that the interview would be recorded. Additionally, the principal granted me permission to follow up the distribution of consent forms with an email to parents explaining the study as well as providing an avenue to request further clarification. Parents were also able to send a hard copy of the consent form directly to me if they chose. Finally, I provided an email address to answer any clarification questions. After two weeks, students who submitted a consent form were scheduled for their interview appointment time.

Teachers

I included six teachers from the faculty at St. Wheeler Academy as participants. With the approval of the principal, I announced to all faculty members information about the study at a faculty meeting and via email. Teachers and administrators were encouraged to volunteer to be interviewed by me. However, they were informed that to be eligible to participate, teacher participants would have to have completed at least one year as full-time faculty to ensure understanding of the school culture. They were asked to email me to request participation in the study and agree to engage in a recorded individual interview as well as complete pre-interview reflection questions. Possible participants were encouraged to contact me if additional information was needed and/or if they had any clarification questions. To reduce bias, researcher positionality about issues of Latina students at St. Wheeler Academy was not revealed. Moreover, teacher responses were assured anonymity.

Teachers were provided two weeks to express their interest to participate in the study, and teachers from all academic disciplines were encouraged to engage. I sought to have a teacher sample that represented diverse ethnic groups including those from White and underrepresented backgrounds including Latina/o teachers. Given the notion that students who were interviewed were of Latina/o descent, it was critical to have Latina/o faculty interviewed. I also sought teachers from various academic disciplines to be represented including the humanities, the sciences, and world languages, as well as a diverse gender sample. The sample of teachers represented a diverse ethnic population as well as teachers from various disciplines including religion, social studies, humanities, and science. Further, one teacher was male, four were White, and two Latina.

Table 3

Ethnic Identification and Genders of Participant Educators

Name	Ethnic identification	Gender
Bill	White	Male
Colleen	White	Female
Evelyn*	White	Female
Grace	White	Female
Luz	Latina	Female
Rebecca	White	Female
Ruby*	White	Female
Yolanda	Latina	Female
* Denotes administrator		

I then contacted potential participants to engage in a pre-interview reflection project, and schedule the interview. Some interviews were conducted at the school site, though to encourage comfort and honest discussions, other off-campus interview locations were also arranged.

Administrators

The Assistant Principal of Student Affairs and the Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction were interviewed to better comprehend perceptions about their Latina students and to gain knowledge regarding their understanding of the cultural school climate. Administrator interviews also addressed follow-up questions created to gain clarity regarding specific interview responses from interviewed teachers and/or students.

For over a decade, the Assistant Principal of Student Affairs was a religion teacher before being promoted to be a school administrator last year. According to her job description, the assistant principal "must have a core understanding of the benefits of an all-female education and the Catholic influence in the education of the whole student."

She was also responsible for developing and presenting professional development sessions for faculty regarding faith development and strategies for encouraging and teaching

toward a values-based learning community. Similarly, she was tasked with forming an accepting school community and preventing discrimination in school practices. Lastly, her job required her to ensure that Catholicity was incorporated in all facets of the school life.

The Assistant Principal of Curriculum and Instruction had been at the school for the previous four years and had over a decade of experience working in independent schools at various levels. Additionally, part of her tasks included overseeing all teachers and providing administrative directives. She had been involved in establishing curriculum mapping and further developing the junior and senior research programs. As assistant principal, she was also charged with ensuring that various teacher curriculums met the needs of all students and maintained a safe and comfortable educational environment.

Data Collection
Pre-Interview Reflection

In order to prepare for the interview session, and to craft questions relevant to individual participants, all students and teachers who self-selected to be part of the interviews participated in a pre-interview reflection, and received via email a list of questions to be answered prior to the scheduled interview. The pre-interview reflection for this study was created by adapting the questions about perceptions regarding cultural school climate from the MSCI created by Marx and Brynes (2012). Marx and Byrnes created survey statements for students to agree or disagree with and separated these statements into various categories to inform student perceptions of cultural school climate. These subcategories included: (a) Culturally Responsive/Relevant Teaching, (b) Educator-Student Relationships, (c) Liking the School, and (d) School Success.

These pre-interview reflection questions for the various parties can be found in the Appendix D and E sections at the end of this dissertation. Participants received questions

attached to the same email with their assigned interview time. Participants were asked to complete the questions prior to their interview. Obtaining these reflective responses allowed me to potentially follow-up on responses provided or to request elaboration on experiences and/or perceptions during the interview process. I informed the participants that in order to interview them, the questions needed to be submitted prior to the interview.

Interviews

Student Interviews

The Marx (2008) study lacked student interviews because of Institutional Review Board (IRB) limitations. In this work, I have successfully acquired written permission from the research site, and from IRB to conduct interviews with students. However, it should be noted that this study's methods were modified from the proposal due to IRB limitations. I originally had proposed focus groups but the IRB discouraged this, citing a concern for participants' confidentiality. Additionally, it was requested that parents be informed about the study and interview process 24 hours prior to the students, to allow parents to ask questions about the study given the sensitive nature of the subject matter. I complied with both of these requests.

After the authorization forms were submitted, I arranged for hour-long interviews with each Latina student over a three-week period. Before starting the interview, students learned once again about the study and were reminded that their interview would be recorded and later transcribed. Additionally, they were provided time to ask questions. Once potential questions were addressed, students and parents were required to provide a specific student and parent consent form.

When Marx and Byrnes (2012) created the MSCI, they focused their theoretical framework on critical studies of Whiteness and Critical Race Theory. Because of the research setting and different participant pool, I have developed a different theoretical frame, which used Latina/o Critical Race Theory (Solorzano &Yosso, 2012), Catholic Social Teaching (Massaro, 2011), and Yosso's (2006) Cultural Wealth Model. This frame informed the student interview questions. In addition, the interview questions were developed using Marx and Byrnes's (2012) research, which organized their survey question into various subcategories "to better understand the different dimensions that contribute to a positive multicultural school climate" (p. 7). As indicated earlier, their survey items were separated into four classifications, including (a) Culturally Responsive/Relevant Teaching, (b) Educator-Student Relationships, (c) Liking the School, and (d) School Success. Student interview questions were created to fall under one of these subcategories in order to align with these classifications. It was my intent to understand if and how the school or faculty practices were empowering or further marginalizing the Latina population at St. Wheeler's Academy. Student interview questions can be found in the Appendix.

Teacher/Administrator Interviews

Teachers were not informed that this study sought to specifically understand the perceptions of Latina students. Teachers engaged in one-hour semistructured interviews, in which they were asked open-ended questions that were coded for common themes (Creswell, 2009). Interviews inquired about Latina/o students and the teacher's impressions of the school cultural climate and the role of Latina/o culture in the school curriculum and culture.

Teacher and administrator questions were constructed to address Yosso's (2002) Capital Wealth Model, Catholic Social Teaching, and Critical Race Theory. Each question was designed to address an aspect of the capital wealth model and/or Catholic social teaching. I attempted to identify whether the school was helping students build the distinct characteristics of each of these theoretical frameworks, which are deeply rooted in social justice pedagogy (Massaro, 2011; Yosso, 2005). Interview questions were also developed and separated into the same subcategories created by Marx and Byrnes (2012) to evaluate the different questions on the MSCI. Teacher and administrator interview questions can be found in the Appendix.

Researcher Fieldnotes

I also maintained electronic field notes to complement this study's findings. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), field notes are "the written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data of the qualitative study" (pp. 118–119). Further, by adding a fieldwork component, I was able to "keep track of the development of the project as well as "remain aware of how [I] was influenced by the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.119).

Because I conducted several interviews over a short time, maintaining field notes helped me to recognize developments, but also to track my own potential researcher bias given that I am employed full time at the research site. I conducted field notes and reflections eight times over a three-week period in late December 2015 and early January 2016; I also conducted two to four interviews daily. In collecting field notes, I not only described the project and findings, but also reflected on the findings and the process.

Descriptive Fieldnotes

I "provide [d] a word-picture of the setting, people, actions and the conversations as observed" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 120) by keeping an objective record of the events happening at the school. This occurred if instances or notable events occurred at the research site. These notes were detailed to describe the interview setting, students, teachers, behaviors, or any event in which I engaged or overheard that may have contributed to the cultural school climate of the research site.

Reflective Fieldnotes

To complement the rich descriptive field notes, I engaged in taking reflective field notes. During the data collection time, I reflected on the method, which included the impact of the pre-interview reflection and/or the effectiveness of the interview questions. Reflection also allowed me to analyze any conflicts that arose when speaking to students, teachers, and the administration about such a sensitive topic as ethnic background and culturally appropriate educational practices. Additionally, I maintained notes with clarifying questions. All in all, I believe that I contributed to the richness of the interviews and pre-interview reflective questions responses with my research field notes. These provided accounts of and highlighted any other influences that helped me better understand and explain Latina student perceptions regarding their cultural school climate.

Data Analysis

Analyzing Qualitative Data

At the completion of the various student, teacher, and administrator interviews, findings were organized and prepared for data analysis. In order to accomplish this task, interviews of the

three parties were transcribed from their recorded format to a typed document. According to

Creswell (2009), while transcribing, researchers seek to gain a general understanding of the data

and recurring themes. Factors including tone, credibility, and overall depth will be generally

considered before formal coding occurs (Creswell, 2009). Reflective notes taken during or after

each interview were revisited to increase general understanding of findings as recommended by

Creswell (2009).

After interview data recordings were transcribed and analyzed. I considered the general

factors such as tone, credibility, and overall depth before coding as Creswell (2009) suggested.

Next, various coding categories were assigned including primary and secondary codes. Coding

allowed me to organize the responses into various divisions or patterns before thoroughly

delving into questioning meaning (Creswell, 2009).

Primary Coding

In order to identify potential themes present in the interview transcriptions, the first step

in my primary coding involved reading all interviews to gain a general understanding. In this

case, the primary codes were named and fell under the subcategorical themes created by Marx

and Byrnes (2012) as part of their MSCI measure:

- Culturally Relevant/Responsive Teaching

- Educator/Student Relationships

- Liking the School

- School Success

These were the codes that by Marx and Byrnes (2012) used to organize their findings,

and I used them as a starting point to analyze my work. Secondly, as a best practice, I was open

to any emerging categories to define and potentially code. I did not limit my coding to those created by Marx and Byrnes (2012), but instead generated others including: Sisterhood, Identity, and Curriculum.

Secondary Coding

Once the themes for the results were identified, the transcriptions were read again with the primary codes in mind, but this time seeking to secondarily code to determine the manner in which the theoretical frameworks resonated in the responses of the various parties in regards to the cultural school climate. Furthermore, in the analysis of the themes, I sought to analyze and present themes for connections among the three parties interviewed. Each transcript was analyzed individually, but as suggested by Creswell (2009), also examined across the different responses. Ultimately, the findings allowed me not only to interpret meaning, but also provided a platform to present the perceptions of Latina students to the school, and offer recommendations for institutional change.

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Limitations

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There were several limitations to this study including the fact that I completed this study at my current place of employment. This circumstance could have affected student, teacher, and administrator responses in the survey as well as follow-up interviews, especially given that I hold administrative power, and that interviews were conducted in-person and in a one-to-one manner. Additionally, the notion that this study was conducted exclusively at one school with students from affluent backgrounds with a strong emphasis on Catholic social teaching as well as a focused female empowerment limited the generalizability of the results. However, despite this limitation, there is very little research on this particular educational context, and even less

research on this context with a focus on Latina women. This study sought to build the literature in this area.

Positionality

The roots of this study come from my personal educational experience. Given my background as a first-generation Latina college graduate, I am personally committed to further extending the literature regarding Latina experiences in the American educational system. Completing this research is a personal and professional pursuit. I attended an elite private liberal arts college at which I often felt like an "outsider" and did not see my cultural values embraced or reflected in my school community. Given the frequency of my experience, I knew that I could not be the only who was feeling that way. In fact, many researchers have investigated the feelings of Latina/o students in higher education, especially those Latina/o students from underprivileged backgrounds (Nora & Crisp, 2009). However, there appears to be a gap between the research focused in higher education and that which focuses on the experiences of Latina students in homogeneously Caucasian high schools, specifically Catholic single-sex White-dominant high schools.

Conclusion

In order to gauge a true understanding of the perceptions of Latina students regarding their cultural school climate, it was necessary to not only gain insight from the administration and teachers, but also to provide Latina students an opportunity to voice their opinions. It is for this reason that all students who expressed an interest in interviewing were provided an opportunity to do so. I hoped that by encouraging student voice, Latina students would be able to in some manner address and inform the research about their cultural values and needs as well as

address possible marginalization at their school site. Additionally, following the instructions and

recommendations of the Institutional Review Board from Loyola Marymount University, all

methods of data collection and analysis protected participant confidentiality as well as presented

these experiences in an accurate and ethical manner.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

This research sought to uncover and explain Latina student perceptions of the cultural school climate at their single-sex Catholic high school. In order to truly understand the plight of the Latina/o student and the school's cultural school climate, soliciting and incorporating student voice is vital. In this section, the findings from student and teacher interviews, pre-interview reflections, and researcher field notes will be reviewed and analyzed.

Latina students and educators were interviewed to uncover their school cultural climate perceptions in regards to student/educator relationships, school connectedness, cultural relevancy, and school success. Interviews and pre-interview reflections presented a diversity of opinions regarding the school's cultural climate. Additionally, soliciting both teacher and student voices helped to gauge whether teacher and student perceptions were similar in determining if students' needs were being met. All interview and pre-interview questionnaire inquiries for the teachers and students were informed by the two research questions guiding this work.

1. What are the perceptions of Latina students in a Catholic single-sex school regarding their cultural school climate?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the cultural school climate for Latina students?

This chapter is organized around the two research questions, answering each in turn, and using data from the field to explore the patterns that arose in participant response to these two questions. To present the results of this study, research questions are answered based on student and teacher responses. When analyzing the results, various themes emerged.

Question #1: What are the perceptions of Latina students in a Catholic single-sex school regarding their cultural school climate?

Student Perceptions of Curriculum: On the Margins

In order to analyze student perceptions of the cultural school climate on their campus, interviews and pre-interview refection questions requested information regarding if and how the school delivered culturally relevant material and if the students felt a sense of connectedness to the overall curriculum. Student interviews revealed various perceptions of the representation of Latina/o issues in their school curriculum.

Limited Focus on Latina/o Culture

All 16 students interviewed expressed feeling that there was limited information about Latinas/os in the majority of their courses. In general, they felt a lack of content about and sensitivity to Latina issues across the curriculum. Alyssa, a senior, summed up her feelings by saying, "I feel like the [Latino] community has made such a huge impact in our country's history, but we don't discuss it at all." Another student, Michelle, in her pre-interview questionnaire shared that in "in classes other than Spanish, we do not talk about ethnicities much," which contributed to her opinion that Latina/o topics were not being addressed. Furthermore, Nancy, a senior, shared that she often asked herself, "What about Latinos, like, where were they?" After reflecting on this statement, she uttered, "There is a lack of representation most times." Alyssa noted, "Girls don't seem to know that there are differences within the Latino population."

