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Breaking Stereotypes by Obtaining a Higher Education: Latinas' Family Values and Tradition on the School Institution

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Table of Contents | McNair Scholars 2010

6	Princess Braxton–Davis <i>The Social Psychology of Love and Attraction</i> Faculty Mentor: Cheryl Boudreaux, Ph.D.
13	Joi Dupler <i>Exploring Men’s Intimate Relationships (with Feminism): Another Side of Feminist Consciousness</i> Faculty Mentors: Rachel Campbell, Ph.D. & Danielle DeMuth, Ph.D.
23	Andrea Gómez Cervantes <i>Breaking Stereotypes by Obtaining a Higher Education: Latinas’ Family Values and Traditions on the School Institution</i> Faculty Mentor: Lisa Hickman, Ph.D.
55	Nathaniel J. Hansen <i>The Geomorphic Settings of Known Archaeological Sites in the Lower Grand River Valley, Ottawa County, Michigan</i> Faculty Mentor: Patrick M. Colgan, Ph.D.
63	Erin Harshberger <i>Kappa Opioid Regulation of Stress-Related Behavior</i> Faculty Mentor: Glenn Valdez, Ph.D.
68	Chelsea Sage <i>Group and Individual Performance on a Creativity Task: The Constraining Effects of Examples</i> Faculty Mentor: Christine Smith, Ph.D.
72	Aaron Schutza <i>Transmission of Quantum Information via Laguerre Gaussian Modes</i> Faculty Mentor: Dr. Richard Vallery, Ph.D.
85	Kraig S. Shattuck <i>Developing Evolutionary–Based Domain–Specific Loyalty Scales</i> Faculty Mentor: Robert O. Deaner, Ph.D.
97	Lisa Shattuck <i>Teaching Play Activities to Children with Autism Comparing Adult and Peer Models</i> Faculty Mentor: Jamie Owen–DeSchryver, Ph.D.
105	Jordan B. Sparks <i>Applying Anthropology to Water Quality Assessment: An Investigation of pH and Nitrates in Drinking Water</i> Faculty Mentors: Elizabeth Arnold, Ph.D. & Heather Van Wormer, Ph.D.
111	About TRiO Programs

Breaking Stereotypes by Obtaining a Higher Education: Latinas' Family Values and Traditions on the School Institution



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Abstract

Higher education is a way to be able to reach the American Dream and help pursue a professional career. The American Dream is a common ideology in the Latino community. Low wage labor in the United States was a way to obtain that American Dream. Today, further generations, immigrant, and nonimmigrant Latinos continue to live the American Dream. A way to reach this goal may be through higher education, which in many cases opens doors of opportunities to better individuals' futures. Education is almost a necessity in the United States, especially to help climb the social ladder. The family may have a large impact on how education is viewed and valued depending on the different values and traditions of that family. As a result, the family may impact decisions made about higher education.

Education and the family are two basic components to an individual's life in the United States, just like in many other countries. Education serves individuals as a way to obtain social mobility and a way to improve their social location. This may be noticed in the skills gained through higher education that may lead to professional careers. In the United States, diverse skills and knowledge may be differentially valued. The skills and knowledge that are highly valued in our society may be gained by obtaining a college education. Higher education reaps social and financial rewards to individuals. As a result, decisions to obtain a higher education or not have strong linkages to later social outcomes.

The family serves individuals by helping shape their personality, goals, and dreams through values and traditions. Values and traditions learned from the family may help mold individuals' decisions regarding their future plans. Different roles of who we are and what we are supposed to be are learned primarily from the family. Similar to education, family is able to structure our future, sharing values and traditions that are differently regarded by society. These values and traditions may guide some individuals towards obtaining a higher education while they may also lead others down a different path.

The current research focuses on adolescent Latinas and their experiences in their families and educational experiences. The purpose of this research is not to make a racial or color distinction; most minorities are often part of the lower socioeconomic status, which may entail that they share similar values and traditions. Families' values and traditions may be similar; the different roles played in the home and by friends may also be similar. It is a possibility that Latino values and traditions are a reflection of social class location. It is also a possibility that these values and traditions may be specific to their culture as Latinos. It is this second possibility that I wish to explore. Research in the past (Gloria, Castellanos and Orozco 2005; Aleman and Aleman 2010; Coleman, Ganong, and Rothraugg 2007; LeCroy and Krysik 2009) has focused on values and traditions that Latino/as may share and the barriers that some Latino/as encounter to obtain a higher education. To better understand the Latina experience in higher education, I instead focus on the particular values, practices, and policies that may be affecting specifically Latina students on obtaining a higher education. Emphasis will also be placed on the avenues of opportunities young Latinas encounter to obtain a higher education.

In this paper I concentrate on two main research questions. First, How do family values and traditions affect eighteen to nineteen year old Latinas' decision-making process of going or not going to college?, and second, How does the school as an institution affect Latinas' decision-making process of college enrollment? Theoretical frameworks of Cultural and Social Capital, Symbolic Interactionism, and Critical Race Theory will be used to better understand the data and results as I explore these research questions. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies will be employed in this study. Secondary data from the Education Longitudinal Study, 2002, and one on one interviews conducted with young Latinas will both be used to fully explore the experiences of young Latina women with their families and schools as they make this decision about higher education. The interviews will help gain an insight on how family ideals are affecting the decision making process of college enrollment of young Latinas. Latinas may rely on their families for support on making decisions that may affect their future.

LITERATURE

Family Background

To fully understand the Latino family, it is of extreme importance to note that Latino families in the United States may differ due to the variety of cultural differences that encompass what it is to be a Latino. Country of origin of Latinos may include Mexico, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean. The degree of acculturation or socialization into the American culture may also affect the experiences of a Latino family (Contreras, Kerns, and Neal-Barnett 2002). Values are perceptions of what may be good and/or bad passed from generation to generation that may guide decision-making and behavior (Contreras et al. 2002). These values are molded by different cultures, socioeconomic status, demographic backgrounds, and even by the parents' occupation and work conditions (Contreras et al. 2002). Even though some groups may have the same socioeconomic status, it is a possibility that they may have different values and traditions because of their diverse backgrounds and experiences. It may be true that minorities in the lower classes may be very similar because of their socioeconomic status. Past scholars have found that values such as respect, collectivism, having good morals, and belief in authority have been found to be of high importance in the Latino family (Contreras et al. 2002). This may be true for others' experiences, but the traditional role that Latinas learn may or may not be different from that of other populations. For example, according to past scholars, the typical role that Latinas learn while growing up is the role of *Marianismo*, a role that leads Latinas to become good daughters by being passive and helping around the home, as well as becoming good wives and mothers who take care of everything in the home, children, elders, and other relatives (Williams 1990; Cofresi 2002; Contreras et al. 2002; Coleman et al. 2007). The differences of Latinas' family values and traditions and how these may be viewed by our society are the main purpose of this study.

It is sometimes more difficult for Latina women to acquire full family support

while growing up in a more traditional family. In a traditional family, Latinas' roles are to be focused on helping in the house and marriage (Wycoff 1996; Cofresi 2002; Olive 2008; Kimmel 2008). Especially if they have younger siblings, Latinas are expected to help take care of them and help their mothers cook, clean, and do housework. With family support for education, it is easier for Latinas to break away from traditional roles and obtain a higher education, which encompasses following nontraditional roles and becoming more independent (Wycoff 1996). As much as many Latinas would like to fully focus on their academics, it may be harder for them to do so if they have to do housework and fulfill their traditional family duties. This makes it more difficult for Latinas to choose an education, as their perception of college is in some form shaped through their experiences at home.

Education is very important for individuals to rise up the social ladder. Latino families may be more encouraging of their daughters to finish high school and obtain a higher education before marriage. In a study by Plunkett and Bacama-Gomez (2003), more Mexican-origin girls than boys reported having higher academic and educational motivation from their fathers and mothers. More and more Latino families from several cultural backgrounds may be beginning to break away from traditional ideals and encourage their daughters to obtain an education and to become independent. Some nontraditional families may also encourage their daughters to set education as their primary goal. Once Latina women come to the United States, they begin to have the option of choosing parts and pieces of their original traditional values and roles and values of the new culture where they are (Cofresi 2002). To complete high school and continue education on to college may be one of the new options Latinas are encountering today in the United States. Although there may be new nontraditional roles that Latinas encounter, the traditional roles of the Latino family continue to be present.

La familia, or the family, in Latino culture serves as the primary social structure and main source of support for individu-

als (Williams 1990). Family in the Latino context encompasses distant relatives and friends as well as the nuclear family (Coleman et al. 2007). Family for Latinos is extremely important; it is the main support system that molds the value of *Familism*, which emphasizes bonds of the family, duties, obligations, unity, and family closeness (Contreras et al. 2002; Coleman et al. 2007; Villanueva and Buriel 2010). It is through these values that individuals connect to each other, creating unbreakable bonds. Latinos feel a higher responsibility to provide assistance to a greater extent to their elders and family members in need (Coleman et al. 2007). The family is formed by norms and rules through parental authority (Williams 1990; Coleman et al. 2007). It is important for Latino children to follow their parents' house rules if they want to receive their full support. Due to strong bonds, it is of high importance not to bring shame to the family name by following the traditions and values of the family and helping each other no matter the situation. One obligation for Latino children may be translating for parents and elderly members of the family (Villanueva and Buriel 2010). Many Latino parents are first and second generation immigrants in the United States, and as a result, may not speak English. In several studies, Latina adolescents have been found to help their families by translating for their parents in different public places and circumstances more than boys (Contreras et al. 2002; Villanueva and Buriel 2010). Translating for family members, therefore, is a gender role expectation for young Latinas (Villanueva and Buriel 2010).

In addition, family members are socialized into gender roles following *Machismo* and *Marianismo* (Contreras et al. 2002; Cofresi 2002; Coleman et al. 2007). The meaning of *Machismo* is male supremacy, emphasizing the man of the house not only as a father but also as a provider and protector. The *Machismo* value may influence Latino men to fulfill the traditionally patriarchal role. The role of *Marianismo* emphasizes girls being good daughters and, once married, women being good wives and mothers. This role defines women following the example of the Virgin Mary. *Marianismo* brings in the importance of a woman taking care

of her family, the household, and children. It involves sacrificing her personal needs for those of her family and her husband, following the example of the Virgin Mary by self-sacrifice for her children (Williams 1990; Contreras et al. 2002; Cofresi 2002). Strong marital bonds may also be the result of the Marianismo value of Latinas towards fulfilling their traditional role as mothers (Williams 1990). Additionally, women are taught to have *hembrismo*, a superior spiritual strength, similar to the one of the Virgin Mary (Cofresi 2002). Through this spiritual strength, Latina women are able to endure demands of their husbands and family and tolerate abuse (Cofresi 2002).

In the United States, traditional gender roles have evolved. Women today are more active in the labor force and men are also more active in the family (Kimmel 2008). Latino gender roles also may be a reflection of their socioeconomic status and ethnic background (Cofresi 2002). However, these two values, *Machismo* and *Marianismo*, continue to make an impact in Latino families. *Machismo* and *Marianismo* are the most prominent roles for men and women to follow (Williams 1990; Cofresi 2002; Contreras et al. 2002; Coleman et al. 2007;). Latinas, while growing up, are socialized into a *Marianismo* role where they are expected by their family to fulfill their household duties. Education may not be part of the role that they are expected to follow. Instead, education may only be a secondary option, making it harder for Latinas to pursue a college education. Additionally, Latinas are often expected to stay closer to home to help and support their families (Contreras et al. 2002). Latinas may feel the responsibility to follow their family duties and help their families because, in a Latino family, family is first and the individual comes second (Coleman et al. 2007).

Additionally, Latinas are expected to take care of their children and help their extended family (Williams 1990). Latinas' obligations in the home and to their family members may affect Latinas' decision of whether or not to obtain a higher education. Responsibilities and obligations may make it harder for Latinas to obtain an education if they are married, as their time and ability to focus on academics

diminish with the workload in the household. It is clear that family support is very meaningful for Latinas when it comes time to make the decision on going or not going to college.

Family Support

For Latino families, education does not focus solely on academic performance; Latino families also place a lot of weight on moral development within education (Contreras et al. 2002; Hill and Torres 2010). Scholars have explored the reasons why immigrants come to the United States. One of the primary reasons for Latino parents coming to the United States was to ensure a better education and future for their children as well as a healthy moral development (Contreras et al. 2002). Healthy moral development for Latinos may include an environment where children are able to learn how to make right choices and gain knowledge on what is wrong or right from adults who make up part of their lives. Moral development is a value that Latino families believe should come hand in hand with education. With this in mind, one is able to consider the importance of education for Latinos, contradictory to the stereotype of Latinos devaluing education. Scholars find that Latino parents highly value education. Additionally, past researchers (Villanueva and Buriel 2010) have explored how strong academic performance on the part of immigrant children may be a way to express gratitude to their parents, demonstrating again the value of education in the Latino family.

Other studies have explored a connection between family, community values and self-fulfillment through higher education (Hernandez 1995; Wycoff 1996; Alberta et al. 2005). With higher levels of family and community support for higher education, students feel more confident in obtaining an education and fulfilling their career dreams without feeling restrained (Hernandez 1995; Wycoff 1996; Solberg and Torres 2001). When the student is able to rely on his/her family for advice and encouragement, the family provides the student with a valuable support system. The student may be able to express his/her experiences at school with his/her family and

look for their help and advice to continue their education after high school.

Furthermore, research outcomes point at mothers of Latinas being equally or more supportive than fathers of Latinas obtaining a college education (Williams 1990; Contreras et al. 2002). Mothers of Latinas seem to be more encouraging and reaffirming than fathers. Also, it has been explored how Latino boys receive more encouragement and support to obtain a higher education than girls (Contreras et al. 2002), which may demonstrate family values affecting educational experiences. This may be a reflection of Latino traditional gender roles where daughters are expected to be more involved in the family and boys are expected to help the family outside the home. Latino/a gender roles and parental encouragement for higher education may affect Latinas' educational choices for their future. The support from their mothers may help Latinas continue their education after high school, while the lack of support from their fathers may impede Latinas from obtaining a higher education. Family support systems enforce high levels of confidence in students that will help students feel comfortable in their environment (Solberg and Torres 2001). Parental support can set high educational standards and expectations for their children (Wycoff 1996).

Students with high levels of confidence are able to build relationships with their teachers, making it easier to obtain role models and mentors in education (Solberg and Torres 2001). This encourages students to pursue a higher education and visualize higher levels of career options. Parents and the family are important supportive figures that make it possible for Latino/as to fulfill their education (Wycoff 1996). When parents are not supportive of their daughters on going to college, it may be harder for Latinas to obtain a higher education. Because of the value of familism and the importance of the family for Latinas, the lack of support may restrain many Latinas from obtaining a higher education. Additionally, gender roles may highly impact the decision of whether or not to go to college. Parents not only help students by pushing them to obtain an education but also by keeping them on track and encouraging them

to focus on their studies. Students who do not have other family members who have obtained a college education may be very dependent on their parents and family support for higher education. Gender roles, family values and traditions may be large factors that contribute to this decision. On the other hand, it is a possibility that the educational institution plays a large role in Latinas' decision on college enrollment. Now I turn to the subject of education to further understand where Latinas are obtaining their information about college, support for higher education, and where they may encounter obstacles and opportunities.

Education

At home, many students are the first ones in their families to attend school in the United States (Olive 2008); in other words, they are the first generation students. If they are the only ones who have gone to school, they may have little understanding at home for this experience. Students who are first generation going to college may lack important information and skills about college (Sterm 2009), not only because they are the first ones in their families going to college, but they may also be one of the first to go to college in their neighborhood. Past scholars (Sterm 2009) have noted that Latinos live in neighborhoods with fewer college-educated individuals. This may be a reason why it may be harder for Latinas to decide whether or not to go to college. Education may be a way to obtain the correct information and knowledge about college for those students who may not have access to this in their homes or their communities.

Education is a way to social mobility; better education may allow one to obtain a better occupation, which may lead to other opportunities and improve one's social location. In addition to leading to the improvement of occupational stability, obtaining an education also benefits society as individuals are more skilled and able to help develop their communities. Latinos are the fastest growing minority in the United States, but this population is not growing dramatically in terms of educational attainment. Today, Latinos make up 15 percent of the traditional col-

lege age population between eighteen to twenty-four year olds in the United States (Valverde et al. 2008). By 2020 they are expected to comprise 22 percent of that population (Valverde et al. 2008). In contrast to the relatively fast growing Latino population, high school graduation rates and higher education enrollment has not been steadily increasing (Valverde et al. 2008). Dropout rates of Latino high school students have been as high as 44 percent (Valverde et al. 2008). By the year of 2018, Latinos are expected to be 29 percent of all high school graduates (Valverde et al. 2008). There may be various reasons for this mismatching of increasing numbers in the Latino population and slow or little growth for Latinos' enrollment in higher education.