Acknowledging Efforts to Include Latina/o Issues

While all students interviewed did acknowledge a need for more Latina/o issues to be addressed in their classes, they were grateful for the one place they all noted they were able to engage. The seniors shared that their religion teacher had focused on diversity of religious observation and prayer. More specifically, all senior participants expressed being connected to *Mujerista Theology*. Mujerista Theology is described as women's liberation theology, which seeks to address the role that theology can play in the daily struggles confronted by Latinas (Isasi-Diaz, 2006). Students expressed that learning about this in their religion class helped them understand how spirituality can facilitate understanding their unique experiences as Latinas in the United States. One student, Kathy, appreciated and felt empowered that an area of religion at St. Wheeler Academy focused on Latinas specifically. Another student, Jessica, clarified that while she was grateful that her Latina religion teacher had introduced such a topic, in her pre-reflection questionnaire, she revealed, "I do definitely see a bit of White-washing in her teaching." She specifically felt her teacher "tries to make the Latina/o culture more palatable to the White girls." She believed that teachers instructed about Latina/o ideologies in a manner that would not make the White students feel uncomfortable or unable to relate. However, the same courtesy was not afforded to Latina students when being taught about the dominant, White culture. She further explored her stance by saying, "I think [teaching] respectability and gold star politics aren't helpful." She used the term "gold star" to refer to one-sided and/or accepted societal ideologies and implied that such practices were not helpful for White students to understand Latina/o culture more appropriately.

Latina/o Culture in Spanish Class and Beyond

In addition to the seniors who mentioned the Latina/o inclusion in theology class, the overwhelming majority indicated that Latina/o issues were addressed in their Spanish classes. Stephanie, who came from an economically privileged background and lived in a mostly White community, said it was her Spanish teacher who exposed her to many issues being confronted by the Latino/a community both in the United States and abroad. Further, Rachel, a senior, stated that over the course of four years at St. Wheeler Academy, she had been exposed repeatedly to Latino culture and issues in her Spanish classes. About one third of the seniors talked about similar experiences, and one student specifically said that Latina students who do not have the exposure to Latina/o culture in Spanish class might be forfeiting all experience of their culture with the exception of the previously mentioned experience in religion classes and perhaps some texts in English. She said, "Other than that, it [the focus on Latina/o culture] is not a huge influence at this school." Two junior students explained that in their English and religion class the year prior they had reviewed some books, including one called *Esperanza Rising*, which focused on the experience of a little girl in Mexico. However, the students felt that these were all international perspectives. Most students believed that Latina/o matters were not presented from the perspective of Latinas/os in the United States. When questioned further about why teachers may take this approach or not discuss Latinas/os as much, Brittany disclosed, "I wouldn't say they don't know about it, but it's just something that they don't think is as important, I guess." Rachel suggested that religion classes remind her of the oppression against Latinas/os given that much of the Christian theology addressed in her classes is rooted in the Spanish colonization of Latin America. Another student said that some books that focused on the Latino/a experience

were assigned during the summer and then not even addressed during the school year. For example, Michelle talked about having a summer assignment to read *Ragtime*, which focuses on the immigrant experience; however, the book was not taught in the class, simply assigned for reading outside of class. She noted, "We do not talk about other ethnicities." Further, Carolina, a junior of Cuban descent stated that when talking about how communists and fascists came into power, the conversation focused on Italy and China, but "nobody mentioned Cuba and that was huge when Castro was in power; that was a big deal."

Limited Perspectives in the Classroom

All students reported that while other ethnicities and other immigrant stories were addressed in the curriculum, there was very little of substance about the Latina/a experience. For example, one student, Stephanie, who expressed an interest in learning more about immigration issues said, "There are so many immigration issues associated with Latinos, but all we discuss is European immigration." Most other students also shared wishing that not only stereotypes about Latinas/os be addressed in the classroom, but also that the impact of Latinos/as be addressed. In her pre-interview reflection questionnaire, Alyssa specifically noted, "Our history classes have not shed enough light on the Latino population and issues."

Additionally, Melissa mentioned that throughout her schooling, she had often wondered and asked her mother " What about Latinos; where were they?" Veronica, a senior, pointed out that while she appreciated that her religion class talked about women of color, she questioned, "Why did we spend two weeks talking about African American feminism and only one day on Latinas?" She would have appreciated gaining a more substantive lesson given that there were significantly more Latinas in the senior class than African American students. Another student

suggested that "we talk a lot about history like African American people… and that was a big issue in our country, but so were a lot of different Latino issues, like the Chicano Movement." Jessica felt the same way and shared, "Black rights were a huge part of our history, but no one has really paid attention to Hispanic rights." She also pointed out that her classes failed to acknowledge prominent Latina/o leaders including Cesar Chavez. She said she learned about these cultural touchstones from her family. Melissa, whose parents were political refugees in the United States, one from Columbia and the other from Cuba, stated that she felt that while she didn't mind the emphasis on Black history, she would appreciate learning about the Afro-Latino history associated with her parent's birth places. Thus, the overall consensus was that students felt that the curriculum focus seemed to prioritize other cultural experiences in the classroom over those of the Latinas/os.

White Feminism

When asked about their favorite aspects about the school, all students spoke about the emphasis on feminism, independence, and women's empowerment. All juniors and seniors revealed that they willingly looked for a single-sex high school experience as they sought to have limited distractions and become more confident. Each student revealed that she had, in effect, become more self-aware. For example, Veronica said that given her experience at her single-sex school, she believed that the research that she had read, which stated that girls become more confident, was very accurate. Further, Veronica stated that St. Wheeler Academy girls can be described as "very outspoken and powerful." She added that, as a senior, she had come to the realization that St. Wheeler Academy students enter the school as "maybe girls, but definitely, the community has created confident women." Along the same lines, in my encounters and

observations of some seniors, most alluded to the notion that the female empowerment focus present at the school motivated them to consider entering male-dominated fields in their future careers including engineering, mathematics, business, and technology. This value was also apparent when interviewing Evelyn, one of the school administrators, who stated, "Instructional strategies are also employed that clearly address the learning styles of girls (i.e. more collaboration, less competition) and students are encouraged to take more courses in math and sciences that are typically male-dominated in co-ed environments." She felt that being in an all-female environment allowed St. Wheeler Academy "girls to become more engaged and take more ownership of their educational experience."

Yet, though the common response among the Latinas demonstrated that they felt empowered as young women in the single-sex environment, and did reveal that their classes had a strong emphasis on feminism, various students stated that teachers focused exclusively on "what it is to be a woman in White culture." Michelle further clarified that though her English teacher talked about middle class women's issues as opposed to those in the working class, she had yet to have a teacher who talked about the experiences of women of color. Further, Brittany had a great deal to say about the manner in which feminism was presented in the school. She said, "I think for minority women it's [being a woman of color in a White majority institution] even more challenging than it is for White women." With this statement, Brittany alluded to the notion that women in general experience discrimination, but women of color experience a deeper sense of marginalization not only because of their gender, but also because of their status as an underrepresented ethnic minority.

Research Projects Fueling Personal Interests

The school embedded an extensive yearlong research program into the curriculum. According to school documents, the Junior Research Project and Senior Research Project allowed students to engage in a one-year research project in which they were able to choose a faculty research advisor and investigate a topic of interest. All interviewed students described the project as rigorous and long but worthwhile. One student stated, "I hate the project. It's so much work. But, I am so glad to finally have an avenue where I can talk about the stuff that I care about." Melissa felt the same way; she chose to write about rehabilitation for inmates because "there's a large amount of Latino people in prison." This project helped her learn more about Latina/o social issues, as she was able to more fully answer her own inquiries about "Why do so many Latinos continue to go to prison "What's the cycle?" Crystal informed me that her Junior Research Project not only allowed her to investigate a Latino circumstance in the United States that related to her family, but also to learn about a new academic discipline that she could review further in college. She said, "My Junior Research Project was based off immigration and the American dream… I wasn't even aware of Chicano Studies until… the Junior Research Project gave me an avenue to know and be more aware." She further clarified that her research project had allowed her to connect with her ethnic identity and she now hoped to either double major or minor in Chicano or Central American studies in college.

Besides engaging in their own research, many students revealed that learning more about their culture and the issues affecting their population through their own or other student research projects provided them with a sense of self and confidence. And, after being placed in a group with another Latina student to complete a project, one student revealed, "We were able to talk

about different injustice issues because they were included in our world views with other [White] girls." The same student said that she would have appreciated involving her Latina heritage and/or experiences in classes as the exchange helped her to gain confidence in her ethnicity while simultaneously breaking down barriers and stereotypes with her White classmates.

Student Perceptions of Teacher Support: "Getting us"

In terms of teacher support, every single student revealed that she loved and felt very supported by teachers, and all but 4 of the students felt that teachers acknowledged the students' Latina heritage.

Teacher support. In fact, in follow-up questions about favorite aspects of their high school experience, each student disclosed that her strong relationships with teachers had maximized her personal and academic development. Jessica, a senior, stated, "Your teachers really do get to know you and make an effort to understand your learning style and understand who you are as a person." Crystal revealed, "I've always appreciated all of my teachers. I've never been afraid to go up to them and ask them a question." For this particular student, receiving a personalized education was especially critical as she came to the school from an under-served public school; however, she stated that all of her teachers and her advisors came together to provide her academic support. Similarly, other students, Diana and Stephanie, were grateful that their teachers "went above and beyond" to provide them accommodations including extra time on tests, ability to write on tests, and additional scaffolding in helping develop research projects given their Attention Deficit Disorder and learning differences.

Missing cultural connections. While all 16 students interviewed generally felt

supported, they did not reveal cultural connections with many teachers nor feel that their teachers

"get" them as Latinas. For instance, in her pre-interview reflection, Jessica shared, "I feel like

White people, especially, my teachers who are older, will not fully connect or relate to people of

color." Furthermore, Crystal revealed that she felt especially unsupported by teachers on Cinco

de Mayo when students came to school dressed up in sombreros and traditional Mexican clothes.

Numerous students who engaged in this action were White. Crystal revealed feeling that teachers

should have utilized this opportunity to engage in a discussion about cultural appropriation. In

addition, she felt frustration because the school had not addressed that Cinco de Mayo is actually

not a significant holiday in Mexican history, though she is not of Mexican heritage. Along the

same lines, Brittany shared that on one occasion, her freshman Spanish teacher told students, "

Ok, students, you should all practice Spanish whenever you get a chance. Like at home, you can

practice with the maids and gardeners." Brittany was especially sensitive to this comment given

that her father, a United States–born person, had a job in the service industry as a janitor before

completing his degree. I asked if she mentioned this to her teacher. She said, "I never felt that it

was my responsibility to address teachers and tell them they were wrong."

In fact, one third of students revealed being very apprehensive about confronting their

teachers and/or fellow classmates about cultural appropriation and Latino issues in general. For

example, Brittany said that she did not want to feel more alone or isolate herself further. She

feared that if she became outspoken in classes, her classmates and/or teachers would say, "Oh,

she's so dramatic!" Conversely, about half of the students did feel comfortable. In fact, Rachel

shared that she had corrected a generalization made by her history teacher that most Latinos are

liberal and vote democratically. Given Rachel's own experiences and what she had pursued in her Latina/o Catholic community, she contested the notion by clarifying that there were many within-group differences among Latinos and that there were certain Latino groups who were very religiously and politically conservative, including Cubans. She further noted that such differences in political ideology were connected to their country's history. Rachel felt that it was important that such a clarification be made, as she did not want her non-Latina classmates to think that the statement applied to the entire population. When her teacher agreed with her clarification, she felt more encouraged to not only contribute in class discussions regarding Latina/o issues, but also to challenge her teacher and/or classmates when necessary.

Additionally, it is important to note that teachers did state that while the majority of St. Wheeler Academy students may have felt more inclined to "speak up" in classes or had enjoyed their experiences at the school, a significant number of students had confided in them about discriminatory practices at the school. For example, in her pre-interview reflection questionnaire, Grace shared, "the Advanced Placement Environmental Science class group from a couple of years back did tell me stories of teachers that couldn't tell them apart and would say things that struck me as being ignorant or even racist." Grace also divulged that police in the local community had treated some Latina students in a discriminatory fashion.

Student Perceptions of School Culture: Welcoming but Homogeneous

The majority of students interviewed expressed that in general they felt that their high school was welcoming, but did not necessarily embrace and/or encourage expression or exposure to Latina/o culture. Firstly, all but two of the girls had graduated from much more diverse middle schools, including some with a majority Latina/o population; 10 students classified St. Wheeler

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Academy as a "very White school." Students described the school as predominately White without being prompted or asked if they attended a White school. In fact, Crystal contemplated transferring after her first year because she was one of the few Latinas and one of the few students from a disadvantaged economic status on campus. However, two students who had attended predominantly White elementary and middle schools described having very racist experiences at their previous schools where they were forced to become more "White" or act "Americanized" in order to "fit in." They indicated that St. Wheeler Academy was "much more welcoming." Stephanie, who had attended a economically privileged elementary/middle school expressed that her high school was a refreshing environment given that she no longer needed to "put on this face, like, "oh yeah we're part of the upper class and we are wealthy like everyone else."

Latinas and issues of silencing. While all of the participants admitted that there was little of substance in the curriculum or school culture that focused on Latina culture, there was an unwillingness to admit that there was something wrong with this. Instead, the great majority was accepting of the status quo, and appeared not to want to criticize their schooling experience. Furthermore, despite describing that in general, many felt as if they fit in, various Latinas spoke about wanting to engage in discussions about contemporary topics affecting Latinos/as, but felt that many of their classmates did not have much interest in Latinos. Alyssa described it this way: "I can bring up things, but I do not know how much it will last." Along the same lines, she also expressed, "I am not sure that I could make a change in the culture or the curriculum. I just feel like there's nothing really here that makes…Latinas welcome." More than half of the students also noted that they had noticed that the only people sparking conversations about

Latinas/os were classmates of Latino descent but they were often disregarded. Most students felt limited to also express their opinion because they felt that White students in their class would accuse them of using the "race card" or defaulting to always be the voice of color. Jessica also alluded to feeling similarly, and when asked about addressing Latina/o issues in classes, she stated, "I am going to stay on the sidelines this year, I don't want to say anything right now." She reported that she had started to feel censored by the faculty and student community and believed she was regarded as an "angry Latina." Additionally, Melissa felt disregarded by her classmates when she addressed her Colombian heritage and students would not believe her when she would tried to discredit negative perceptions such as seeing "Columbia as a drug-trade" country whose government is running the cocaine business and can't "control the guerillas."

Latinas and issues of stereotyping. All but one of the students also revealed that their White classmates did not always have an accurate portrayal of Latinas/os and the places they reside. Michelle felt that her White friends were disconnected and judgmental of certain neighborhoods with large Latino populations. She recounted, "My friend once made a comment about East LA… she said, 'It's not good. It's a stupid ghetto.'" This student was especially insulted about this comment given that most of her family was raised there including her mother and many of her Latina/o friends who were residents there as well. After telling this story, she said, "She's never been there so she doesn't really see." When questioned further about whether she confronted the student, Michelle revealed that she had told her that her comment was ignorant; however, she also revealed that "[At our school], we are in a bubble, we do not really talk about it, [issues of cultural difference] even though, its really relevant in my life." She angrily expressed, "People [at St. Wheeler Academy] sort of feel that it's more dangerous to be

around people who are not wealthy." Other students mentioned that attending school in such a privileged environment clouded students' perceptions of the "real world."

Another incident that addressed stereotypes was when a student talked about her teacher dressing up as stereotypical illegal immigrant for a lesson on immigration. He described himself as someone who sold oranges and flowers outside the freeway. While her teacher did this as a form of teaching students in his classes that this stereotype was inaccurate, Latina students were offended by his portrayal. Carolina specifically felt that though he was teaching, presenting a negative image of Latinos simply deepens ignorant perception, though the teacher wanted students to address stereotypes in a critical sense.

Latinas and College Admissions

While two thirds of the students may not have felt completely embraced by the community, the majority said they felt welcome and were grateful to attend the school because it provided them great opportunities and was seen as reputable. They perceived that the school culture was defined by rigorous academics that would allow them to be "college ready."