Latino/a students may lack not only resources that would best represent their culture in school, but also mentors and role models who would encourage them to continue with their education (Hernandez 1995; Hill and Torres 2010). Only 6.2% of full-time teachers in the United States were Latino in the 2003-2004 school year (Hill and Torres 2010), which means that there are few role models and mentors that Latino/as could look up to. Latino/a students may not have enough teachers from their own background. Without being able to relate to their authority figures, they may not feel as comfortable to reach out for help or look up to teachers as role models or mentors.

In past research (Hernandez 1995; Crosnoe 2005), it has been shown that assistance from school guidance counselors and teachers is very important when all students make the decision on going or not going to college. Teachers addressing Latino students do not often take into account the diversity of groups included as Latino, and at times refer to different cultures as one (Hill and Torres 2010). Some teachers even refer to Latino students as "Mexican students" (Hill and Torres 2010). If students are not able to feel like unique individuals while attending school, they may not feel comfortable in the academic environment. Latino students may feel less support or understanding of their teachers, their experiences and the decisions they face regarding higher education. With little or no assistance from

teachers from the schools, it is harder for students to make an informed decision about their future. Additionally, without individuals to look up to and guide them, it may be harder for students to pursue a higher education or envision themselves in a higher occupation. Latino/as feel a sense of anger and frustration as the careers they would like to fulfill, they feel, are not intended for a Latino/as (Hernandez 1995). Students may not feel there is a need to continue their education if they do not see Latinos as professionals. On the other side of the story, students who may have role models and teacher support for education may feel more encouraged to continue their education after high school. This may help students decide whether or not to apply to college, and it may also help them gain more information about college and what is necessary to apply.

A lack of opportunities exists which would encourage teacher-student interaction. Little attention is paid to the importance of cultural influence inside the classroom for Latino/a students (Valverde et al. 2008). If there are not many Latino/a teachers, and there is a lack of Latino culture in the schools, teacher-student interaction may be harder to take place because students may not feel comfortable in their environment. One of the major factors that may affect why Latino/as' education rates are relatively lower than other populations may be the marginalization of culture inside the schools.

Recent school-based initiatives in the United States have tried to promote academic success for Latino children through programs that help teach parents how to work with the American school system (Contreras et al. 2002; Valverde et al. 2008). These new programs work to promote understanding to the parents about the American educational system and the expectations of the school, while at the same time focusing on sharing the cultural values of Latino families with school staff. Although programs have been developed, they do not address the Latino community as a whole. Latino parents may have different ideals of what is the meaning of education than that of the school system. Latino parents, in past research, describe ideals incongruent with the school system (Hill and Torres 2010). Parents may feel

as if the school institution does not accept their culture and language differences. Some values and traditions that may be learned in the home, for example the value of education, which for Latino/as means more than books and school and may extend to include morals, social skills, and attitudes, may contrast to what teachers are teaching students. Parents may expect students to learn this from school or be punished if they do not act right in the school. In schools, this may not be the case and teachers may expect parents to teach morals, values, and how to act correctly in their homes. Parents of Latino students feel disrespected and devalued when trying to communicate with the teachers; at times parents do not speak English very well and teachers talk down to them. Parents can feel embarrassed and inferior when they do not have respect from teachers (Hill and Torres 2010). There is a lack of translators or bilingual materials available that may help accommodate Latino parents so that they are able to better understand school initiatives and their child's education. This may impact what parents think of education, and it may shape decisions about education for their children. Even if there have been attempts to help Latino students improve their chances at academic success, for Latino students and other minority students, by the time they reach their junior and senior year of high school, their college choices are highly limited (Gonzalez, Stoner and Jovel 2003). College choices may be limited due to financial availability and lack of correct knowledge about colleges that may offer financial aid or support for students for diverse populations. Additionally, if the parents do not have the correct information due to translation difficulties or lack of respect from the school institution, the support that children should get from their parents if they had the correct knowledge may not be there.

In contrast, schools that may have bilingual information, translators and more advantages for parents to be able to communicate with school administrators and staff may be viewed as an avenue of opportunity for many Latina students. Parents who are able to communicate with the teachers may be able to help their children more in school issues. Parents who are able to understand the goals of the

educational system, and when teachers as well as school administration are able to understand the Latino culture, it may be easier for Latino students to have a better school environment and continue their education after high school.

The focus of choosing a school with a specific program moves to financial availability when Latina students are faced with the decision of college enrollment (Gonzalez et al. 2003). Aside from grade point average, Latinas may have to take into account what university they can afford, what is the right information they need, or how much time classes will require outside of the home. Latina students may have family and home responsibilities as well as little financial support. These may be some factors affecting higher education rates for Latinas.

Furthermore, Latinos college enrollment rates overall have only grown slowly over recent years. College enrollment rates for Latinas ages eighteen to twenty-four have positively increased from 16 percent to 24.5 percent between 1980 and 2000 (Gonzalez et al 2004), in comparison to Latino males whose college rates have not improved as rapidly, from 15.3 percent in the 1980's to 18.5 percent in 2000 (Gonzalez et al. 2004). This is a relatively large accomplishment for Latinas' self-betterment and social mobility. In addition to college enrollment, there has also been a 75 percent increase in bachelor degrees for Latinas (Gonzalez et al 2004). This demonstrates that Latinas' involvement in college completion rates is also increasing. This could be due to a more supportive family value system and a more cooperative educational system. In a study by Gonzalez, Jovel and Stoner (2004), college undergraduate and college graduate Latinas were interviewed, and it was uncovered that one of the main sacrifices these women have made to obtain their education has been their families. It can be argued that Latina women who decide to move away to college take on a nontraditional role. Latinas breaking away from the main role of Marianismo may represent nontraditional roles. Additionally, becoming a full time college student in itself and applying more time to education and not the family may be what molds a nontraditional role. Because

the family is so important for Latinos, it is very hard for Latinas to be away from their families and miss all the little things that make up their values and traditions.

When Latinas encounter themselves with the decision to go to college, they may also take into consideration how far away their home is from the college or university they want to attend. It may be harder for Latinas to move away from their families with values such as familism. To be able to feel comfortable in a different environment that one is not used to, it may be important for an individual to reach a certain level of acculturation or assimilation to that environment and social context.

Acculturation, Enculturation, and Assimilation

The process of *acculturation* takes place over time and occurs when an individual or a group adopts the attitudes and values of a mainstream culture due to continuous exposure to that culture (Punkett and Bamaca-Gomez 2003; Hurtado-Ortiz and Gauvain 2007; Coleman et al. 2007; Cano and Castillo 2010; Gonyea 2010;). Latinas maintain aspects of their original culture while adopting facets of U.S. culture (Coleman et al. 2007). For example, Latinas may tend to grasp the influences of individualism when it comes to money situations and occupational mobility expectations, which are part of U.S. culture. At the same time, Latinas may keep their family values and traditions, like the importance of elders and Machismo. Exposure to a different culture and the acculturation of this culture are important and may help us understand the Latina experience in academics (Contreras et al. 2002). One of the main measures in past research of acculturation has been the different levels of language use and preference (Contreras et al. 2002). From acculturation, Latino/a teens may find or develop their self-identity and *Ethnic Identity*. Ethnic identity refers to one's sense of belonging to a particular cultural group (Contreras et al. 2002). From this ethnic identity, individuals may take pride in following certain values and traditions passed on in their homes and might also help the find self-identification. Scholars

in the past (Plunkett and Bamaca-Gomez 2003; Hurtado-Ortiz and Gauvin 2007) indicate that acculturation can be related to Latino students' academic performance and educational resilience.

This is also known as *Enculturation*. Enculturation is the process of socialization and the maintenance of original cultural and heritage norms (Cano and Castillo 2010), thus allowing individuals to adopt aspects of individuals' culture but at the same time holding on to facets of Latino culture. Interestingly enough, scholars like Cano and Castillo (2010) have found that Latino students with lower levels of behavioral enculturation are predictors for Latina college students' distress. Assimilation into a different culture may in some cases bring more stress to students, and it may make it harder for Latinas to make a decision of whether or not to go to college if they may not be able to identify with the culture.