However, when it came to college admissions, plentiful participants revealed feeling that their classmates mocked their Latina heritage or believed that "Latinas will have an easier time getting into college." Three Latinas alluded to jokes made about ethnic minority student admission to colleges. More specifically, Carolina mentioned confronting White friends when they teased about checking off the "Black" box for racial affiliation when taking the SAT. She also explained in her prerefection questionnaire "it's only cool to be a person of color when college applications roll around." In this context "cool" meant that White students felt that being a person of color was advantageous and/or enriching especially when it was associated with

facilitating the college admission processes. Additionally, she also discussed having had a conversation with a White friend who advocated for the elimination of affirmative action. Carolina became very upset with her friend and explained, "A Hispanic person has such a disadvantage for so many years, so they need to be accepted to institutions to get on an even playing field." Carolina now understood that her friend did not comprehend the implications of social justice issues affecting Latinos or people of color in general. Melissa also expressed her discomfort when one of her close friends said, "As a minority, you're going to have a lot of fun applying to college!" With this statement, Carolina felt that her friend believed that because Carolina was part of underrepresented ethnic minority, she would somehow have a greater opportunity to become admitted to her colleges of choice.

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Latina Friendships

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Many of the students felt generally welcomed at the school by their peers, and the majority of the girls expressed that they had a diverse friend group. There was not one person interviewed who described her core friend group as predominantly White. However, other issues around friends arose.

Latina Friend Groups

Most students indicated that they preferred to maintain friends that were like-minded and/or came from underrepresented backgrounds. Melissa, a senior, addressed this topic directly in her pre-interview reflection questionnaire when she wrote, "I definitely fit in here at St. Wheeler Academy, but one of the things that I've noticed is that I tend to agree more ideologically or have similarities with the students of color than those who are not." She added, "I've realized that the other Latino and African American students specifically have been more

embracing and culturally understanding towards me." Another student, Crystal, shared, "My best friends are black and my friend group is mainly Latinas." She said that this was intentional given that they depended on one another to cope in the predominantly White and economically privileged student body present at the school. While the majority of students could not really pin point the exact reasons they were able to connect better with other Latinas, Diana, a senior, said, "I do not know, we just have a deeper understanding of one another." Crystal referenced that she appreciated going to her lunch table and being able to discuss current issues affecting racial minorities with people who wanted to engage in such conversations. She revealed that some of the questions they asked each other when they experienced cultural appropriation at the school included: "What are they doing? Why are they doing this? Why is cultural appropriation ok?" Along the same lines, when questioned further about why she was able to "better" connect with students of color, Crystal divulged that she appreciated being able to talk about world events including Black Lives Matter and the missing college students in Mexico with like-minded friends. This is perhaps because. as Denise expressed, "Her friends of color have a deeper understanding of one another."

"White-washed" Latinas. After being ridiculed for attending a "White school," Michelle sought to have a diverse friend group because she did not want to "start acting in a White way." She did not want to act or be perceived as acting in a "White way," as this would again negate her Latinidad. To her and another student, Denise, acting in a "White way" meant that they would talk with a certain tone, be interested in certain activities, and be associated with negative "White" connotations including being materialistic, not being aware of socioeconomic differences, and being politically conservative. She was a bicultural student who already

struggled to have her Latina culture and identification recognized and embraced. However, she did disclose that her outside friend group, which consisted mainly of underrepresented ethnic minority females, mocked her about "being White" now. She said that such a classification bothered her and made her feel even more confused about where she "fit in" given that at school she felt more Latina, but when around her elementary/middle school friends she felt much more "White-washed." She ended this conversation by saying, "I guess because of the St. Wheeler Academy culture, we sort of act in a White way." She said that even her Latina mother had described a White tonality in her diction, and the expressions and voice she used. Another student, Diana, expressed feeling that she was more "White washed" at the school. Though she had asked her friends to pronounce her name in Spanish, she had noticed that her White peers and teachers or those who did not speak Spanish felt uncomfortable complying with her request. After noticing the uneasiness, she discontinued asking people to pronounce her name in Spanish even though she would prefer that they do.

Sisterhood

When students were asked about the factors that they enjoyed most about their experiences at St. Wheeler Academy, all alluded to a "sisterhood" existing at the school. When students described such a "sisterhood," they explained that it was not a formalized term per se, but the manner in which the girls described the close-knit community bond they felt with their fellow classmates. The bond was created and associated specifically with gender by placing all students under one umbrella. All students generally felt positively about the sisterhood, noting that the Little Sister/Big Sister program was valuable for connecting with lower- and higher-grade level students. However, interestingly, most Latinas expressed that these partnerships

between big and little sisters were random and not based on any common interest. When asked if they would appreciate being able to request a Latina/o Little Sister, Big Sister especially in the freshman year, four agreed that this would be beneficial especially in the transition to a predominantly White school; however, they also noted that the school would likely not allow this as it could divide the homogenous "sisterhood."

Despite the fact that all participants reported that issues of diversity can sometimes be divisive at St. Wheeler Academy, students did confirm a strong commitment to community as a fully integrated aspect of the school environment. Central to this ideal was the establishment of "sisterhood" in which students felt that they could connect and/or rely on one another. Participants noted that the school valued life-long friendships, and that students expressed feeling very connected to their classmates and felt that their classmates respected and valued them as friends. According to one student: "

> Honestly the sisterhood here is incredible. I definitely have felt that my best friends are like my sisters because we have gotten so close and we can tell each other anything and I know that I can always rely on them if I need help with anything or they can turn to me if they need help with anything.

However, not all students felt this connection and, in fact, some felt that the emphasis on sisterhood may be disconnected from or provide a wedge between them and their Latinidad given the emphasis in Latina culture to family relationships.

Latinas Prioritizing Family

All of the Latina students embraced a perspective that placed family as a priority above friendships, and all talked about choosing to engage with their family on weekends rather than

friends, which is a value that most of their White peers did not comprehend and often mocked. About two-thirds of participants indicated that they did not regard their relationship with friends as their most important relationships, though they felt that the school encouraged this notion. All in all, students revealed that neither their White friends nor their school culturally prioritized families. As evidence, they cited requests for weekend sleepovers or planning institutionally supported retreats where themes often exclusively focused on friendship.

Denise stated, "We [Latinas] obviously pick the family over hanging out with our friends." Other students said that while they felt a sisterhood with their classmates because they attended school in a small community, they did not feel that their classmates fully understood their culture and/or the role it had in their lives. Jessica felt similarly, and said, "Just the small amount of minorities [at St. Wheeler Academy] makes you build a closer bond, and basically just want to find yourself and your identity."

Brittany also expressed feeling disconnected because of the emphasis that the school placed on creating and valuing friendships so highly. She explained that growing up she was taught to place family first and that this has been explained to her as a deep-rooted Mexican value. As a result, she did not necessarily want to spend all of her weekends at her friend's houses or gatherings; nor was she seeking the deep connection with people other than her family, as was emphasized in many of the school-sponsored religious retreats. Because of this concentration, Brittany revealed that she was unable to relate to her classmates or to the school's emphasis on "sisterhood." She said, "I've never valued friendship as much as the school does. There was even a retreat last year about our... relationships with friends and I thought it was

really stupid." Most students did not bring up the sisterhood on the campus unless directly asked about this, though they did allude to enjoying the close community at the school.

Interestingly enough, when speaking about their families, nine students also revealed that they had noticed that many of their parents did not participate much at the school. Seven others also noted that similar to their experience, most of the friends that their parents had at the school were also of minority descent. In fact, Nancy specifically mentioned that her parents were able to associate more with Latina/o parents because they "get" each other. Another student also alluded to the fact that because her father connected culturally with other Latino fathers, they were able to connect on a personal level and "joke around." While half of the students revealed that their parents were not engaged in the school, there was not a student who felt that his or her parents were not welcome by the school, but there were other factors including long work hours and/or not wanting to associate with "rich" parents as reasons that made them not be as involved.

Conversely, student and administrator responses did not align in this arena. Evelyn, a school administrator, revealed that she felt that Latina/o families were welcome at the school; she stated, "We do not differentiate too much between different minority groups at the school [...]. All families are automatically de facto members of the school community [...]. They are all a part of the Parent Guild." She also further suggested that because the last two presidents of the Parent Guild have been of Latina descent, this circumstance presented modeling for other families to become involved. She asserted, "Their leadership sets the tone that any person is encouraged to be involved." It may seem that the school's practice of colorblindness was being validated given that some Latina parents were involved in the school and could possibly encourage others. The administrator's assertions seemed to place the responsibility of getting

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more Latina/o parents involved at the school on other Latina/o parents rather on than the school administration, faculty, and staff.

Bicultural Students

This research sought to interview participants who identified as Latina, but did not disqualify those who were half-Latina. Findings about the perceptions of the cultural school climate for these bicultural students also emerged, including students who never felt that they fully fit in with one ethnicity or the other.

Identifying Latina. Four students cited a resistance by their peers and educators to identify them as Latina given their "ethnically ambiguous" appearance. Veronica, a half-Mexican and half-White student recalled a time when she told a classmate that she was Mexican and her friends responded by saying "What? I don't believe you!" Such interactions made the Latina students feel that people refuse to recognize them despite their personal identification and desire to be considered "Latina."

Carolina, a half-Latina and half-White student confided that some people, including fellow Latina classmates, occasionally did not consider her "Latina enough." She felt this was either related to the notion that students were half White, or because they did not fit the mold of what people considered to be "Latina/o." She later revealed, "Unless, I'm in Miami or with my cousins, no one ever talks about how I'm Cuban." Other bicultural students, especially those who did not speak Spanish, also shared this sentiment.

Besides feeling that she needed to "prove" their Latinidad, Michelle shared that she wanted her teachers and classmates to see her as Latina regardless of her bicultural background. She said, "I've always see myself as Mexican." Further, Michelle explained that people failed to

acknowledge her diverse background given that her last name was from her father's White family, and thus not considered "Latino." Carolina stated, "A person can pick what cultures they want to be…its personal thing, whereas race is not." She used this rationale to validate her desire to embrace her Cuban culture.

Biculturality and White privilege. Despite feeling that their teachers and classmates failed to acknowledge or embrace their Latina heritage, all of the bicultural participants recognized their White privilege, and their ability to "pass" because they did not have a typical Latino last name and/or did not have a darker skin complexion. Students were able to identify such a privilege without prompting. They seemed to be having these conversations with others outside of the school. Michelle admitted that even though much of her extended family lived in predominantly Mexican neighborhoods, her family did not have the same economic struggles as her relations and she was fortunate to attend a school with an abundance of resources. Carolina also stated that she never felt discriminated against by her teachers, or in general, because, as she said, "people predominantly see me as White so I may not even realize [discrimination] because of my privilege."

When these students were further questioned about how they developed a critical perspective to recognize their inherent privilege, two students revealed that their parents engaged in conversations with them frequently about their unique stance. Carolina talked about being part of a community-based program in the local neighborhood that consistently challenged students to understand their perspectives and how they had they been influenced by this social and/or economic standing. Students said that there were no supports or organizations on campus that challenged students' notions of race, class, and privilege.

The Spanish Club

While conducting this research, I consistently questioned students about not only their peer relationships and the presence of Latina/os in their school curriculum, but also the social-cultural support available as Latina students at their school. All students talked about the "Spanish Club," but when asked about the purpose of the club, half of the students seemed unable to articulate its goals and/or mission. According to the school website, the mission of the Spanish Club was as follows:

> *to educate and expose [...] students to the culture of the Spanish-speaking world. The most important aspect of this club is its adherence to the pillars of service, community, and study in educational outreach (both locally in inner-city Los Angeles and abroad in Mexico).*

In terms of club membership, there was a split interest and/or participation in the club by those interviewed. Further, of the 16 students interviewed, only four students were currently members of the Spanish Club. Alyssa said that she decided to join the club because she was very proud to be Latina and wanted to be surrounded as well as connect with other Latinas on campus. All students revealed that they held membership in this club or contemplated joining it at one point because of their ethnic affiliation. However, 12 students interviewed did not currently belong to the club and had some issues with it.

One main issue for the participants was that Latina students who were not Mexican felt that the club had failed to acknowledge within-group differences among Latinas/os and their distinct cultural practices or ideologies. For example, in her pre-interview reflection questions, Alyssa revealed that while the Spanish Club "does embrace Latino pride," she felt the culture

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was "misunderstood and not genuinely valued," because, "girls don't seem to know the differences even within the Latino population." Another student, Jessica, also referenced this in her pre-interview reflection, and specifically focused on the opinion that "[The Spanish Club] bothers me because they seem very stereotypical." She alluded to the notion that the club reinforced stereotypes by focusing on Mexican holidays including Cinco de Mayo and selling Mexican sweet bread as fundraising efforts. Along the same lines, Jessica said that in her three years as a member of the Spanish Club, all she had done was "eat chips and salsa and color-in Dia de Los Muertos and Cinco de Mayo coloring pages."

Twelve students also noted that they wished that the club were more "proactive in addressing Latino issues." More specifically, Nicole hoped that the club would "demonstrate more balance by addressing social injustices confronting Hispanics/Latinos, but also on a more positive note, [show] how awesome it is to be Hispanic." Alyssa, who was part of the club for one year expressed wanting to speak to concerns aside from celebrating culture but she described feeling that that was not encouraged or allowed. Alyssa also talked about being part of the club because she was very proud to be Latina and wanted to be surrounded by this community. Three students specifically joined because they wanted to find a group where they could connect with other Latina students, given the White student majority. They thought that the group would provide familiarity and further extend the community feeling prevalent at the school. Two other students who chose not to be members of this club attributed it to an administrative rule. The rule stated that students were only allowed to belong to two clubs in a year. Such a policy specifically affected two students as they revealed that given that they could only hold membership in two clubs, they decided to pursue other interests. Choosing to leave the Spanish Club seemed an

easy option given that students did not feel that it was relevant to them for several reasons. For one, the overwhelming majority students did not feel that they would benefit from the club because they perceived that the manner in which Latina/o culture was portrayed was stereotypical. Additionally, 10 students felt that they were limited on the information that could be presented. For example, a senior shared that the club would be "put on check," if they became too political and/or talked about "real issues. " Finally, those who abandoned the club also felt that ideologically, having a Spanish Club represented by an "all-White" student board was further evidence of Latina marginalization.

Being Left Behind

In addition to being frustrated about some of the beliefs held by their classmates, and the lack of Latina/o focused curriculum, one third of Latinas felt that "Latinos were being left behind," because the school did not provide Latinas a platform to speak about Latina/o culture and social justice issues to the general school population. Michelle said she would like to replicate the conversation that was had in a dance class about how Latina students were feeling on campus. This was important to her because she hoped to find that other Latina students would reveal that they felt as she had. Another student stated that she would love for the Spanish Club members to engage in a discussion about being bicultural. She stated that while she valued her family and thought the deep commitment to family was a Latina/o value, she often felt a dissonance with the messages she heard at the school. She said these discussions were especially relevant for the school "because we're in an environment that you always have to go for more and reach higher for ourselves."

Perceptions of Catholic Identity

Given the unique teachings of their school's philosophies, students were questioned about the Catholicity of their school. All students associated the Catholic components of their high school experience, primarily with social justice and service to others, and not to spiritual or faith formation per say. Their articulation of "Catholicity" was vague and informed almost exclusive by the outreach experiences at St. Wheeler Academy. The school did have a robust community service program, and the successful Junior and Senior Research Project both focused on social justice endeavors, so the student attraction to these issues was understandable. However, the actual faith-based experience of a Catholic school, the importance of ritual and sacraments of the Catholic faith, was decidedly missing from the students' perspectives about the Catholic identity of the school. Rather, most students appeared to be more "culturally Catholic," and all but one of the students revealed that they had chosen to attend a Catholic high school because they had attended Catholic schools their entire lives. One senior student, Rachel, expressed that she felt that being Catholic was part of her culture. She said, "Being Catholic and being Mexican…they go hand and hand." Many had parents that were practicing Catholics, and most were raised in the Catholic faith and had one or both parents who influenced their faith journey thus far.

Two students alluded to the notion that they felt welcomed by the Sisters who managed the school. One particular student, Crystal, who came from a low-income household with parents who lacked formal schooling and attended the school thanks to a significant financial aid package, revealed that being able to attend a Catholic school provided her "a chance for opportunity," as her home public school did not have the same number of resources. Further, she revealed that she felt the school was a fit because the Sisters were "so open and so kind."

All students were asked about how they experienced the Catholic ideology in their high school education. About three discussed the various pillars that informed the religious order's practice as having a significant influence on their perceptions about the role of Catholicism in their daily and future lives. The pillars, which students mostly identified with included "finding truth," "community," and "service," and "find God in education." In terms of a Catholic education, one student stated that her Catholic school education "gave me a good foundation just as a person, just to be considerate." Further, according to the school administration, "Catholic social teachings are a part of all aspects of school life in both the academic program and co-curricular." Evelyn perceived that those tenants and CST "defines school climate by reinforcing the tenets of the Catholic Church while allowing students to grow spiritually no matter their personal faith tradition."

Additionally, though the school had a Catholic affiliation, the vast majority of students believed that students did not need to be Catholic to attend and/or feel comfortable at the school. Michelle, a junior, stated, "I don't feel pressured to have the same ideologies as Catholic doctrine." Many of the Latina students expressed the same sentiment and most focused on the feeling that being Catholic meant addressing social justice issues. One student specifically referenced that her religion classes all four years had emphasized community work and social justice by "tending to the needs of people in need," which also connected to the teachings of the religious order overseeing the school curriculum and culture.

Administrator Support for Latina Students

All participants talked about feeling supported by the school and the administration. Additionally, Evelyn shared, "Our admissions policy consciously tries to reach a variety of

students of different ethnic backgrounds and we engage students who reflect the local demographics that the girls are accustomed to outside of school," they want to see the interaction and integration of cultural values being more engrained in their daily school practices. However, they also expressed hope that the administration could provide the Spanish Club or another entity or avenue to speak about Latino culture and/or social issues to a larger audience through an assembly or a more significant celebration around Hispanic Heritage Month. Some students who were part of the Spanish Club also revealed feeling that the administration did not want to provide a platform to discuss Latino issues given that for a couple of years Latina students had requested an assembly time and had not been granted such time. One student, who was an active advocate of the creation of the Black Student Union (BSU) at St. Wheeler Academy, said that when this club was approved they were provided an assembly time during Black History Month, which made her question why the Spanish Club had been denied an assembly. Students wanted the administration to not only create and encourage a discussion as well as a celebration forum during Hispanic Heritage Month, but also mandate that all teachers have to address and integrate Latina/o history into all of their curriculums. After interviewing, Ruby, a school administrator, informed me that she had not received any requests to engage in critical discussion surrounding Latina/o issues. She revealed that she welcomed this opportunity given that the schools' approach to "critical thinking as a model automatically makes discussion more sophisticated in its analytical approach to education." Ruby also clarified that she did not have a policy to censor cultural education and that the previous administration did have this reservation, thus perceptions may be from the former approach. Finally, she affirmed a commitment to allowing more cultural groups and education on campus.

When talking to the administration about the possibility of school policies being unsupportive to ethnic minority students, including Latina students at the school, one administrator admitted, "I don't believe that the policies are unsupportive, but I am sure we could better address the needs of certain groups with more focused programs." She also clarified that while various assemblies have presented information about diverse cultural groups, "I am not certain that they are entirely effective."

Question #2: What are the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the cultural school climate for Latina students?

Teachers Interviews

In addition to gaining an understanding of Latina student perceptions about their cultural climate on campus, six teachers were interviewed and completed a pre-interview reflection questionnaire to learn more about their views.

The teachers revealed that though they did not tailor instruction to be sensitive to their Latina students or feel trained to engage in critical teaching/discussions about race and/or ethnicity, overall, all teachers expressed a deep commitment to their students and expressed a desire to continue growing as educators through professional development. Every Latina teacher interviewed also expressed wanting to strive to connect more culturally with Latina students. They hoped to not only help the girls learn about their culture, but also foster their identity development to a certain degree. Interviews, reflection questions, and observations demonstrated that they enjoyed working at an al- female school to serve as positive role models for their students.

Teacher Perceptions About Curriculum

When discussing the cultural relevance of the school curriculum for Latina students, the majority of teachers commended the school's emphasis on teaching students to embrace and learn about distinct cultures as well as various social inequities. However, teachers revealed not altering their curriculum to represent more Latina/o issues. Some shared that they did not know much knowledge about this population. For example, one teacher answered, "I guess I do not feel differently about that question for Latinas versus Caucasian vs. Asian, vs. African American. I do the best I can for all of my students to be successful." There was a significant pattern in teachers feeling that a general approach to all students despite ethnic affiliation was sufficient, though many acknowledged stories that may have suggested otherwise.

Despite the lack of a specific approach or accommodation for Latina students, all teachers did report that they enjoyed the freedom provided by the administration for teachers to create class lesson plans that integrated diverse topics with limited supervision and/or restrictions; teachers felt a kind of "academic freedom." Moreover, though five admitted to not necessarily making specific or targeted plans to meet the needs of their Latina students, they all felt that their administration would support any alternative approach they chose to teaching their curriculum. All six felt the liberty to create culturally appropriate/relevant teachings to connect with their Latina students, though none did. However, one teacher revealed, "I think that we need as an institution to authentically celebrate Latino culture […]. We don't do a good job of celebrating any cultural difference that exist here."

Institutional absence of culturally relatable pedagogy. Teachers were also asked if they felt that they utilized culturally sensitive/relatable practices in their classrooms. Grace revealed that while she felt that incorporating culturally relevant practices in science is not necessarily applicable, she did try to integrate issues of economic equality. For example, in her Advanced Placement Science class, she explored the axiom "Not in my Backyard." She said that this is an idea "that historically things like landfills, things like power plants, things like water treatment plants, were put in neighborhoods that were lower income, because they had less power to fight the system." By teaching about these ideas, she hopes for students to understand that there are social inequities, which happen in many low-income communities. In her pre-interview reflection, Grace revealed that she attempted to meet the cultural needs of her Latina students by assigning a good amount of group work. She explained that since Latinas derive from a collectivist culture, she hoped that assigning a collaborative project would not only be relatable, but also provide her Latina students on avenue to be academically successful.

Unlike Grace, who felt that she could incorporate many social issues into her science course though she did not specifically address issues involving Latinas/os, Bill attested to feeling limited by the Advanced Placement Social Studies curriculum, because "there is set curriculum" that "must be followed." He also expressed enjoying teaching his regular United States History class more than his AP because of the flexibility to tailor his curriculum and not feel that he is in "this crazy intense simultaneous marathon and sprint," to cover all of the material that will be covered in the AP exam. He also revealed that he engaged his regular students in critical discussions about the manner in which information was presented and its accuracy. Due to this more relaxed pace and given the curricular flexibility, Bill felt that he could more easily

incorporate Latina/o issues and not have to adhere to a preset curriculum that did not reflect the Latino experience in a deep and/or deliberate manner.

Bill agreed that Latina/o issues were ignored in American history classes. He said, "There's no way around the fact that it has been overlooked." He also shared that while he did remind students that many Spanish outposts in New Mexico, Santa Fe, and San Augustine were older than Boston by hundreds of years, he did confess that he "has not been great at incorporating the [Latino] stories." He also stated that he reminded his students consistently that his opinions and values were informed by the fact that he is a "White male heterosexual," and said, "Let's not forget that [such a condition] creates a power dynamic on this classroom." To him, it was important to recognize his "immense privileges," because he believed that if he was not "calling them out as they are happening [he] is not just complacent, but actively reinforcing inequities."

Talking about White Privilege

Three faculty members addressed not knowing how to exactly meet the needs of Latina/o students and/or how to effectively talk about White privilege in their classes. Two other teachers believed that faculty needed to engage in significant professional development on culturally relatable and sensitive training. Luz has specifically sought this training from the administration and last year had been allowed to attend a professional development conference called "People of Color Conference;" however, she felt that more faculty members should have been able to attend and that there needed to be ongoing professional development addressing these topics. Grace shared that she did remember participating in a professional development session addressing culture, but that it was about teaching Asian international students and how to meet

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their "English as a second language" needs with various teaching strategies. Additionally, another teacher, Rebecca, said that she had never given much thought to understanding Latina/o issues or inciting discussion because "there doesn't seem to be a dialogue about campus climate or community" at St. Wheeler Academy. This may be due to the fact that all the educators at the school may share in the opinion of one of the school administrators who stated, "I think the Latina students are far more widely accepted and included than the Asian [international] students."

International students. When it came to embracing culturally relevant practices, Colleen expressed a deep commitment to delivering such services. Colleen has been teaching social studies classes to international students, created and maintained for those who had not had exposure to American culture in previous years. Colleen expressed that this minority group on campus benefitted greatly from her culturally relevant course, given that the students spent their "day mixed in, but there here's one place where [they] feel totally safe and comfortable."

Besides focusing on ensuring that her students were comfortable in their classes, Colleen revealed that it was vital that students from another cultural group, including her Asian international students, should apply topics seen in the classroom to current events. She also alluded to the fact that being a Junior Research Project advisor had helped her students connect with their cultures as well. She recalled a specific instance in which a Chinese student who was investigating the Civil Rights Movement sought information about the role of the Chinese population during this time. In her investigation, that Chinese student learned that during that time, "Chinese students were completely shut out of the school system in California." Through the interactions provided by this topic, Colleen herself admitted to a new learning experience not

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only gaining new knowledge, but also learning how to potentially fortify student interests and their own identity development. All in all, through her teaching practices, she tried to eliminate misconceptions by students about the United States or how its history had influenced other countries. She referenced that she has had many students say that class was "really eye opening"; however, it was important to note that this class had as its specific focus assimilating Chinese international students to the American culture of St. Wheeler Academy. It was not a class created to meet the cultural needs of Latina students.

Fostering Latina Catholicity

Yolanda, a faculty member involved with the faith formation of the students, revealed that as a Latina, she is cognizant that many of her Latina students are also Catholic. Given these circumstances, she often hoped that her Latina students, especially those who were a part of the youth ministry team, would want to engage in more cultural activities. However, she reported that this has not happened just yet, even though the school did celebrate the Feast of the Virgin of Guadalupe. She clarified that while she moderated this group, she believed that "the moderator should take the lead from students," and so she never pressed her agenda on them. However, later in her response, she clarified, "As a leader on campus and as an administrator I think it is my role to plant a seed and put it out there." Yolanda believed that it was her responsibility to question and/or probe to help students develop a more critical perspective in their analysis of race relations. She also added, "I also need to get them to buy in…. I'm not going to drive it…because I feel that it should come from them." Later in the conversation, she contemplated, "I wonder would there be an interest from the Latina students to have [a faith sharing] group [specifically] for them because then they could talk about their faith lives." She

expressed that this may be a good option for her Latina students to have a "good space for them to celebrate their cultural heritage and also their excitement for living out their faith" because there is "an intersection for a lot of Latina students in a Catholic school."

Fostering Independent Women

Aside from embracing and/or presenting multiple cultures, every teacher expressed a commitment to helping their female students become confident, as one teacher urged, "getting away from female stereotypes." Grace appreciated the all-girl environment because she felt that students were able "to move away from the typical stereotypes of what girls aren't supposed to do, and aren't supposed to good at." Another teacher, Bill, cited that while he witnessed the girls apologizing a great deal, which is stereotypical female behavior, he had noticed that the all-girl environment had provided the students "a comfort in not having to dress up." He also worried that the girls were spending too many hours trying to be high achievers academically; he explained, "The number of hours that you work and the lack of sleep that you get is sort of like a badge of honor."

In terms of stereotypes, Grace admitted in her pre-interview questionnaire that while she has been told that many Latino families are stereotyped for valuing their boys above their daughters, given that her daughter had many Latina friends, she had come to understand that this may not be a reality. Additionally, while before she did not understand why Latino parents were opposed to sending their Latinas far away to college, she now revealed, "I understand how families might feel that they want to keep their daughters safe." By making this realization, she seemed to understand Latina/o culture better and thus be more able to appropriately service and/or support her Latina students.

Luz, a Latina teacher who revealed that she wished her Latina students were more empowered, stated, "We should focus on what it means to be a successful young woman and focus on young female leadership." In her pre-interview reflection, Colleen shared, "I feel like we try to recognize achievements of women, no matter what their background, rather than those of a particular background." Rebecca provided a different take to this perspective; she felt that the struggle of women of color is distinct from that of White women. She referenced that the leader of the school's Feminist Club "doesn't understand feminism for women of color," and said that teachers provided a "feminism includes all women" kind of approach, which further promoted colorblindness at the school. She also felt that all faculty and especially male teachers needed more training in cultural sensitivity, but also in deconstructing gender norms and ideals. She said that she came to this conclusion because of comments and feedback provided by male research advisors.

School Success

Teachers were questioned about what made their students successful. Four teachers felt that students who were ultimately successful were those who were confident, resilient, or comfortable with who they are, but none alluded to culturally relatable practices in success including the role of family. For example, in her description of a successful student, Evelyn stated, "Students who develop into mature, self-directed women are also considered successful." In this case, self-directed may negate the influence of family. Further, to describe such a student, Yolanda stated that a successful young woman "has a mastery of… different subject areas of her academics but has a sense of who she is." She did question if Latina students were aware of their Latina identity and/or interested in fostering it. In fact, in her pre-interview reflection, Yolanda

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questioned why the Spanish Club or an "institutional vehicle for sharing one's Latina culture exists" was dead. She revealed that when she was a student at the school, she remembered that the Spanish Club promoted Latino culture. In fact, she provided a historical perspective by revealing that the Spanish Club was created by Mexican international students many years ago and that she often felt disconnected from the group as an American-born Latina. After educating me about the history, she questioned, should we "start a Latina faith sharing group if they can't even utilize the club that is already part of the structure?" However, after a moment of reflection she said, "Maybe we need to create a new structure."

Two teachers suggested that successful students at the school were able to identify a strong support system in the school, including strong friendships, which helped make them successful. Many believed that the life-long friendships and sisterhood students created were two of the most important outcomes of a St. Wheeler Academy education. For example, Grace said "I think the most important value at St. Wheeler Academy our is friendships. The kids value friendships over, really anything else." And yet, that was not what all the Latina students reported.

Teacher and Student Interactions/Feedback

The majority of faculty reported that students had an abundance of opportunities to further engage with faculty for academic and/or social enrichment. Colleen specifically noted that the school consistently requested feedback from students by surveying them regarding their course perceptions after the first semester and at the end of the school year. All administrators also requested information and evaluations of student classes and teachers. According to Evelyn, a school administrator, recent alumnae and current students were surveyed "periodically to glean

insight into school climate and general satisfaction with programs." Most recently, responses had shown that "students are most satisfied with the warmth and inclusivity of the community. They feel encouraged to take risks and to challenge themselves beyond their limits." Grace, who revealed having been visited by many college alums over the years, shared that report contributing more to class discussion than their female counterparts who did not attend all-girl schools.

In terms of the research projects, Rebecca, who led these efforts as the Director of Research and part of our noninstructional stuff, but who informed curriculum at the school, acknowledged in her prereflection questionnaire that many of her Latina students appreciated the research project because they could delve into issues of interests. Rebecca said that students "ask questions about where their loyalties should lie, mostly, and I can see how this causes conflict in terms of their social lives or fitting in with the status quo in a majority White school." She further stated, "I don't think we take into consideration our non-international students, who are women of color." To explore issues that consistently addressed identity, Rebecca stated, "Encouraging exploration of Latina identity and issues and topics through research is one thing I can try to do." Having to explore identity when mentoring students in the research projects was not something Rebecca anticipated, but she said she understood why it had surfaced. She explained that anytime students had a choice to write about a passion, such choices would explain and reveal student interests.