The *Assimilation* process has also been evidenced in our educational institution. Assimilation is the process of immigrants blending or merging into the mainstream culture leaving their own culture aside (Golash-Bozna 2006). In the past, some schools forbade children from speaking Spanish during school hours, and if they spoke Spanish they would be punished. Today there are still some cases where Spanish in schools continues to be prohibited (Valverde 2006). This may only force the already harsh assimilation process in Latino students. Although some may believe that this is a way to help students learn English faster, in reality it is a way to make the students feel uncomfortable and lost. In addition, students feel like their home language is not as good as English (Valverde 2006). Latino students may face an internal conflict between family values and traditions and the mainstream culture's values and traditions presented to them through the school institution.

While gaining a college education, Latino students have to go through the enculturation of family values into the college environment (Alberta et al. 2005). Growing up in a Latino family, there may be values and traditions that may directly impact the decisions made by Latinas to pursue their college education (Alberta et al. 2005). If the student's family views this

as an important value, it may be harder for her to break away from the mold and go to college before following her family duties. Latino/a students are caught in an acculturation process where the environments of home and school may clash completely. This acculturation, according to Gloria, Castellanos, and Orozco (2005), brings stress to Latinas and makes it harder for them to focus fully on their academics. In addition, it may be harder for Latinas to find a supportive coping system at home, especially if most of their relatives/parents have not been to college and are not able to relate to their experiences. Latinas may also not be able to gain access to the capital that allows for success in college.

Social Capital

Social capital can develop through interactions with others and participation in social networks; this participation may later be used for social benefit (Monkman, Ronald and Delimon 2005). For example, social capital may be developed through the school institution, as students are able to make friendships, which later on may turn into important networks and connections. As individuals grow up and graduate from high school or college, they are able to use those networks and connections to find jobs or a position in fields of interest. Many individuals obtain social capital through their family and school institutions. Students in lower socioeconomic statuses are often at a disadvantage in obtaining valuable social capital. Similarly, Latino students' social capital may not be valued the same as students from higher socioeconomic statuses. This is because most of the connections and networks that Latino students create are not with individuals who may go up the social ladder. Rather, these students rely on other students who are most likely going to end up getting lower income jobs. Furthermore, students who are able to get higher positions are more likely to break bonds with their old neighborhoods and connections may disappear. Similarly, Latinas are affected because it is harder for them to gain valuable social capital that will help them in their future. Since there is not a lot of Latinos in professional careers, it is harder for Latinas to obtain connections that would better their

chances at maintaining a connection with other Latino/as in professional fields.

Through the family, Latinas are able to obtain support for higher education; in the schools, Latina students are able to interact in social networks that benefit them in the present and create advantages for their future. For example, first generation Latino students may be able to gain relevant information about how to apply to college or how to find financial aid from other students who have knowledge of this information. Latino students may be able to gain social capital through interaction with other students about American norms and rules. For example, Latino students may be able to learn the value of individualism that is well known in the American society compared to the value of collectivism more known in the Latino family. Additionally, Latina students who may have friends or relationships with other students who have a higher socioeconomic status than themselves may be able to furnish that relationship until they are older. This relationship may help students attain opportunities that without that relationship would not be possible. Non-Latino students are also able to gain social capital from Latino students' culture and their values and traditions that may differ from their own. Social norms of obligation and reciprocity may guide social capital to be negotiated (Monkman et al. 2005).

In the Latino community, social capital may be understood by the depiction of neighborhood and family ties. For example, within the value of "compadrazgo," friends are very close and are sometimes viewed as part of the family. A "compadre" or a "comadre" is expected to help raise children; in cases that the parents can no longer be there for the children, they are expected to step up in place of the parents. Many times, Latinos' social capital is devalued by society. The values and traditions that Latinos carry with them are not acknowledged equally as the social capital from other individuals from other ethnicities or socioeconomic statuses.

Cultural Capital

In addition to social capital, cultural capital is important in our society. Cultures may differ in many ways, such as

knowledge, practices, values and traditions. This is what makes up cultural capital: it is the cultural experiences in one's home and environment (Barone 2006). Similar social skills, language styles, and attitudes are different according to class origins because different social classes share different cultural capital through different social contexts. As a result, students with this capital are rewarded in the school system. It may be true that Latinas in lower socioeconomic statuses have similar cultural capital than other individuals in such socioeconomic status. The difference between Latinas and other individuals may involve the cultural capital that Latinos bring with them from their original countries, such as their native language being either Spanish, or a dialect, values of familism, marianismo and machismo, the values of compadrazgo, or even experiences lived as an immigrant. Cultural resources, however, are not equally valued by society and can lead to different quantities and types of advantages and disadvantages (Monkman 2005). In relation to the school institution, pedagogical rules, practices, and procedures are related to the culture of the upper classes (Barone 2006). In the case of Latino/as, their cultural capital is not, in many cases, valued sufficiently in school or society. Although there have been recent changes in programs to better incorporate Latinos into education, there are still some schools that do not encourage Latino culture. For example, a law in Arizona that denies high schools from teaching Latino Studies was passed recently because state representatives believed that "Mexican-American studies program teaches Latino students that they are oppressed by white people" (Cooper 2010). Latino/as values and traditions are not always respected and well represented in the school institution, as demonstrated in the case of Arizona. Schools that do not allow Latino students and other ethnic minorities to explore their own cultures and history may not encourage Latino students to feel comfortable in the educational environment. Experiences in high school may affect Latinas' decision of college enrollment.

The cultural capital from Latinas may be completely different from other students. Latinas' experiences in the family and their neighborhood, and their values

and traditions, create cultural capital that may differ from that of other students. This may include different language, attitudes about friendships, and perceptions on authority. This capital may be valued in other contexts but not necessarily in the school system.

Furthermore, Latino/Hispanic parents may not have the same opportunities to share cultural and social capital with their children. Unlike other minorities, Latinos do not have the opportunity of having colleges and universities aimed specifically towards Latino/a education. History has painted a harsh path for all minorities to obtain a higher education. During the 1860s, Historically Black Colleges and Universities began to give African Americans the opportunity of obtaining a higher education (Brown and Davis 2001). Although Historically Black Colleges and Universities could not give an opportunity to every African American student when they first opened, after the 1960s, African American involvement in higher education increased. Universities geared to specific minorities, similar to the case of African Americans in Historically Black Colleges and Universities, give the opportunity for minority students to obtain social capital to help increase opportunities in their future (Brown and Davis 2001). Following Historically Black Colleges and Universities, tribal colleges and universities also opened, aiming at Native American students. Although Native American higher education was overlooked for many years, in the 1960s the second tribal university opened (McClellan, Fox and Lowe 2005). Though the first tribal university opened during the 1850s, it was abolished by the American government. After the 1960s a strong movement began to call attention to Native American students, opening avenues of opportunity for them to obtain a higher education (McClellan et al. 2005). Yet there is no percentage of colleges or universities geared specifically towards Latino students. Latino parents of today's generation may not have been able to have as many opportunities as others to obtain a higher education, making it harder to share cultural and social capital with their children about what is needed to apply to college, how to obtain financial aid, what is the process of acceptance, or how is it to live in college. This may

impact Latina decisions about college because important information about college, and role models already in college may not be able to be obtained.

Symbolic Interactionism Theory.

To describe the family, Symbolic Interactionists depict the family as a unit of interacting personalities (DeGenova 2008). Family members interact through a basis of symbols and meanings that socialize individuals as they grow up. Through this interaction, individuals learn roles such as father, mother, daughter, or wife. Once an individual is socialized into a role, he/she learns to "play" the assigned role (DeGenova 2008; Sandstrom et al. 2010). The behaviors and attitudes demonstrated by the "actors" resemble what they should be doing according to that role (DeGenova 2008; Sandstrom et al. 2010). As a result, our actions and feelings are determined by our environment and interactions with others (DeGenova 2008).

It is through the family that, as we grow up, we learn meanings and later attach those meanings to certain symbols. According to Symbolic Interactionists, we learn what we know through our environment (Sandstrom, Martin and Fine 2010). We form concepts and ideas through symbols and their interpretations and interactions relating to those same symbols (Balantine and Spade 2008; Sandstrom et al. 2010). While growing up, we are able to connect words with meanings and finally visualize a concept (Sandstrom et al. 2010). The basis of these symbols that we learn is, therefore, the family. Through the family we learn meanings of others, and we also obtain a sense of who we are (Balantine and Spade 2008). Meanings and symbols are also learned through other institutions, such as the school institution or the church institution, but the main socializer for most individuals is the family. The values that we have are learned for the most part through the family. The family, then, makes up a big part of what encompasses an individual.