Additionally, topics and conversations with Latina students prompted her to think, "Latina students are trying to fit in and are not sure of their place in the school." She especially had seen this conflict between Latinas from lower socioeconomic statuses and those from more

privilege. She had had conversations with students from the former group who stated that wealthier Latina students "lack [an] understanding of what it is "really" like to be Latina. She shared a specific example in which the administration assigned her to work with a Latina student who had come from a public school and was having trouble in English class. Rebecca's responsibility was to help her develop her English skills, yet Rebecca found that this was not really what she needed. In fact, she needed extra time to adjust to a school with much stronger academic rigor. She stated, "I sort of think that those involved assumed that because she was coming from a Spanish speaking household and a public school that she was bound to be unable to manage the work." Rebecca acknowledged that she had the formal training to work with English language learners, but that did not mean that she was "qualified to help a Latina student who does not need language support." She ended this story by saying, "I really don't know what my role should be, could be, in terms of supporting our Latinas." Overall, with the research projects and through her general approach, she invested in students' "inquiry and self-discovery process."

Conclusion

The data collected about Latina students' perceptions of their cultural school revealed that though students felt a great connection to the school and teachers, they also felt the school was failing to meet their distinct needs as Latina students. Student voice provided suggestions as possible solutions to meeting their needs. Teacher participants spoke of their appreciation for their Latina students and their diligence. They also revealed gratitude for the freedom they had over their course curriculum and felt supported by the administration—but many admitted that they did not focus on Latina/o issues and/or felt that they needed further professional

development to effectively and sensitively address Latino/a experiences and culture. An analysis

of the results will be reviewed in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

The data in Chapter 4 provided rich material for discussion about the cultural school climate perceptions of Latina students in a Catholic single-sex high school. To review, the following two research questions were used to determine perceptions of both students and faculty at St. Wheeler Academy:

1. What are the perceptions of Latina students in a Catholic single-sex school regarding their cultural school climate?

2. What are the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding the cultural school climate for Latina students?

Though this study did not seek to replicate the work of Marx (2008), her work was foundational to this study. Interestingly, despite the fact that the students at St. Wheeler Academy lived in a suburban setting—in contrast to the rural setting of Marx's (2008) study— and despite the fact that this study's participants did not have English fluency difficulties, the results of this study regarding Latina/o cultural school climate perceptions were very similar to those of Marx's (2008) work where she interviewed teachers and surveyed mainly first-generation Latina/o students in a rural Utah school. For one, students in both studies did not feel "heard," and/or that their culture was acknowledged at their schools. Additionally, teachers from Marx's (2008) study, similar to this one, admitted that they cared about the general success of all of their students, but did not necessarily alter their curriculum and/or teaching practices to meet the specific cultural needs or foster the cultural values of their Latina/o students.

In this study, the findings suggest that while it is apparent that Latina students believe they are benefiting from the education and the resources provided by the school, their "Latinidad" is not being acknowledged or addressed culturally or pedagogically. Additionally, results demonstrated that ethnic identification and socioeconomic status did impact perceptions of cultural school climate for student and educator participants. Further, while some bicultural students could relate more with the dominant Western ideology present in the school, they, too, felt that their Latina cultural values were not being fortified especially with regard to the role of family. Further, in alignment with Catholic Social Teaching, the school community showed a commitment to social justice, but did not overtly address issues of Latina students or Latinas/os in the United States and/or abroad, or the exploration of resistance of cultural hegemony at any great depth.

This research project was designed and results were evaluated using the intersection of three theoretical frameworks including Latina/o Critical Race Theory, the Cultural Wealth Model and Catholic Social Teaching (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Massaro, 2011; Solórzano &Yosso, 2012; Yosso, 2005). By intersecting these theories, the perceptions of the Latina students and educators with regard to cultural school climate were critically interpreted, to determine the needs of the Latina students at St. Wheeler Academy.

This goal of this chapter is to discuss the results of the research using these theoretical frameworks as a structural schematic to organize the analysis. I have focused on addressing how and if students have been able to develop and adopt the various capitals included in Yosso's (2005) strength-based framework called the Cultural Wealth Model. Structuring the chapter in this manner will present the strengths and cultural assets possessed by Latina students, which

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may or may not have been nurtured by the school. The various components reviewed include familial capital, social capital, aspirational capital, resistance capital, and linguistic capital. Other findings that emerged outside of the frameworks are also addressed. Latina/o Critical Race Theory also served as an umbrella mechanism to highlight the perceptions, resistant actions, and cultural assets of Latina students. This theoretical framework also helped to present the manner in which socioeconomic status manifests and/or influences student perceptions and educational experiences. Further, in my analysis, Latina/o Critical Race Theory served as a liberating discourse, which encouraged me to engage in conversations that addressed social and educational injustice and allowed me to propose solutions to counteract these engrained discriminatory practices (Elenes & Bernal, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). Additionally, use of Latina/o Critical Race theory encouraged me to provide Latinas a platform to "voice" their thoughts while simultaneously resisting the environments that oppress them (Elenes & Bernal, 2010; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001). This was the case at St. Wheeler Academy, where Latina voices in this study were honored and encouraged. Finally, given the institutional frame of Catholicism at St. Wheeler Academy, and the focus on social justice, a Catholic Social Teaching lens was also considered in an analysis of the results. This overall approach provided a comprehensive review of the opinions of Latina students and educators about the school's cultural school climate. I will be addressing each capital according to importance as revealed by participants.

Familial Capital

Latina students at St. Wheeler Academy shared that they had a strong sense of familial capital and carried a solid sense of community and close relationships with their family.

Respecting, supporting, and collaborating with their family members was a highly emphasized and fostered cultural value for these students (Yosso, 2005). However, understanding the role of family and fueling familial capital was an area that the school needed to self-evaluate, as it did not appear that the educators truly understood or intended to understand Latina/o familial values to help students build their familial capital. Such an assertion was clearly supported, as students felt disconnected with the school's strong emphasis on friendships, especially with regard to a grade-level retreat. Having such a mismatch directly contradicted research that shows that Latinas/os generally foster a collectivist environment when they are taught to place familial relationships as a priority, as these close interactions help them become successful and supported in accomplishing goals (Gonzalez et al., 2005; Rodriguez-Brown, 2010; Yosso, 2002).

Family members also served as a strong support system in terms of reaching higher education. Students were very aware of the sacrifices that their parents were making to meet ensure that they would have access to higher education. All parents had specifically sent them to St. Wheeler Academy to provide their children a gateway to higher education. In fact, though only about half of the students interviewed were on financial aid, they all mentioned that they wanted to better themselves for their families. All in all, if the leadership is not aware of familial importance, St. Wheeler Academy cannot expect to build this capital for their Latina students.

A Colorblind Sisterhood

Unlike understanding and embracing the role of family, at St. Wheeler Academy, the school staff generally demonstrated a fair understanding of building community given the importance placed on creating a "sisterhood" or close bond among students regardless of ethnic affiliation. This sisterhood to some degree resonated with Cooper's (2012) research, which found

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that Latina/o students valued their school's community and "family-like" experiences when it mimicked the strong familial bound found in their upbringing. Essentially, there was a direct connection between familial capital and perceptions of sisterhood at the school. The school mission valued the solidarity provided by a sisterhood, which had been very beneficial for the students. All participants expressed that they had created important friendships and felt a part of a larger and united school community. However, nurturing relationships connected to the general school culture did not create the close relationships that Latinas sought. In a way, the colorblind sisterhood being promoted at St. Wheeler Academy could have also been serving to negate the rich diversity at the school. Furthermore, the school practices did not solicit and/or embrace the role of Latina heritage when fostering and emphasizing sisterhood.

Most of the Latina students revealed that though they had acquaintances throughout the school, their closest friends were other students who shared familial and collectivist values. The school did not recognize this need, and operated with a more colorblind approach, denying Latina-focused activities, groups, and relationships. Denying such a focus on Latinas in school activities appeared in revelations where students felt silenced—whether it was denying the screening of a documentary series focused on Latina/o issues or disallowing an assembly to specifically address Latina/o culture. The school could not simply stereotypically celebrate Latina/o culture without providing Latina students a platform to discuss identity, social justice, and other themes associated to Latinas. In essence, all of these activities, which acknowledged ethnic difference and embraced such distinctness, could actually bring the sisterhood at St. Wheeler Academy even closer together as students connected at a social, cultural and academic level.

Being committed to not only challenging social justice issues including colorblindness and a rejection to inform about Whiteness and/or White privilege requires a different commitment than St. Wheeler Academy currently exhibited. By acknowledging students' backgrounds and validating as well as incorporating their experiences into class discussions and educator-student relationships, teachers can help students build their navigational capital to "navigate through society's institutions" (Yosso, 2002, p. 79). Students should never be made to feel that valuing their family and friendships with other students of color is undesirable or is in conflict with the sisterhood philosophy of the school.

Not only was there a lack of understanding of the significance of familial capital, but also, as student interviews revealed, the school potentially resisted building familial capital. This sentiment was apparent when I asked participants if they would like to mentor incoming freshman of color or how they felt about having an option for students to choose to have a self-identified Latina "Little Sister, Big Sister." The students reacted to this as if it would have been a forbidden and/or unsupported practice by the school administration. The students believed that the school administration would believe that my suggestions for Latina support programs would cause a division amongst the student body. They felt this way because this was the response they had heard when they had requested special consideration for attention to Latina issues in school-wide activities.

Additionally, Latinas felt disconnected to their White peers because the Latinas felt that the latter did not understand the cultural importance of family in the Latina/o community. Such a notion made the Latinas feel further disconnected to the "sisterhood." This left the Latina students feeling frustrated and shocked. Latina students did not understand why they were

mocked for preferring to spend time with their family over friends on weekends. In essence, Latina students may have felt that the thing they hold most dear is potentially shaming. Further, unless they have a strong Latinidad that allowed them to disconnect from the dominant culture, this shaming could lead to assimilation, which would destroy their familial capital as well as their cultural pride. Nonetheless, they still believed that the sisterhood at St. Wheeler Academy had another layer for them. They wanted to culturally connect with other students of color, though they knew that the leadership frowned upon this. These Latinas wanted a space that embraced their Latinidad and sought ways to help each other cope with their feelings in relationship to the cultural disconnect within the school environment.

Teacher Relationships as Potential for Familial Capital

While relationships with peers can be problematic for Latina familial capital, Latina student interactions with teachers seemed to be very collaborative and highly personalized. Yet, despite the close relationship with teachers, the data showed that these same teachers might not have had an accurate understanding of Latina/o culture and student needs. There did not seem to be many, if any, specific classroom or cocurricular strategies that considered students' Latina/o cultural needs to inform student familial capital. By understanding the practices that fueled familial capital and included student's home culture in their pedagogy, teachers could get to know their students and their family at a deeper level, which placed them in the position of the learner (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Teachers needed to alter their practices to provide culturally responsive pedagogy that could use the students' cultural assets and home values/traditions (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Further, some teachers demonstrated a superficial understanding of the collectivist perspective. For instance, when asked about what was being done to represent

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Latina/o familism in the classroom, one teacher responded that she knew that Latina students value group work; thus she implemented group work to meet the collectivist need. This minimal consideration seems superficial and essentializing given that there are much deeper forms of incorporating the role of family and relationships in Latina school experiences. Group work is effective pedagogy but it does not necessarily show special consideration for the Latina perspective.

Instead of being encouraged to build familial capital at the school, students received conflicting messages. While the school advocated for sisterhood, and classmates talked about deep friendships, no one in the community focused on the importance of the student's home family. For example, Latina students did not feel that they connected to a retreat focused on the importance of friendship and could not understand why their White classmates mocked them about spending their weekends and free time surrounded by family. Additionally, while teachers believed that students prioritized their friendships over other relationships, Latinas expressed just the opposite opinion. Clearly teachers did not have a true understanding of their Latina students. Teachers made generalizations about students based on the dominant student culture at St. Wheeler Academy without being aware of Latina student priorities. It is the responsibility of the school to understand such diversity in student perception and work toward personally enriching students in a culturally sensitive matter. This is particularly essential because the Latina students expressed feeling very proud about their culture and wanted it represented in their classes and specifically in regards to seeing familial values more embraced by faculty and students.

Further, while the teachers did not have a clear understanding of Latina family needs, nor did the leadership team. Their lack of attention to this issue suggested an absence of

understanding about the role that student success and relationships played in the Latina family's collective values and triumphs. The leadership team had the capacity, power, and responsibility to request that teachers not only understand student needs, but also meet their personal and academic necessities. The leadership emphasis on student individual pursuits and the annual religious retreats focused on friendship did not highlight the role of family and thus ignored important cultural assets of the Latina students.

Family Involvement at St. Wheeler Academy

According to the results from interviews, St. Wheeler Academy was not making a purposeful effort to further engage Latina families in school events. This was a missed opportunity given that Latinas shared that their parents preferred to engage with other Latina/o families and/or other students of color. Many of them also revealed that their families did not either attend many school events or were exclusively involved in activities where Latina/o families were engaged. This clearly demonstrated that these families wanted to connect to one another and form bonds with those who may be culturally similar. Further, Latinas/os embrace personalismo, which refers to building strong interpersonal relationships created with a strong foundation of trust and care (Anthrop-Gonzalez & De Jesus, 2006). Many of the Latina/o parents felt uncomfortable coming to the school because of their minority status, and/or their socioeconomic standing and, for some, language fluency issues. Thus, the findings showed that the school might not have been creating an inviting environment where Latino parents felt welcome and where their home culture would be honored. While an administrator revealed that all families regardless of ethnic background would also fall under the Parent Guild, it may be that a more purposeful recruitment strategy to help these families feel more comfortable was

necessary. These direct strategies are needed as most students revealed that their parents did not feel unwelcome at the school, but did not necessarily feel that they were encouraged to be involved or attend events. If St. Wheeler Academy understood this, and embraced this need, they would develop Latina family support groups, or Latina family activities to help students bond with each other and their each other's families.

Some of the students revealed that their parents did not feel comfortable attending the school events specifically because of their parents' limitations with the language. The school did not publish any of its information and/or parent information newsletters or other materials in Spanish or any other language. In some cases, for parents who were not fluent in English, this placed their daughters in a situation to translate and potentially create a power dynamic in the home as well as further marginalize the parents. Additionally, the school did not currently promote offering culturally competent translators at the school and the administration looked to faculty who spoke another language to translate. Parents needed to have translators not only for language fluency, but who would also understand the cultural challenges and idiosyncrasies that the students and/or the families may be encountering. The notion that there were not active efforts to meet the linguistic needs of some of the Latina students at the school was in essence a social justice issue that needed to be addressed.

Overall, while the families did not necessarily feel excluded from the school community, they did not feel encouraged to participate. Teachers did not reveal any specific considerations and/approaches to working with these families and administrators shared that there were not any purposeful activities to recruit more Latina/o parent participation. It almost seemed that Latina families were not part of that community or "family-like" feel that the school prided itself on

delivering. In essence, St. Wheeler Academy was not appropriately serving their Latina students if their families were not being properly supported at the school.