The basis of what influences individuals to view and understand the world may be a factor as to how Latinas make their decisions whether or not to go to college. Latinas may be socialized and learn certain gender roles that may or may not af-

fect their decision of obtaining a higher education. Symbolic Interactionist Theory describes how individuals observe symbols and attach meanings to those symbols. Latinas may learn to view their environment a certain way according to their families' values and traditions and their environments. Some Latinas may learn the importance and value of higher education as they grow up, while others may not have this opportunity. It is important for Latinas to have a supportive family who appreciates and emphasizes education, thus emphasizing higher education. This is not only a support system, but it also encourages confidence in Latinas, making it less difficult for them to focus their attention on their academics.

The Latino family teaches and socializes the value of familism as children grow up (Contreras et al. 2002; Coleman et al. 2007). All families teach different values and traditions to their children; scholars (Contreras et al. 2002; Coleman et al. 2007; Villanueva and Buriel 2010) point to Latino families practicing the value of familism. Children see and experience interactions with their parents and siblings, creating relationships that lead to values such as obligations, duties, and unity to and within the family. If a family does not emphasize such values, children may not be able to learn it because they would not be around it or be able to experience it. Within the Latino family, familism is one of those values, as well as gender roles such as *marianismo* and *machismo*. As children get older, they may have certain obligations to their family due to the socialization process of what it means to help the family while growing up. The Latino family may value certain aspects of values and traditions higher than other families from other ethnic backgrounds. For example, Latino children often help their parents by translating; scholars refer to these children as "language brokers" (Villanueva and Buriel 2010). Sometimes, parents do not speak English well, and children do because they are able to learn it at school. Children help their parents by translating between them and other individuals, especially for parents who do not know English very well and have to deal with schools, medical affairs, landlords, legal authorities (Villanueva and Buriel 2010), or other social settings where Eng-

lish is the primary language. Research conducted by Villanueva and Buriel (2010) has shown that girls are often chosen as language brokers in the Latino family. This is due to gender roles emphasizing girls more emotionally attached to the family than boys, which is an example of the value of familism. Female children may feel obligated to help their parents when they need them, and in many cases, this may be through translating. This value of obligation and learning that parents may need help may be socialized and learned through the family. Symbolic Interactionist Theory posits that children learn what they know through different symbols and meanings. As female children see that their parents need help, they are socialized into the obligation of helping them through translation.

Furthermore, gender roles of *marianismo* and *machismo* are also associated with meanings and symbols as children grow up. Girls and boys mimic their roles in the family by interacting with their family members on a daily basis and building relationships with those interactions. In this way, children observe the meaning of the roles and the symbols attached to them. For example, children are able to see how their mom may stay at home cooking while the dad is at work. Eventually they are able to associate the symbols of cooking and housekeeping with mom and work or being outside of the home with dad. Young Latinas merge meanings with symbols, realizing that being women, they are supposed to be at home and not go to college. This may affect their decision whether or not to apply in the future. On the other hand, if young Latinas have a family support on higher education, it may be easier for them to go to college. Even if they may view the mother at home and they associate the meaning of mother with staying at home and taking care of the family, it may be more acceptable for Latinas to apply to college with family support for higher education. Support from the family for Latinas to obtain a higher education is also learned as children grow up as socialization occurs through the life course. With more support from the family for higher education, Latinas are able to do better in school. This may enhance their confidence and may encourage them to obtain a higher education.

In addition to family support on education, for Latinas to make the decision to pursue a higher education, the school institution may also play a large role. The school institution may not be a system that helps everyone reach the top nor encourage equality. Instead, it may be a way to separate individuals and put some in the top while placing others in the bottom, for example by rewarding upper class cultural capital (Kerbo 2009). Therefore, Latinas who may have a strong supportive family value system, and family values and traditions that encourage a college education, may feel more confident in pursuing higher education and later a professional career.

The school institution may also affect the decision about higher education. A symbolic interactionist perspective on how the school affects this decision-making process may include how as well as what students are learning in school. Cultural and social capital can be attained through the school institution. Additionally, Latinas may be able to associate certain symbols acquired in school to certain meanings that may later on lead them to the decision of whether or not to apply to college.

There are other factors affecting young Latinas decision to obtain a higher education, one of which may be stereotypes and how these influence individuals' views of themselves and how they decide their future. As part of the Symbolic Interactionist perspective, Labeling Theory explains how stereotypes, at times, become self-fulfilling prophecies. Expectations based on race, gender and ethnic background often affect how individuals make sense of their reality and how they interact with others (Ballantine and Spade 2008). For example, if teachers or professors utilize preconceived notions that Latina students do not appreciate education and do not try their best, teachers and professors are more likely to ignore them during class, call on them less, and grade their papers more harshly. This not only makes it harder for Latinas to finish with a good grade in that class, but it also discourages them from obtaining a higher level of education as they feel they are not good at school, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Labels and stereotypes may impact the percep-

tions of many young Latinas, of themselves and of their future. On the other hand, stereotypes may also encourage young Latinas to obtain a higher education. It may be the case that these young women who are pursuing an education are doing so to prove stereotypes wrong.

Labels are learned through individuals' environments, including the home, school, church, or even through the media. The same way that stereotypes and labels are learned, racism is also learned through the process of socialization. To further understand the implications of racism in our societies at an institutional level and consider racism's role for Latina decisions about higher education, we turn next to Critical Race Theory.

Critical Race Theory

Although overt racism and segregation in academic institutions have been made illegal, the reality is that racialized practices continue to exist in academic institutions (Villalpado 2004). Through the Critical Race Theory, we can better understand the practices, policies, and policy making of institutions that may make it harder for race and racism to disappear in our society (Villalpado 2004). Critical Race Theory developed from legal scholarship in order to examine the persistence of racism in our societies (Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Aleman and Aleman 2010; Closson 2010). This theory explores how racism is socially constructed through interactions and relationships between individuals, thus pairing well with Symbolic Interactionist Theory. Symbolic Interactionist Theory is a way to understand the micro-level (individual level) of issues, for example, to understand how Latinas learn certain values and traditions as they grow up. Critical Race Theory is also a way to view issues more globally, on a macro level, allowing us to see how policies and practices affect individuals' values and traditions.

The core of the theory emphasizes how racism is institutional and systemic (Aleman and Aleman 2010). Racism is used by those in power to benefit themselves, and it may be a way to separate the lower classes (Kerbo 2009). Critical Race Theorists in recent years have focused on how race is used against different minority

groups in response to shifting needs of the society, for example, in the labor market (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Different minorities may be appreciated more or less according to the necessities of the labor market and what is needed in our society (Kerbo 2009). Critical Race Theory exposes institutions for their complicity in reproducing social constructs that are damaging (Aleman and Aleman 2010). Additionally, this theory locates racism as part of everyday operations; not only through individual acts, but amongst the main structure maintained by institutions in our society (Valdes, Culp, and Harris 2002). For example, racism is not only demonstrated at the individual level by a person making a racist joke, but also at the institutional level through the school by giving minorities a different type of education from that given to other students with higher socioeconomic statuses.

Furthermore, Critical Race Theory exposes how racism intersects with other forms of oppression such as sexism, homophobia and economic exploitation (Valdes et al. 2002; Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Critical Race Theory is a way to view how racism continues to prevail in our societies and that it is up to the individuals to make a change. An example to understand the Critical Race Theory through Latino/a experiences is policies and regulations that may affect Latino/as' chances to obtain a higher education. There are over sixty-five thousand students who are not able to continue a higher education in the United States, most of them are Latino/a (Dream Act Portal). Sons and daughters of illegal immigrants are in the United States because their parents brought them to this country when they were young and now find that they are not able to obtain a college education. Although there are some financial aid possibilities, these are only for U.S. citizens and residents. Young students who find themselves in this situation are not able to continue their education without the financial support. Many Latino/as who may want to continue their education after high school are not able to do so because they do not have the necessary financial support. These Latino/a students who are illegal in the United States have grown up in the American culture. They may have gone through the edu-

cational system, learned how to drive in the United States, and some students may even work. They have been socialized into American music, certain styles of clothing, and different slang only used in the United States. Students who have been brought to the United States at a young age may be fully socialized in the American culture.

The Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act, known as the Dream Act, aims to help illegal students who were brought by their parents to the United States obtain a higher education; but this act does not have full support from representatives of the United States Congress. Students and others supporting the Dream Act have tried to encourage Senators and House Representatives to pass this act and support students obtain a higher education. This proposition was presented to the government in 2006 (Dream Act Portal); four years later students continue to wait on a result. This proposition will in particular affect many Latino/a students. Involvement in higher education may be possible once the Dream Act is passed for many students who are today being excluded.

This barrier to many Latino/a students attempting to obtain an education, especially first-generation students, has a potential to turn into an opportunity. While many Latino youth are United States citizens, this policy affects those who are not. Through the Dream Act the lack of institutional support for Latinos to obtain a higher education is demonstrated. Critical Race Theorists may envision policies and practices by the government institution to support minorities to obtain an education. Passing the Dream Act would be one of them and an opportunity to obtain a higher education for Latino/a students. Other practices and policies for Latino/a students should be created to encourage students to obtain a higher education, for example, school counselors may communicate correct knowledge and information for Latino/as students about college and more scholarships aimed to this population, as well as training for school staff noting Latino culture within the school institution. Other policies and regulations to the Dream Act are explored by Critical Race theorists to acknowledge inequali-

ties that impinge opportunities for Latinas to obtain a higher education, such as the law prohibiting Latina American studies in high schools in Arizona, or repainting of murals in schools that have kids in the murals who look Latino.

Furthermore, in the school institution sexism and racism continue to affect students in achieving a higher education (Closson 2010). Researchers in the past (Knaus 2009; Closson 2010) have shown the complexity of learning environments. These environments may differ from urban to rural schools where the demographic make-up of the classroom may vary. Disadvantages and advantages faced by racial minorities like Latinos can be traced to differential educational achievement and attainment (Kao and Thompson 2003). Schools may differ in the type of curriculum and staff provided to teach. Some schools may focus on students obtaining a vocational future while other schools may focus on students going on to college after high schools. Schools that focus on students obtaining a college education in turn favor more advantaged students (Kao and Thompson 2003). The curricula taught in schools where more minorities from lower socioeconomic status attend compared to schools where higher socioeconomic status students attend are different. Students in higher socioeconomic statuses are taught to be more independent and autonomous, while students in lower socioeconomic status are taught to work together with others and conform to rules (Kozol 2005). The curriculum taught in schools may affect the decisions Latinas make on college enrollment. Students who are located in college preparatory curricula may be more likely to apply to college while students who are not in schools that enhance that curricula may not have such opportunities.

Scholars argue that assigning students in academic/nonacademic tracks and ability groups serves to reproduce inequalities (Kao and Thompson 2003; Ballantine and Spade 2008). The placement of students of low/high income and different races and ethnicities into different schools, or in different programs or courses within the same school makes it unequal for students to obtain the best

education they could have and encourages division of classes, races, and ethnicities. In past research (Kao and Thompson 2003), low-income, urban schools have been shown to not offer the same courses that higher-income suburban schools offer. Additionally, differences in courses may also be affected by the teachers' perception on what to teach (Kao and Thompson 2003). Minority students are often placed in low-ability groups that may not focus on college preparatory courses, or college bound curricula that would be otherwise used to prepare students for college (Kao and Thompson 2003). Without guidance leading towards a higher education, it becomes more difficult for minorities, including Latinos, to pursue a college education.

In addition, Latinas, like most women, have to deal with a harsh environment in the classroom (Ballantine and Spade 2008; Kimmel 2008). Researchers have found that teachers interact differently with girls and boys in the classroom, giving boys the more challenging problems and identifying them as trouble makers. This brings boys more attention from the teachers, in comparison to viewing girls as quiet and passive, resulting in girls not having the same opportunities to participate in class (Ballantine and Spade 2008; Kimmel 2008). Latinas face a harsh reality when aiming to obtain a higher education and then a professional career resulting from an educational system that is not cooperative and encouraging. This may be one of the reasons why family values and traditions have a large effect on Latinas involvement in school and their goals and dreams. If there is no support for higher education from the educational institution for Latinas, the family institution becomes the primary and maybe the only source of support for higher education for Latinas.

As a result, Latinas may be faced with an educational system that does not support their culture or their gender. Latinas are not only a minority by being women but also an ethnic minority, which many times may lead to less interaction with teachers, less confidence to participate in class, less self-assurance to ask for help, and a lower sense of comfort with other students, amongst other things. The La-

tino culture may not be well accepted in the educational institution. This makes it complicated for Latinas to feel a sense of belonging in the educational arena. In some cases, teachers may not expect Latinas to be able to obtain a higher education due to stereotypes and low expectations; therefore, they may treat Latinas differently in the classroom and may not challenge their abilities and skills. There are always the stereotypes that may chase Latinas through their educational careers, such as pregnancy, contracting genital diseases, or simply not being smart enough. A better sense of acceptance in the schools of the Latino culture may be an avenue of opportunity for Latina students to continue their education after high school. More correct information and knowledge about college may also be an opportunity for Latina students to attain a higher education.

Latinas, like most ethnic and status minorities, may attend lower income urban schools. Urban schools may not receive the same funding as other non-urban or private schools. Therefore, schools that are attended for the most part by Latinas are not able to provide the quality education that other schools may have. Since there is less funding, extracurricular activities and drop out prevention programs may not be fully funded. The teaching staff is not equally certified as teachers in higher income suburban schools. Primarily, the didactic materials these young girls are learning are not equal to those of higher income students. Their preparation for college may not correspond to the education received in a higher income school because the schools teach different curricula in different demographic areas.

Due to constraints of socioeconomic status, sexism, discrimination, and racism in the educational field, Latinas are in need of a strong supportive system both in the school and in their families that will encourage them to obtain an advanced educational career. If this support system is missing, it makes it harder for Latinas to continue their education. Symbolic Interactionist Theory helps us understand how individuals are socialized into different values and traditions and gain cultural and social capital. Cultural and Social Capital leads us to understand how knowledge and skills are learned and passed on from

our environments, and Critical Race Theory helps us to understand how society's institutions may provide opportunities or barriers to certain individuals. Together, these theories have led us to better process, analyze, and understand the Latina experience in education and their homes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this project, I will address two main research questions. First, *How do family values and traditions affect eighteen to nineteen year old Latinas' decision-making process on going or not going to college?* Scholar attention (Monkman et al. 1990; Hernandez 1995; Hurtado-Ortiz and Gauvin 2007; LeCroy and Krysik 2008; Valverde et al. 2008; Carranza, You, Chhuon, and Hudley 2009) has focused on the Latino experience in education, but not much research has focused on the Latina experience in education and how this may be affected by her role in the family. There may be various reasons for the lack of enrollment of Latinas in higher education, one of which may be the family. Family helps shape individuals' views and expectations. Furthermore, family values and traditions may be a basic indicator of what is encouraging or restraining these young women from breaking the mold and fighting stereotypes by obtaining a higher education. In this study, I will investigate how family interactions and relationships may affect this decision-making process for young Latinas. Additionally, past literature (Hernandez 1995; Gonzalez et al. 2003; Gonzalez et al. 2004; Olive 2008) focuses on the barriers that Latino/as encounter to obtain a higher education. While I will note whether these barriers are present, I instead focus my project on the avenues of opportunities that Latinas encounter that may help these young women to pursue a higher education.

Second, I ask, *How does the school institution affect the decision-making process of Latinas' college enrollment?* The Latina experience in school may also be important in the decision-making process of Latinas. How the Latino culture may be acculturated or clash with the educational arena may affect the future of many young Latinas. Incorporating Latino culture in the school

institution may help Latinas feel more comfortable in the school environment and may affect their decision as to whether or not to continue their college education. Learning experiences and environments amongst individuals may be different and may affect their decision-making process of college enrollment. The purpose of the current study is to further understand the Latina experience in the educational institution; in addition to young Latinas' family values and traditions, specifically how these affect the decision-making process on college enrollment. This research question will be explored to help uncover the opportunities that educational institutions have to offer to Latinas to help them obtain a higher education.

DATA AND METHODS

In order to address whether family values and traditions of eighteen to nineteen year old Latinas affect their college enrollment decision-making process, and to investigate how educational institutions affect this decision, I use both quantitative and qualitative data. Employing both methodologies allows a better understanding of the Latina educational experience and how this may be affected by family values and traditions. Quantitative data provide a clear demographic picture of the Latina experience in education nationwide, while qualitative data provide more in-depth information about the Latina experience with the family and the educational institutions. The study's quantitative section provides depth of understanding and context for the qualitative analysis of the study and gives more weight to the information gained. Dual methodologies are used in this research to contribute to literature on this topic and further our understanding of the factors that affect young Latinas's decision-making processes on higher education.

Quantitative

In order to provide a national picture of young Latinas of high school age, I employ secondary data from the National Center of Education Statistics titled the Education Longitudinal Study (2002). In the Education Longitudinal Survey, over 15,000 high school sophomores (tenth

grade) participated in the study by filling out surveys in 2002. Study participants included 752 randomly selected public and private schools, helping to make this data on high school students nationally representative. Students were assessed in the year of 2002 and follow-ups with the same students were assessed during their senior year in 2004. This data set also includes dropout and transfer students, who were tracked in order to obtain follow up information (ELS 2002). This data provide descriptive statistics that demonstrate the rate of young Latinas' school involvement and how their parents and teachers believe they interact with school. I also provide a picture of the students' interactions and relationships with their parents and teachers from the students' perspectives and incorporate demographic information from high school Latinas and how they view their educational experiences.

Variables used for this project include student sex, student race, individuals who provided college information, close relatives' desires for students' post-secondary careers, how often a student discussed college with her parents, the parents' highest obtained level of education, the importance the student placed on education, whether the student felt her teachers praised effort, parents' aspirations for their child's education, the student's educational aspirations, the level of parents' understanding of spoken English, parents' satisfaction with their child's education, the importance parents placed on their child living at home while she pursued post-secondary education, students' beliefs that teaching is good at their school, students' beliefs that teachers are interested in students, whether students attended a bilingual/bicultural class, whether English is the students' native language, students' beliefs that teachers expect them to succeed in school, teachers praise student effort, and students' attendance in a college preparation program. For this project, I filtered the data to include only Latina female students¹ to understand their high school experiences and the factors leading them to make decisions for their future. The sample size of Latinas is N=1121. Parental involvement and expectations are also included, along

¹Excluding analysis in Chart 1.1, which includes all students enrolled in tenth grade year in 2002, and Chart 1.2, which includes all female and male Latino students enrolled in tenth grade year in 2002.

with teacher influences that may or may not impact Latinas' college decision-making process. Using these data, the results are generalizable to the national population of Latina women enrolled in tenth grade in 2002. These data are particularly relevant today and to my research questions because the participants who decided to continue their education in college may have finished obtaining their college degrees now. This is directly relevant to the qualitative data conducted in 2010 and allows me to see if the experiences of Latinas today may be similar or different from the experiences of Latinas in 2002.

Qualitative

All participants ($n = 8$) involved in the qualitative interviews were Latina women specifically eighteen to nineteen years of age because this is the age when most students are faced with the decision to enroll in college. Six participants were in college. One participant had just graduated from high school and decided to apply to college. One participant was not in college but wanted to obtain a college degree in the future. For the purpose of this study, it was important that the participants identified themselves as Latinas. What it means to be a Latina may vary, but doing so places emphasis on the cultures from Latin American Spanish-speaking countries, such as Mexico, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, Peru, or El Salvador. The women who volunteered to complete the interviews were contacted through nonprofit community based organizations that mainly focus on Latino/Hispanic affairs. These organizations were informed of the purpose of the study, and they referred the correct information to the women who participated. Women were also contacted at supermarkets, Laundromats, and local businesses in the Latino community. They were informed about the project; if they were interested, their contact information was shared with the researcher, and interviews were conducted later.

Snowball sampling was also utilized to obtain participants for involvement; participants referred others who might be interested in volunteering for the study to the researcher. The sample is small, nonrandom, and nonrepresentative. As a result, these qualitative data are not generalizable; rather, they are used to pro-

vide more detailed information about the Latina experience in education and the family value system. The women's participation was fully voluntary, and their identities are kept confidential for their own protection. Prior to the contact and recruitment of the participants for this study, Institutional Review Board approval was obtained through the researcher's home university.

One-on-one interviews were conducted with the participants and lasted from thirty to sixty minutes. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish and later translated into English. Notes taken during the interviews were transcribed immediately afterwards. In addition to demographic information about interviewees, their experiences in school and family structure were explored through a series of open-ended questions. The questions were designed to elicit an understanding of what is important to these young women and how they perceive their experiences in their family and education. These interviews allow for a better understanding of the roles Latinas are learning in their families, their values and traditions, and how their interactions with family members affect their college enrollment decision-making process. Interviews also allowed for investigation of women's perceptions of the school institution, if they had enough information about college, and how their relationships with their teachers affected their decision-making process. Additionally, the question of, "What do you believe are some barriers for Latinas to obtain an education?" and, "What do you consider are some opportunities for Latinas to obtain an education?" were asked to obtain information not only from their personal experiences in the educational system but also their perceptions of their environments. Interviews were content coded into themes and analyzed. The themes that were relevant were family, college, and the decision-making process. These themes included participants' points of view along the following dimensions: participants' goals and dreams, parental support, family values, family traditions, family unity, parent communication, family roles and obligations, parental expectations, teacher support, school access for college information, school diversity, school participation, participants' role models, close friends go-

ing to college or not, barriers to obtaining a higher education, opportunities to obtaining a higher education, and the pay-off of attaining a college education.

Analytic Strategy

Descriptive statistics were conducted to depict a clear picture of the population, 1121 Latina female students. They include demographic information about the schools participating in the Education Longitudinal Study in 2002, using the following variables: racial composition, gender composition, parental level of education, and English as the native language. Cross-tabulations were conducted with variables to glean a better understanding of Latinas' family values and traditions as well as the role of the educational system. Correlations were run to investigate the relationship between specific variables and what may be some of the factors leading to the decision for Latinas to obtain a higher education. Additionally, for the qualitative interpretation of the results, I coded the interviews into different themes that are affecting Latinas' decision-making processes. The coding schema was related to relevant dimensions explored during the interviews to understand the decision-making process of young Latinas. Family and school experiences were examined along with the participants' goals and dreams. Opinions on barriers to obtaining a higher education and opportunities for continuing their education after high school were also examined.

RESULTS

Schools in the United States are filled with students of different genders, races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status. The national racial composition of tenth grade high school students in the United States during 2002 indicated that 14.5% of all students were Latino (see Chart 1.1). Of the Latino students, 49.5% were female (see Chart 1.2). Out of all Latina students who were in tenth grade in 2002, 47% spoke English as their native Language (See Appendix). To make a decision about one's future is difficult for any teen. But how are Latinas deciding whether or not to obtain a college education? Through this project, I analyze how and if their family values and traditions play a large

role, and how the school as an institution plays a role in this decision.

Correct knowledge and information about college may be critical when making the decision of whether or not to apply. The individuals who these women go to for college information about college may have a great influence on this process. These young women may be going to different individuals to obtain information about college (see Table 1.1). Some have gone to their school counselor (45.3%), to their teacher (37.1%), and to their coaches (5.4%). However, most women are reaching out to their families about college information. Seventy-six percent of women identify that they ask family members for college information. Therefore, the family may play a very significant role on Latinas' decision-making process for their academic future. The family as well as the school institution may affect significantly the type of information Latinas obtain about college and their decisions for their future.

Family

Parents, siblings, and other family members may have a great influence of how much Latina students value education. Cultural and social capital about college may be passed on to Latina students from different family members. Latinas may also learn the importance of obtaining a higher education from their close relatives and family members. This may demonstrate the shift from traditional roles to nontraditional roles for Latinas. According to the Education Longitudinal Study data, as shown in Chart 1.3, 77.3% of Latinas' close relatives want them to go to college. This is significant because, although some of the relatives may not have a college education, they continue to value education since they want the student to continue their education after high school. Additionally, most students have discussed going to college with their parents; 50.8% of the Latina students said they talk to their parents often and an additional 40.2% of students said they talk to their parents sometimes (see Chart 1.4). This may possibly demonstrate the value of familism, parental support and how much Latinos do value education given that 91% of women are turning to parents for support and advice about college.