<div align="center">**Social Capital**</div>

According to Yosso (2005), Latinas/os who possess established social capital have a support network of individuals aside from their family members. When questioned about their favorite aspects of attending St. Wheeler Academy, all participants mentioned the relationships with their teachers as either their first or second most enriching factor. This positive circumstance is essential given that, according to Gonzalez (2013), "research on social capital shows that once Latina/o youth understand what it takes to achieve academic success and social mobility, they will actively seek out institutional agents and form relationships with them that allow them to succeed" (p. 8). Connecting with teachers helps students build a kind of social capital that they could use both while at St. Wheeler Academy, and once they graduate. Furthermore, according to Gonzalez (2013), Liou et al. (2009), Rodriguez-Brown (2010), and Yosso (2005), helping Latina/o students build this capital is especially essential given Latinas/os have not historically had access to various mentors and/or individuals to connect them to educational resources. Overwhelmingly, students felt that their teachers cared about and wanted to connect them. This is especially critical as teachers becoming allies with their students can further student commitment to social justice, which is essential in systems with ingrained discrimination (Kendall, 2006). Furthermore, students classified their relationships with their teachers as the highlight of their school experience. In fact, some students experienced that some of their closest and most enriching relationships were with their teachers at St. Wheeler Academy. Finally, there was not one student who expressed feeling that her teachers did not

believe in them or treated them in a negative manner due to their ethnic identification. This was a very positive circumstance at St. Wheeler Academy, as according to the research of Anthrop-Gonzalez and Carr (2006), the educational success of underrepresented students can be significantly enhanced if the student perceives that he or she is "engaged in a caring relationship with an adult at school" (p.411).

The school also prided itself on providing its students with various forms of social capital to ensure their success including small classes, access to a personalized education, field trips, and connections to great colleges. The students believed that the small class size advantage allowed for a more intimate and personalized educational journey. This was especially apparent when students revealed that they felt comfortable contributing to their class discussions and felt that their teachers encouraged such participation. Marx (2008) found that teachers felt very comfortable relating to their students as "human beings"; yet, their revelations about how they could *not* relate were either directly or indirectly associated to their cultural background. This is exactly what had been happening at St. Wheeler Academy. Students did not experience connections to their cultural heritage, and were not having teachers initiate conversations and/or actions that encouraged the Latinas to seek out these connections. The consciousness raising that might help them more closely identify with their Latinidad that was currently suppressed by a fairly strong adherence to a colorblind philosophy.

Thus, though the data revealed that while the school promoted a certain kind of social capital it did not provide students a concurrent opportunity to develop their own cultural identity. While the school did a great job supporting the development of student-teacher relationships, sending Latina students into the world, and getting them into good colleges as empowered

"women," what was ignored was their cultural identity. Their gender identity was formed and

supported, while their cultural identity languished—there was rarely a conversation at St.

Wheeler Academy about "successful Latina women." Additionally, many of the students

interviewed received some form of financial aid and viewed the school as a great resource and

committed to providing students from lower socioeconomic groups opportunities for a strong

education. However, there was an absence of consciousness regarding cultural power.

Acquiring and maintaining strong social capital allows students to not only understand,

but also gain social mobility and work toward academic success (Gonzalez, 2013). However,

Latinas talked about feeling lucky to have the opportunity for their prestigious education,

attributing their advantage to some indefinable cause, unrelated to human intervention. In

reality, their education at St. Wheeler Academy had little to do with luck, and more to do with

the hard work and sacrifice of parents willing to do what it took to provide for their children, to

give them the social capital that perhaps they did not have. While students expressed feeling

"lucky" to have been admitted to the school, it was apparent that they did not attribute their

successful admission to their parents' hard work, especially for those coming from immigrant

families, who truly valued becoming highly educated.

The Cultural Disconnect

Despite the strong positive relationships that students reported, it is also interesting that

these same students mentioned that they were unable to culturally connect with their teachers and

wished there existed a more diverse faculty. While students were able to socially connect with

their teachers and considered them a part of their social capital network whom they could count

on for academic help, Latina/o students must also connect culturally to their resources outside of

their family members. Furthermore, by acknowledging students' backgrounds and validating as well as incorporating their experiences into class discussions and educator-student relationships, teachers can help students build their social capital and Latina/o students can identify "peer and other social contacts [who] can provide both instrumental and emotional support to navigate through society's institutions" (Yosso, 2002, p. 79).

A social connection/mentorship is not enough for Latina students; in fact, the student interview responses demonstrated that students wanted mentors of color. For example, the student who talked about the cultural appropriation that occurred on Cinco de Mayo was upset that none of her teachers that day told the girls that their behavior was inappropriate and even discriminatory. The same student who came from a public school to St. Wheeler Academy and said that it was the teachers who identified and helped her was the same student who said that it was her teachers who left her feeling alone and culturally unsupported. This student could have benefited from a teacher trained in cultural sensitivity or a Latina faculty member with whom she could feel comfortable revealing such an incident. Her feelings regarding it and this person could have really benefited the student without having her feel misunderstood and/or judged because of her ethnic affiliation. St. Wheeler Academy cannot expect to build student social capital with untrained teachers or based on assumptions about personal circumstances. People in a student's social capital realm should be asset that can help them achieve.

Curriculum Influence on Social Capital

Building social capital represents not only people who support students, but also the actions of such individuals. For example, in a school, a teacher will only be identified as true resource for Latina students if he or she understands and advocates for their students. One way in

which students can identify a teacher as part of their social capital is through curriculum. It is apparent that all teachers at the school need additional training to show a commitment to making their curriculum more culturally relatable for Latinas. Further, this needs to be done in a way in which Latinas feel culturally linked to their school experience. Building such skills on both the part of students and faculty is essential in building student social capital as educator mentoring relationships help Latinas identify individuals who and what are educational resources beyond their family, and who are motivated to uncover issues related to Latinas/os (Yosso, 2005).

Further, in terms of their school curriculum, students did not connect and/or see their cultural values or practices represented. For example, Latinas were only able to identify reading one book by a Latino writer in their sophomore English class and one religion lesson specifically teaching about Latinas in the senior year. The only time that they confidently alluded to Latina/o issues being described in depth and regularly was in their Spanish classes. As a result, if a student were not in a Spanish language class, it is possible that she would have had only two memorable experiences focused on the Latina/o experience in her four-year high school trajectory. Essentially, the data showed that the educators at St. Wheeler Academy did not prioritize Latina culture, history, and traditions in the school curriculum.

All in all, such deficiencies in addressing and teaching about Latina/o traditions, history, and culture demonstrated that Latina students' funds of knowledge were not being fostered. Combating the institutional dismissal of Latina heritage is essential given that embracing and fostering a student's fund of knowledge creates a more successful climate for all students (Moll et al., 1992). Furthermore, fostering funds of knowledge should be a social justice aspiration given that, historically, the experiences of Latina/o students have not been considered valuable to

integrate into the classroom experience (Hurtado et al., 2010). Ultimately, the school needs to incorporate such practices to help Latina/o students engage more meaningfully in their school experience and help them grow in their own understanding and responsibility to their cultural group. In order to provide their Latina students a cultural responsive education that helps them build a diverse social capital, the teachers at St. Wheeler Academy must engage in training to learn how to recognize and incorporate Latina/o culture and information into their pedagogy in order to provide their Latina students a cultural responsive education.

Building Social Capital through Friendships

Social capital acknowledges that others beyond the family can be a resource to students, including neighborhood friends and other diverse relationships (Yosso, 2005). Resources in a students' social capital are comprised not only of adults/educators who deliver services and/or messages, can but also include student peers. Furthermore, Latina students revealed that most of their closest friends were mainly Latinas and/or other students of color at the school. They felt that these students really understood them and their cultural interests, and fostered their social capital network. It is no wonder that students felt that they were able to engage in conversations about racial/ethnic injustice exclusively with their friends of color, as they felt safe with this group. In fact, there was only one participant, who was bicultural, who disclosed that she was part of a White-majority friend group. Furthermore, Latina students did not feel that they were connected at a deep level with their White friends. For example, some students stated that their White friends, who mainly came from economically privileged backgrounds, had clouded perceptions of real word functions since they lacked an understanding of different cultures and the implications of socioeconomic status on social dynamics. They also explained that they felt

that their friends of color could support them in a cultural sense, as they understood student responsibilities to their families and felt that they needed to attain success to help and serve as a model for communities of color in a general sense.

Also, while the Spanish Club could be another area in which their peers could help promote Latina social capital or build Latina networks either within the school, or in the community, according to student responses, it did not serve this purpose. One reason is that while one might assume that students would see Latinas represented in the school's Spanish Club, this was not the case at St. Wheeler Academy. This club did not build or take advantage of Latina social capital, and many students did not feel culturally connected to the members and/or values of the club. Sleeter (2012) stated that to provide Latina/o students with a culturally responsive environment, it is vital that the pedagogy not be reduced to simplifications, including cultural celebrations and trivialization. The Spanish Club moderators did not understand that celebrating and exploring and/or informing about culture were two different things. This could be why students felt so disconnected to the club's approach to teach others about Latina/o culture. Latina students wanted their culture to be experienced beyond celebrations; they wanted to teach others about the injustices occurring within the Latina/o community. In a way, this could be the manner in which they would form a part of the social capital for their peers of other ethnic groups.

In addition, the club could not empower and build student social capital when it could not culturally connect to its members and/or leaders. For one, Latinas revealed that the club's executive board members were mainly White students, which could not send a message that the Spanish Club was a resource for all students. Also, many of the non-Mexican students, including

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those with a Salvadoran and Nicaraguan background, felt marginalized because they expressed that the club negated within-group differences as many expressed that it focused mainly on celebrating Mexican culture in a superficial manner. Aside from these issues, Latinas felt that the club did not represent a safe space for them to talk about their experiences, and suggested that the club failed to educate about social injustices in Latin America and in the United States in regards to Latinos. Overall, Yosso (2001) recommended helping Latina/o students build their social capital to help students seek educational opportunities and fight inequities. Once they have been able to do this, they can use such experiences to aid their own social networks, which is the very essence of having a strong social capital.

Navigational Capital

Yosso (2005) attested that building strong navigational capital is essential in helping students to effectively negotiate and connect with diverse groups of people. Regarding navigational capital, St. Wheeler Academy had not shown a purposeful dedication to connect students and faculty with outside resources to empower Latina students and train teachers to connect with professional development to expand their own navigational capital and to inform their own curriculum and teaching practices.

Students alluded to a colorblindness being encouraged in the school's values and practices. "Colorblindness insures that critical discussions of structural racism do not take place and as a result, this helps maintain structural racial inequality" (Marx, 2008, p. 59). For example, Latinas discussed being excited to engage in classes and interactions that would focus on a non-White perspective, but they did not experience such practices in their curriculum and extracurricular involvement at St. Wheeler Academy. This circumstance, instead of helping

Latina students, actually served to further marginalize them and, in effect, make them feel less connected to their school environment and disempowered Latinas to voice their perceptions and/or thoughts.

Further, Liou et al. (2009) asserted that ethnically underrepresented groups "use their community resources and knowledge to navigate places that often work to deny them important information" (p. 536). This was the case at St. Wheeler Academy. In general, participants believed that they were required to go outside of the school environment and curriculum to learn about Latina/o culture and/or to have conversations regarding White privilege and other critical conversations. One clear example was Rachel, who built her own navigational capital without knowing it by learning about White privilege and its consequences through her involvement in a local community program. There she engaged in conversations about the advantages of affirmative action, the injustices in governmental programs against Latino populations and cultural appropriation, as well as strategies to combat such injustices—mostly topics that had not been addressed in her daily classroom experiences. This experience, which she sought and discovered on her own, showed her commitment to building her own navigational capital, but further emphasized that the students had to go outside of their school to encounter such critical information. Given the homogeneity of the campus, Latinas, specifically, need to acquire navigational capital to learn to resist institutional inequities including those potentially present at their school.

One participant, who was unable to relate to Latina mentors on campus, sought outside connections to navigate being a part of a predominately White campus. Her motivation to seek outside resources closely related to the assertions made by Liou et al. (2009) that "it is important

for educators to note that communities of color employ their navigational capital to counteract institutions that inequitably structure their access to high stakes information" (p. 545). For example, though St. Wheeler Academy might not have been teaching students about these Latina/o circumstances, it was able in some respect to build student navigational capital by assigning all juniors and seniors research projects and advisors. These projects provided Latinas an advantage to an academic freedom to further explore their Latina/o culture. Through one student's research on her junior research project, she was able to further develop her navigational capital as she learned about her potential major in college, Chicano Studies, which she hoped to pursue to learn more about and highlight Latina/o issues present in the United States and abroad. Even though this student had to seek outside sources to learn more about her culture in an academic sense, the school's incorporation and commitment to the scope of the student research projects demonstrated the beginnings of a platform for building a potential navigational capital for students and, more specifically, Latina students.

Students were not the only ones looking to build their navigational capital; this was also a concern for the teachers. One teacher revealed that after being at the school for three years, and advocating to take students to the People of Color conference, she had been unable to obtain funding for this. The school appears reluctant to invest in helping students and/or other staff members to gain the skills to engage in culturally appropriate and sensitive instruction to not only teach about the multicultural landscape, but also to navigate within it. This faculty member had been wanting to not only receive training to address ethnic minority student issues and White privilege in her classes, but also to create cultural connections for and among students. She wanted to help them to learn how to appropriately and effectively approach issues involving

cultural diversity especially in regards to sensitive issues. Further, by attending this conference, not only would educators, but all student attendees learn how to comfortably approach the topics of White privilege as well as understand the distinct "student of color" experience. Given the information shared by the teacher regarding her denied proposals, it can be inferred that such cultural enrichment was not a funding priority at this time, thus sacrificing the enrichment of both student and teacher navigational capital.

Cultural identity development for students is vital for their personal and academic growth. Failure to nurture cultural identity can result in a lack of consciousness about Latinas' cultural power and responsibility. By not providing this necessary information and support for Latinas, the very institution that is committed to helping students' personal and cultural growth is further marginalizing them. Such colorblind practices have subconsciously sent students a message that they are valued as women, students, and Christians, but not as Latinas. While seeking outside resources is not itself a bad practice, it is that students felt they needed to go outside of their school or away from the traditional curriculum to gain a more diverse perspective and, in effect, gain their navigational capital. This highlights the school's failure to meet these Latina needs. Further, the notion that the research director believed that the research projects suggested a need to teach faculty members about White privilege, and class and gender inequities, demonstrated a school-wide deficit in cultural sensitivity training. Because of this and since the school had not identified any faculty at the school who could provide this training, it was essential that the school seek its own outside resources to build its own navigational capital to help students seek and develop their Latina identity and identify other resources to help them effectively negotiate and connect with diverse groups of people.

Aspirational Capital

Aspirational capital refers to a student's ability to remain hopeful that she can overcome obstacles and barriers (Yosso, 2005). At St. Wheeler Academy, while students were provided a strong academic education with plenty of co-curricular opportunities, participants were not specifically nurtured to believe in their potential for high aspirations and future success as Latinas. Further, students at the school were consistently presented with White individuals in successful roles, while most of the exposure to Latinas/os outside of St. Wheeler Academy were from communities in need. Aspirational capital can be fueled for all students, but especially for Latinas/os who have been historically a marginalized population (Zell, 2014). Latinas need to be exposed to people of color in successful positions to feel that such a goal can be attainable for them despite the fact that Latinas/os are underrepresented in high-paying executive careers. Latinas need to see and hear themselves in order to fully develop a healthy sense of self. Having outside exposure to only underserved Latina/o populations can potentially impact student perceptions about their ability to be successful. Zell attested that "aspiration windows reflect the individuals' environmental opportunities and help them envision possibilities for themselves and their future" (p. 9). Students may feel that they their odds for achieving success are lower, or they may feel limited in their career choices due to feelings of responsibility to work in areas that directly improve the conditions of Latina/o populations. Latina/o students may also worry that the exposure to mainly lower socioeconomic Latino populations will make the dominant White population question the ability of Latina students to succeed. Additionally, non-Latino students can develop the stereotyped perspective that most Latinas/os are socioeconomically disadvantaged. This subtle message of disempowerment needs to be re-evaluated.

The Impact of Exposure to Communities in Need

In essence, by having strong aspirational capital, a Latina student should remain hopeful about her future potential regardless of ingrained institutional/educational inequities. Unfortunately, such hope may not remain for many at St. Wheeler Academy given the connection with Latinas/os in the community provided through school-sponsored activities. Latina students revealed that the only connections they had with Latinas/os outside of school were not necessarily with aspirational mentors of color, but with Latino communities in need through participation in various service opportunities. Several of the students alluded to helping a local under-resourced Catholic school through a school-wide Christmas celebration and community service opportunities available through the Spanish Club. Such limitations to these kinds of "charitable" outside interactions, though philanthropic, can further convince Latina/o students about the limitations to their future success.

According to Glenister Roberts (2008), student engagement in service learning can in fact inform student identity, perceptions, and aspirations. Negative aspirational perceptions can impact student confidence in their abilities. Further, to promote aspirational capital, school leadership must consider that, in some cases, their Latina students derive from low socioeconomic communities or have family members who are living in poverty; thus, the school personnel's approach to servicing underserved communities should be delivered in a sensitive manner. This reflection is especially vital given that, according to the students, the school leadership presented a culturally inappropriate generalization that communities of high economic need are extremely disadvantaged and dependent on the donations from members of the school community and others. Because some Latinas at the school might be from these same

communities, they could feel demoralized and/or feel that the school saw them as "charity cases." Further, the data collected showed that the school engaged in charitable activities to expose the general school population, a White majority from economically privileged background, to needy communities. However, such a general approach might not be culturally suitable and/or sensitive for all Latina students.

Despite its areas of growth, St. Wheeler Academy encouraged all young women to defy barriers and enter male-dominated fields, a form of aspirational capital that resonated throughout the data collection process. However, focusing on what it means to be a successful woman is different than what it means to be a prosperous Latina, which was not being addressed at the school. The school did not go beyond its empowerment of gender, which was very apparent in student responses to their confidence in their abilities and future possibilities. Young Latinas need to be able to connect and identify other successful Latinas and/or women of color. They need to be able to understand that they will encounter gender *and* ethnic discrimination often at the same time.

Resistance Capital

The school demonstrated the onset of a strong commitment to ideologically supporting social justice advocacy by providing students avenues to gain knowledge about social injustices and work to combat injustices that, according to Hurtado et al. (2010), form the very essence of this capital. The Catholic mission of the school taught its students to become aware of social injustices and take proactive stands for the downtrodden. However, the results showed that students, instead of resisting, and advocating for their own needs or the needs of the Latina community, demonstrated a subterranean culture of compliance through their lack of resistance

and questioning of social norms. Such a assertion aligns with Dr. Bickett's (2008) findings in her research about compliance in Catholic schools in which she stated,

> Adult leaders have a vested interest in maintaining a community based on compliance when it is congruent with right order because imbedded in this is the de facto acceptance of the philosophy and standards of behavior that the institution is trying to inculcate. (p. 114)

It certainly seems that the adult leaders at St. Wheelers have maintained a "lite" version of addressing social justice issues, not inciting an authentic advocacy that is outside of what is deemed modestly acceptable.

One of the most significant and organized forms of social justice advocacy and resistance capital occurred within religion classes and through the implementation and management of the year-long junior and senior research projects. In these endeavors, Latinas wrote about discrimination and subordination, and were to some degree using the Latina/o Critical Race Theory to evaluate and/or deconstruct their topics. Also, the notion that students were choosing to write about distinct topics that informed their personal ethnic identity demonstrated a need and desire for students to expand and establish resistance capital. For example, students chose to investigate topics not covered in class, including immigration issues, Latina/o access to financial aid and college, factors leading to high percentage Latina/o homelessness, among others. However, developing and teaching a critical perspective was absent from the school curriculum to specifically empower and/or validate Latina cultural interests and/or the experiences of people of color in the United States. In essence, because discussions about Latino issues were absent, students were not able to create their own critical perspective and fortify their approaches to

social injustices. Thus, they had to seek these experiences outside of the set school curriculum and find a research advisor who may help them delve much deeper in these areas.

In order for schools to help with resistance capital, it is essential that students be provided a platform to not only construct their thoughts, but also to feel confident to express their "voice." According to Dixson and Rousseau (2006), providing a voice is seen as "the assertion and acknowledgement of the importance of the personal and community experiences of people of color as sources of knowledge" (p. 35). In this regard, students are able to not only learn, but also advocate to others about the needs of communities of color. Allowing Latinas to voice their interests and concerns contributes to the current trend of expanding the applicability of Critical Race Theory and resistance to the colorblind attitude present at St. Wheeler Academy. The school cannot nurture resistance capital for Latina students and truly manifest a commitment to social justice by simply assigning a project. There must be a more sincere and deliberate critical perspective and avenue for the expression of personal interests and empowerment. The colorblindness that permeated the academic and extracurricular culture at St. Wheeler encouraged compliance and thus did not allow students to voice their opinions and/or foster their resistance capital.

Allowing Latinas to focus on the issues of their own racial/ethnic group allows them to specifically highlight the influences of language and Latina/o traditions on their academic and personal growth. Simply focusing on cultural celebrations separates culture from academic learning, while the trivialization of culture diminishes its importance rather than understanding the culture "as a paradigm for teaching and learning" (Sleeter, 2012, p. 569). By engaging in such superficial methods of cultural engagement, educators essentialize culture, which can be

detrimental to student academic success (Sleeter, 2012) and encourage stereotyping. In fact, St. Wheeler should question its practices to determine whether it is nurturing resistance capital by preparing students of color; in this case, Latina students, to enter higher education and society with a solid foundational understanding of equity issues in relation to education, health, and socioeconomic status.

Many of the Latina participants had gone to a Catholic or religiously affiliated school their whole lives, and they perceived of religion as an aspect of social justice. This can augment their resistance capital to some degree. However, while students identified that social justice was embraced at the school by requiring students to complete Christian service hours, students did not necessarily feel connected or committed to Catholic doctrine specifically, nor did any express interest in religious life. Their definition of Catholicity was narrowly defined through their experiential lens of social justice. Thus the school's commitment to the tenets of Catholic social teaching, specifically the option for the poor and vulnerable was evident.

Thus, students believed that forms of resistance in relationship to Catholic Social Teaching were present at the school. Latinas were taught to fight for social justice, engage in serving others, and critically question social structures. However, though the school was fueling these tenants and simultaneously building resistance capital, by creating a colorblind environment, the school was not purposely engaging Latinas to ensure that they felt included in the dominant White community. This directly influenced the call to solidarity, which encourages all people from distinct backgrounds to acknowledge each other's differences. Solidarity asks for individuals to notice that all people of the world are different, yet they also form a part of humanity, and all humans should be equally cared for (Massaro, 2011). Given that the school

had yet to truly acknowledge and embrace such differences, their intention of fostering solidarity within the mission of the school had not been fully met.

Single-Sex Environment as Resistance

By simply being a single-sex school committed to defying gender stereotypes and barriers, St. Wheeler had successfully helped build student social and resistance capital to some degree. First, students believed that the school's value and practices allowed them to become very confident women. Latinas at St. Wheeler's believed they had been able to develop meaningful relationships with an understanding of their own power as women because of the single-sex environment. However, the Latinas did not express feeling connected with women as Latinas. And, students discussed that this was a type of relationship that they sought to develop.

While the school and mission of the religious order of the school called for advocacy of social justice initiatives, which can be characterized as a kind of resistance to the social order, being resistant at the St. Wheeler was not encouraged. This was apparent in stories that students told regarding cultural appropriation on campus, the denial of Spanish Club assembly time, and the inability to show videos to the community about Latina/o negative experiences in Los Angeles. It was clear that while teachers felt that the school embraced social justice and encouraged students to be open about their beliefs, students expressed being silenced and felt that the school did not value and did not incorporate Latina/o experiences and culture into the classroom. Given such a disconnect in perceptions, it is not surprising that that students did not feel supported in their Latina identity. The school, as represented by the teachers and administrators, believes that that it was teaching resistance by emphasizing social justice as a religious value, but it was not enough for their Latina students.

The school had significant resources already present, including attentive teachers, research opportunities, and great educational resources, which would help students increase their resistance capital. Yet, there was a need for a more deliberate attempt to encourage students to question societal norms and other actions that further marginalize Latinas/os.

Linguistic Capital

Linguistic capital refers to the various language and communication skills students bring with them to school environment (Yosso, 2005). Latina/o students also possessed linguistic capital as they used their second languages to explain their situations and cultural experiences (Elenes & Bernal, 2010; Hurtado et al., 2010). The presence of linguistic capital was more apparent in student responses than in teacher interviews, as Latina students described the influence of the inclusion or exclusion of speaking Spanish in their school experience. Some shared that they loved to speak in Spanish to their fellow Latinas or felt that their Latina peers "got them." This assertion was apparent, as Latinas felt that they had a better understanding of one another culturally and linguistically. Latinas referenced enjoying their Spanish classes because they were able to learn a great deal about Latina culture in a form that did not essentialize it. Latina students taking a Spanish class gained a strong sense of knowledge and pride through this learning experience, in essence, building their linguistic capital on a regular basis. However, outside of this safe space, Latinas received conflicting messages from the general student body. White students at the school had mocked the Spanish language by over expressing a Spanish accent, and not having an educator or another student correct such an action meant not holding student linguistic capital to a high priority and further silencing Latina students.

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The role of the Spanish language for bicultural students was different than their Latina counterparts. Students who did not fluently speak the language, felt that they were "not Latina enough." Latina students seemed to judge each other, especially against Latina students who did not have strong Spanish skills. One student in particular described a student who did not speak the language as "White washed." This negative feeling demonstrated to some degree that these students might feel that they have a lower linguistic capital because of their lack of proficiency. Regardless of fluency, however, it was apparent that Latina students could not talk about the influence of the Spanish language, as they did not have a space and/or opportunity to engage in conversations about their Latinidad and how the language could influence it. In fact, even in the Spanish Club, students did not feel that they had a space to communicate their experiences and/or interests with one another in what some of Latina students considered their native language.

Given its diverse applicability, linguistic capital does not only refer to the use of a foreign language, but also the language utilized in the school to promote or negate inclusiveness for Latinas. The lack of Latina/o representation in the curriculum sent a message to students that their experience was not sought and/or valued as distinct. In the case of St. Wheeler Academy, Latina linguistic capital was not fostered, as students were not being taught or empowered as Latinas by hearing in their classes about issues and/or cultural norms pertaining to them. The lack of such capital demonstrated that the student voice and/or experience was not valued and/or encouraged and in fact led to further silencing. For example, Latina students should always be questioned about how they would like their name pronounced. Not encouraging such linguistic actions, further demonstrated that the school leadership did not understand the importance of

linguistic voice. Further, students identified that most of their classes focused on either Black and/or White issues and rarely alluded to a Latina/o influence. By refusing to build linguistic capital, St. Wheeler Academy failed to breed a language of inclusivity in which students felt that they and their distinct experiences were valued.

<div align="center">**Recommendations**</div>

St. Wheeler Academy was a nurturing and caring institution and had overwhelmingly demonstrated strong educator/student relationships. However, based on the interviews, reflection questions, and observations, teachers and administrators lacked a critical perspective regarding the implications of cultural climate on student perceptions. For example, the school faculty and administration did not understand, were unable, or did not see the need to empower the students as Latina women specifically. Further, according to Hinde (2004), "School culture develops as staff members interact with each other, the students, and the and the community. It becomes the guide for behavior that is shared among members of the school at large" (p. 2). Fundamentally, the faculty and administration have a great deal to learn about Latina/o culture and understanding to sensitively incorporate culturally appropriate considerations into the school's practices including curriculum. A greater sensitivity to the school's cultural climate and the need for inclusivity while rejecting a deficit view perspective is also significantly lacking.

To begin this process, it is recommended that St. Wheeler Academy develop a plan for teacher and staff cultural enrichment by evaluating class/club/program curriculums and extracurricular practices. Such a feat can be accomplished through various professional development sessions in which speakers can teach about the impact of cultural climate and how it can impact student perceptions. Further, it is advised that the school not only consider cultural

climate as influencing the social development of students, but also recognize the academic development implications for students by conducting a full curriculum review. By becoming the "student," in various professional development sessions, teachers can learn to recognize cultural resources that students bring from their ethnic group and home culture and simultaneously learn to appropriately include and encourage their use in their daily educational practices (Gonzalez et al., 2005).

Learning about student home culture and incorporating it into the classroom can help foster inclusive practices but also empower students of color. Furthermore, according to Genzuk (1999), by learning more about student ethnic groups and cultural values, educators can learn to use students' ethnic group characteristics and home culture components to integrate student funds of knowledge into their classroom experiences and comprehensive school experiences. Analysis of the curriculum essentially includes "analyzing the contents and methods of typical school lessons" (Genzuk, 1999, p.11). With this approach, teachers will understand that their lessons are not meeting the needs of their Latina students nor are they relatable to this group. As a response, there will be need for not only analyzing but also "developing instructional units that use the content and methods of home knowledge to inform the content and methods of school learning" (Genzuk, 1999, p.11).

In terms of meeting the need for a more culturally sensitive and appropriate curriculum, it will be essential that the administration take a firm stand on not only enforcing, but also mandating that, in the areas in which Latina/o history and/or issues are reviewed, students are being presented a fair and balanced view, and not a negative or deficit view. Stereotypes and microaggressions must also be avoided, and social injustices that have and are occurring for

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Latinas/os and other people of color both historically and contemporarily should also be addressed. This also applies to the manner in which service and/or charity as well as the notion of sisterhood and the advantages of diversity are being represented at the school. Students must see and engage with more populations outside of the Latina/o realm. Faculty who are unwilling to challenge these norms are simply advocating for assimilation and, as a result, affecting Latina student behavioral and emotional classroom engagement (Thapa, 2013).

Though the Latinas at St. Wheeler Academy were mainly born in the United States and have thus been raised with Western ideals, they should be afforded the same deference given to Asian international students at the school site by having teachers alter the curriculum and/or the manner in which it is presented. However, the school needs to understand that this does not mean separating Latina students, but incorporating and embracing them and their cultural values into the classes and the general school culture. Making special cultural considerations is essential to helping students feel that they are a part of the school community. The notion that teachers have the resources to meet the needs of all students and assure their success regardless of their ethnicity is irresponsible, as their own positionality and cultural traits can affect their teaching strategies. Instead of continuing to engage in standard practices, St. Wheeler Academy teachers need to answer the call of scholarly data, which has shown a need for Latina/o students to establish allies at the schools with adults who not only want to learn about Latina/o culture, but also want to integrate such values and customs into the school's practices and functions.

Through this study, it was quite apparent that teachers did not feel adequately prepared about Latina/o culture or Latina/o issues in general or how to approach them with a critical perspective lens. Though teachers appreciated the flexibility in building their class curriculum,

they were not actively incorporating Latina/o issues, values including familism, and/or accommodations. Two teachers who taught an Advanced Placement curriculum felt limited in being able to change and/or enhance the class material. However, this finding can actually be indicative that the AP curriculum itself is not valuing and incorporating or presenting diverse topics in a critical manner. It is essential that all members of the school community understand and be reactive to the plight of the Latina/o student. Additionally, there is only one club dedicated to speaking about Latina culture and social justice issues, and Latina students believed that this club further essentialized their culture by reducing it to Mexican sweet bread and cultural celebrations while disregarding and/or not encouraging the presentation of Latina/o discriminatory practices and other challenges. It will be necessary to also analyze if the club moderators are equipped to confront Latina/o issues and foster the ethnic identity development of their Latina students. Further, students who have a passion for Latina social justice issues should not be coined as too radical and instead they should be guided in how to present their views and understanding of the world in a respectful but effective manner.

Besides in academic curriculum, St. Wheeler Academy educators also seemed to fail to specifically recognize and/or value their students as Latinas, not just students or women. In order to do this, it will be necessary for the school, which focuses on women's empowerment in all facets of its practices, to determine which ways they are promoting "white" feminism and the manner in which the experiences of women of color and feminism interact. By addressing this phenomenon, Latina students can feel that their school is teaching Western ideals of feminism, but also acknowledging that the experiences and opportunities for all women are not equal and the role that collectivism plays in the feminism of women of color. Additionally, White students

and those of other diverse groups might also learn about the differences, thus enriching their knowledge simultaneously. Further, a raised consciousness and pointed effort to make sure that all cultures are represented in leadership positions at the school is necessary.

Importance of Student Voice

In order to reach such a conversion and lead to a cultural shift on campus, St. Wheeler Academy must encourage student voice among not only all students, but also students of color specifically (Aguilar, 2013; Darder, 2012; Mitra, 2008). According to Toshalis and Nakkula (2012), "Student voice activities stand out for their undeniable utility in orienting educators toward customized practices that meet specific students' needs" (p. 31). Further, it may be that the administration will need to encourage Latinas to address their own identity and/or present on Latina/o social justice issues within the Spanish Club or create another avenue. Such a notion is further supported by the fact that "using student voice to direct at least some of the activity in schools may require educators, administrators, and policymakers to advocate for a reform agenda that challenges current standardizing practices" (Toshalis & Nakkula, 2012, p. 31). One such idea will be creating a safe space for Latinas in which their culture is not only celebrated, but a place in which they can discuss their experiences as women of color at their school and in society in general.

However, before acting, there might need to be some time dedicated to contemplation in which the school learns more about its students' perspective and perceptions. It is vital that student voice be solicited and encouraged. My recommendation would be that the school administration and faculty utilizes the resources provided by the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) to not only understand the needs of Latinas, and also students of

color, but also engage in practices to facilitate and meet such challenges. More specifically, it is suggested that the school participate in providing the Assessment in Inclusivity and Multiculturalism provided by the organization. According to the school's website, this assessment seeks to "provide schools with a deep understanding of the climate of inclusion on their campuses, from current and past students to teachers, administrators, and trustees." By gaining understanding of the perceptions of multiple parties, the school can "convert thoughts, ideas, and assumed best practices into benchmarked numbers for real goal setting." Learning about student perceptions can help teachers in their reflection regarding their daily instructional practices and interactions with students. Engaging in this analysis can help not only teachers develop a critical perspective, but also allow Latina students and opportunity for student voice and self advocacy.

People of Color Conference

Hand in hand with learning about student reactions and experiences, it is vital that the faculty and the students are able to engage in critical conversations about race, ethnicity, and cultural influence in general. For further professional development, I advocate that the school commit to sending not only teachers, but also a diverse range of students to the People of Color Conference also hosted by NAIS. According to the People of Color Conference Website, this conference is "designed for people of color as it relates to their roles in independent schools […]. Its focus should be on providing a sanctuary and networking opportunity for people of color and allies in independent schools as we build and sustain inclusive school communities." Participating in critical conversations and teaching involves speaking about White privilege, social and economic inequalities as well as the rejection of colorblindness and assimilative

practices. Through this conference, teachers can learn about how to sensitively and confidently discuss such issues and cultural values in class and extracurricular activities without ostracizing any students. Similarly, students, both White and those of color can become empowered to address issues of discrimination and White privilege and strategize solutions to question and respond to such challenges. This could benefit the entire school community to engage in conversations about better meeting the needs of students of color as well as better presenting them to the general school population.

In essence, the findings of this research show that there is a need to develop and maintain a cultural shift of consciousness at the school, but also highlights an analysis that should be done at all independent schools in the country, especially those with similar demographics. Additionally, there is a need to resist colorblindness as it further marginalizes students and negates their funds of knowledge and home culture (Marx, 2008). After analyzing student perceptions, it is apparent that having Latinas proudly represented on campus is important and good for all student development. It is hoped that through this research, the school administration acknowledges the perceptions of students and understands that they may not be aware of how students actually feel at the school. In essence, school staff might perceive that they are readily and respectfully meeting the needs of their students and embracing their diverse cultures; however, students may not have the same perception (Marx, 2008; Thapa et al., 2013; Yosso, 2002).

Principally, by analyzing themselves as faculty and staff and their curriculum, while soliciting student perceptions, St. Wheeler Academy can send a clear message not only in words, but also in actions that there is a comprehensive effort as well as willingness to reject the

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assimilation of their Latina students. Adopting and manifesting the mentioned recommendations can help foster Latina cultural values and their overall development while potentially improving their perceptions of their cultural school climate at the school. In essence, all educators at St. Wheeler Academy must acknowledge and react to the fact that "the struggle for equity in education for Latinas/os has not ended" (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010, p.40). All in all, Latinas should never feel that they must sacrifice and/or "turn off" their culturally influenced values, practices, and/or perceptions to fit in and or show deference to the cultural climate at their school.

Need for Change at Larger Scale

Changes also need to be made to affect larger systems including archdiocesan-wide coed, and single-sex schools. For example, the archdiocese can help educators more widely diversify and apply Catholic social teaching to deeper social justice topics. Additionally, eradicating colorblindness from Catholic schools by mandating not only that diversity be embraced but also that the teachers are trained, and the curriculum is integrated to reflect this shift. Furthermore, the archdiocese should discourage celebrating superficial and/or stereotypical holidays including Cinco de Mayo. In essence, all Catholic schools should come to understand that they must make their communities more inclusive of all Latina/o students at every level. Additionally, in general, same-sex schools need to reevaluate if they are presenting feminism to their students through an exclusively White lens. This is especially critical as while the school may be empowering students as "women," their lack of cultural recognition and integration may mean that the school may not be as effective in creating confident young women as they originally believed. Finally, given that many independent schools are not as ethnically diverse as many public and Catholic

schools are, this research can help these places initiate their own investigations and potentially seek and create resources for schools in conjunction with the National Association of Independent Schools and the People of Color Conference.

Future Studies

It is important to remember that in their work, Davila and Aviles de Bradley's (2010) showed that the "the struggle for equity in education for Latinas/os has not ended" (p. 40). Such an assertion proved a reality in the findings of this dissertation as student voice truly underscored a problem in the cultural school climate and school context, and which could likely be extended to other school sites. Following this study, the hope is that the school will now be aware of its Latina student perceptions, and several future studies would be profitable. Engaging in a curriculum review at schools to truly decipher if teaching strategies and curriculums are culturally relatable and sensitive to diverse needs would be a profitable multischool study. In fact, a study that focuses more fully on the experiences of Latina students and connects it to socioeconomic class would also provide great insight and complementary information about other factors, which could affect student perceptions.

Additionally, given that this study was limited to one school site and only 24 interviews, future studies can also be conducted using multiple school sites and further soliciting student voice by interviewing more students and students from other ethnic minority groups. Further, other studies could examine various curriculums and interview students to see what strategies have worked when instructing this particular population. By completing such a research project, a comparison can be drawn between schools that are performing well with meeting and/or

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enriching the cultural needs/values of their Latina/o students versus those that require improvement.

It may be beneficial to do a comparison to other independent and/or Catholic schools who have full- time Diversity Coordinators at the school site to inform all diversity efforts at the schools, as these sites may be delivering culturally appropriate practices beyond an academic sense. In general, the study could and should be performed at other school types including public, charter, Catholic, private, and independent schools with diverse student ethnic demographics. It would also be interesting to examine whether Latina/o college students feel that their voices are heard and if they feel that their college campuses embrace, encourage, and foster their Latinidad. The results of this study can lead to networking among the various school locations to engage in professional development to better serve Latina/o students.

Reflection

When I first started this research, I wanted to engage in conversation with the Latinas at my school. As a first generation Latina, I wondered if they experienced discrimination and/or identity issues attending a predominantly White and economically privileged school. I knew that I had grappled with this type of environment and the confidence issues it brought me, but this was not until I was plucked out of my Latino neighborhood into my very White college. I often wondered if they felt as I had in this new environment that is primarily White regardless of their socioeconomic status. My wonder led me to seek a doctoral degree and engage in a three-year effort to craft, investigate, and engage in this research. I ultimately wanted to convert anecdotal stories often told between my other Latina/o friends and my students regarding the cultural

mismatch at schools, often comical, to validated and respected academic findings. Ultimately, I wholeheartedly desired to document *our* stories and perceptions.

I did not only want to learn about their perceptions regarding their cultural school climate, but also sought to learn more and connect with the girls with whom I shared cultural similarities. Learning the results of how marginalized students were feeling at the school and reading various scholarly research articles that validated Latina/o culture in general and in education influenced me not only in a personal regard, but also as a scholar. While this first started as a personal interest, I came to understand the greater need for such issues to arise at the high school level as they impact academic and personal achievement. After completing this study, I am even more committed to holding my school as well as other independent schools, and eventually school districts, accountable for giving our Latinas a space to talk about their feelings, but also encouraging them to advocate for a culturally relevant curriculum. In order to insure that my goal is not simply present at the private schools, but also within all schools in the American educational system, I hope to continue in this struggle and spread this message.

Appendix A
Student Interview Questions

Liking the School:

1) Why did you choose to attend your Catholic high school? (Yosso's Aspirational Capital)

2) What are the typical characteristics of a student at your school and climate? (Yosso's Social Capital)

3) What do you like best about your school? (Yosso's Social Capital)

Educator-Student Relationships:

1) Do teachers at your school embrace/include your Latina/o culture in the classroom? If so, how do they do this? (Yosso's Aspirational capital)

2) How do your teachers embrace the Catholic mission of the school? (Yosso's Resistance Capital)

3) Do you feel comfortable challenging your teachers and/or not agreeing with their views? (Yosso's Resistance Capital)

Culturally Responsive/Relevant Teaching:

1) In what ways do you see yourself, your family, your background represented in the classroom? What about in student activities? Curriculum? (Yosso's Familial Capital; Resistance Capital)

2) Does the school create an environment that invites minority families to participate and become engaged in the school community? If so, how? If not, what suggestions would you provide? (Yosso's Familial Capital)

3) Describe an instance in which you may have been disappointed with the manner in which a teacher dealt with a situation? A situation when you were pleased? (Yosso's Navigational Capital)

School Success:

1) You self-identified as Latina, what aspects of your culture do you most identify with? (Yosso's Resistance Capital)

2) Does your school environment allow you to connect with your own cultural group or empower you as a young Latina? (Yosso's Resistance Capital)

3) What could the school do to help you grow in your identity?

4) Describe one person at the school who has helped you believe that you will be successful in college and in life? What did they do for you to have this perception? (Yosso's Social and Navigational Capital; Yosso's Aspirational Capital)

Appendix B
Administrator Interview Questions

Liking the School:

1) What are the characteristics of a successful student at your school? (Yosso's Social Capital)

2) How do you learn about student school climate perceptions? What are students most satisfied with? What have they revealed wanting to change? (Yosso's Navigational and Resistance Capital.

3) How is the Catholic faith cemented school curricular teaching? In which ways does it define the school climate? (Yosso's Social Capital)

Educator-Student Relationships:

1) How do you create environments that invite minority families to participate and become engaged in the school community and/or in your classroom? (Yosso's Familial Capital)

2) How do we help your Latina students navigate their school and their interactions with teachers, peers and counselors? (Yosso's Navigational Capital)

Culturally Responsive/Relevant Teaching:

1) How do you honor different cultural customs and values in your class curriculum or discussions? How does the school engage in this process? (Yosso's Familial Capital)

2) Is there any way in which school policies may be unsupportive to students from ethnic minority groups? (Yosso's Navigational Capital)

3) Do you feel that Latina/o students fit in well with students of other cultural and language backgrounds at your school? What events and/or encounters have led to your conclusion? (Yosso's Social Capital)

School Success:

1) What opportunities do you provide students in and outside of the classroom to prepare them for participation in a diverse democracy? (Yosso's Resistance Capital)

2) How does attending an all-girl school help students achieve school and personal success? (Yosso's Navigational Capital)

Appendix C
Teacher Interview Questions

Liking the School:

1) What are the characteristics of a successful student at your school? (Yosso's Social Capital)

2) How do you learn about student school climate perceptions? What are students most satisfied with? What have they revealed wanting to change? (Yosso's Navigational and Resistance Capital)

3) How is the Catholic faith cemented in your teaching? In which ways does it define the school and or your classroom climate? (Yosso's Social Capital)

Educator-Student Relationships:

1) How do you create environments that invite minority families to participate and become engaged in the school community and/or in your classroom? (Yosso's Familial Capital)

2) How do we help your Latina students navigate their school and their interactions with teachers, peers and counselors? (Yosso's Navigational Capital)

3) What role does social justice play in the creating of educator-student relationships especially in regards to first generation students or students from economically underprivileged backgrounds? (Yosso's Navigational and Resistance Capital)

Culturally Responsive/Relevant Teaching:

1) How do you honor different cultural customs and values in your class curriculum or discussions? How does the school engage in this process? (Yosso's Familial Capital)

2) Do you encourage students to disclose when they disagree with your opinions or the manner in which curriculum is being presented? (Yosso's Navigational and Resistance Capital)

3) Is there any way in which school policies may be unsupportive to students from ethnic minority groups? (Yosso's Navigational Capital)

School Success:

1) What opportunities do you provide students in and outside of the classroom to prepare them for participation in a diverse democracy? (Yosso's Resistance Capital)

2) How does attending an all-girl school help students achieve school and personal success? (Yosso's Navigational Capital)

3) How does attending a Catholic school help students achieve school and personal success? (Yosso's Social Capital)

Appendix D
Student Pre-Interview Reflective Questions

<u>***Instructions:***</u>

Please answer the following questions on a Word document and submit via email 24 hours prior to your scheduled interview. Answer all questions based on your perceptions and/or experiences. Your responses will be confidential. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me, Candy Navarro via email to Navarro.candy@gmail.com, by phone to 626-685-8308 or by visiting her office personally between 8:00am-3:30pm (Monday-Friday).

Part 1

I am 16/17/18 years old.

I am in _____ grade. (Circle one)

My ethnic background(s) is(are): White / African American or Black / Native American / Latina or Hispanic / Polynesian / African / Other (Underline your response(s))

I do / do not speak a language other than English. (Underline the response that applies)

The language I speak besides English is _____

Part II

1. Do you fit in well with students of other cultural and language backgrounds at your school? What events and/or encounters have led to your conclusion?

2. Do your teachers seem to understand you? Do they relate to you? How so?

3. Do you think that an important part of succeeding in school is blending into American culture? Why or why not?

4. Are you confident that you are doing what it takes to succeed in school? Why or why not?

Appendix E
Teacher Pre-Interview Reflective Questions

<u>*Instructions:*</u>

Please answer the following questions on a Word document and submit via email 24 hours prior to your scheduled interview. Answer all questions based on your perceptions and/or experiences. Your responses will be confidential. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me, Candy Navarro via email to Navarro.candy@gmail.com, by phone to 626-685-8308 or by visiting her office personally between 8am-3: 30pm (Monday-Friday).

<u>*Part 1*</u>

My ethnic background(s) is(are): White / African American or Black / Native American / Latina or Hispanic / Polynesian / African / Other (Underline your response(s))

I do / do not speak a language other than English. (Underline the response that applies)

The language I speak besides English is _____

<u>*Part II*</u>

1. Do you feel that Latina/o students fit in well with students of other cultural and language backgrounds at your school? What events and/or encounters have led to your conclusion?

2. Do you feel prepared to help your Latina students succeed in school? Why or why not?

3. Do you think that an important part of succeeding in school is for Latina/o students to blend into American culture? Why or why not?

4. Are you confident that you are doing what it takes to help your Latina students succeed in school? Why or why not?

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