Racial Composition of All Students in Tenth Grade in 2012

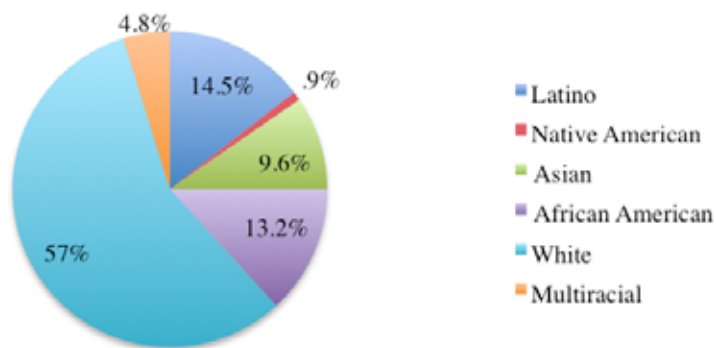


Chart 1.1 (ELS 2002)

Gender Composition of Tenth Grade Latino Students in 2002

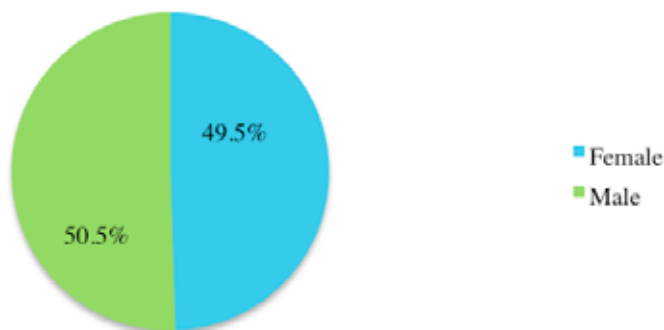


Chart 1.2 (ELS 2002)

	Parent	Sibling	Teacher	Counselor	Coach
Yes	50.6%	25.4%	37.1%	45.3%	5.4%
No	49.4%	74.6%	62.9%	54.7%	94.6%

Table 1.1 Individuals that Latina students have gone to for college information in tenth grade

Close Relative's Desire for Student after High School

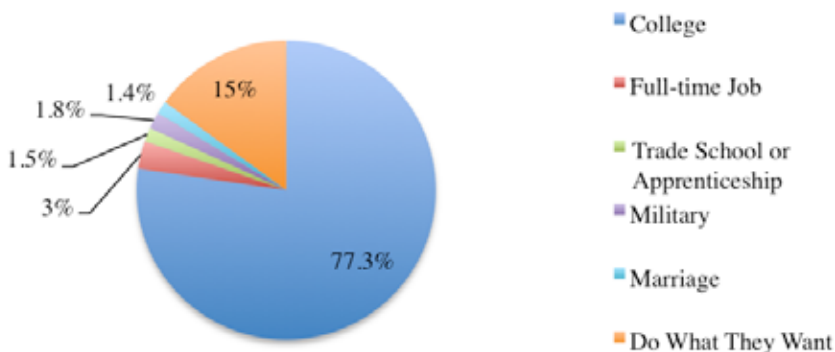


Chart 1.3 (ELS 2002)

To gain a better picture about how Latinas' family values and traditions may affect their decision-making process, a crosstabulation of how often students discussed going to college with their parents and the parents' highest level of education was conducted. The results indicate that, no matter their parents' level of education, most students (90%) are discussing college with their parents, (see Table 1.2). The results also indicate that most of the parents (60%) did not pursue a college degree, but they are still encouraging their daughters to obtain a higher education or at least are discussing the idea with them.

During the qualitative interviews conducted as part of this research project, participants mentioned how family closeness and unity are very important in their families. When asked if they considered their families to be close, most of the participants explained that they felt their families were very close. "We are very close we are always there for each other" (Interviewee 6). One of the participants said that she was not very close with her family because she had moved out of the home. The same participant mentioned how she misses her family and wishes she could be close with them again. Another participant said, "My immediate family is very close, but I was closer with her cousins when I was younger, our interests have changed.... I'm in school" (Interviewee 3). Latinas mentioned how communication with their parents is very important. One of the participants mentioned how her communication with her parents has grown as she has gotten older. "I tell them everything even if they don't want to hear it" (Interviewee 1).

Latinas' Communication with Parents About Higher Education

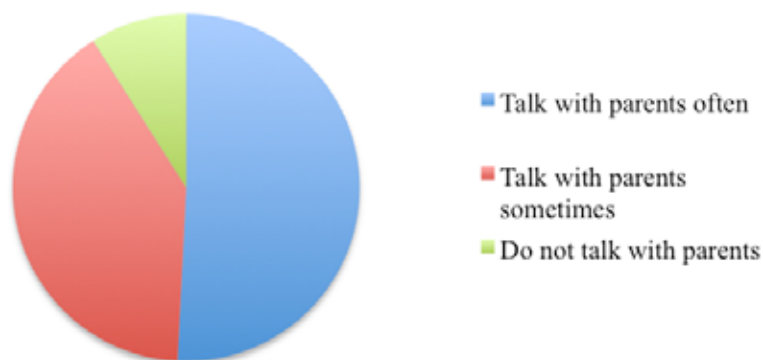


Chart 1.4 (ELS 2002)

Parent's highest level of education	How often child discussed going to college with their parents			
	<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Did not finish high school</i>	1.8% (16)	8.9% (77)	8.9% (77)	19.7% (170)
<i>Graduated from high school/GED</i>	2.9% (24)	9.1% (79)	9.3% (81)	21.3% (184)
<i>Two year school, no degree</i>	1.2% (10)	4.7% (41)	5.9% (51)	21.3% (184)
<i>Graduated from a two year school, no degree</i>	.8% (7)	4.2% (37)	3.7% (32)	11.8% (102)
<i>Attended college, did not complete</i>	1.4% (12)	4.3% (42)	6.6% (57)	8.8% (76)
<i>Graduated from college</i>	.9% (8)	4.9% (43)	8.2% (71)	12.9% (111)
<i>Completed a Master's degree</i>	.1% (1)	1.8% (16)	3.2% (41)	14.2% (122)
<i>Completed PhD, other advanced degree</i>	0% (0)	1.2% (11)	3.4% (28)	6.7% (58)
Total	9% (78)	40% (346)	50% (438)	100% (862)

Table 1.2 Crosstabulation of "Parent's highest level of education" and "How often the child discussed going to college with their parents"

Crosstabulations of how far in school parents want their child to go and how far in school the student thinks she will get were also conducted (see Table 1.3). The majority of the participants, both parents and daughters, agreed that graduating from college was their primary choice (78%). Most parents want their daughters to obtain at least a two-year college education. Similarly, most daughters want to pursue at least a two-year education. Contrary to stereotypes, this demonstrates how Latinos do value education. In addition, several correlations were conducted to understand the secondary data on how family values and traditions may affect the decision-making process of young Latinas regarding college.

		Importance of getting a good education			
		<i>Not Important</i>	<i>Somewhat Important</i>	<i>Very Important</i>	Total
Teachers Praise Effort	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	0% (0)	.7% (7)	19.5% (193)	20.2% (200)
	<i>Agree</i>	.2% (2)	4.5% (45)	44% (436)	48.8% (483)
	<i>Disagree</i>	.1% (1)	3.8% (38)	24.0% (238)	27.9% (277)
	<i>Strongly Disagree</i>	0% (0)	.6% (6)	2.4% (24)	3% (30)
Total		.3% (3)	9.7% (96)	90% (891)	100% (990)

Table 1.2 Crosstabulation of “Parent’s highest level of education” and “How often the child discussed going to college with their parents”

	How far in school a parent wants their child to go						
How far in school a student thinks they will go	<i>High school graduate/ GED</i>	<i>Two year college</i>	<i>Four year college incomplete</i>	<i>Graduate from college</i>	<i>Master’s degree</i>	<i>PhD or other advanced degree</i>	Total
<i>Less than high school</i>	.1% (1)	0% (0)	0% (0)	.8% (8)	.1% (1)	.5% (5)	1.5% (15)
<i>High school/ GED</i>	1.3% (13)	1.6% (16)	0% (0)	3.2% (31)	.8% (8)	1.4% (14)	8.3% (85)
<i>Two year college</i>	.2% (2)	.7% (7)	0% (0)	2.4% (24)	.6% (6)	1% (10)	5% (49)
<i>Four year college incomplete</i>	.2% (2)	.6% (6)	.1% (1)	2.3% (23)	.8% (8)	1.4% (14)	5.5% (54)
<i>Graduate from college</i>	1.3% (13)	1.3% (13)	.2% (2)	17.5% (172)	7.9% (78)	10.4% (102)	38.7% (380)
<i>Master’s degree</i>	.4% (4)	.3% (3)	.1% (1)	7.3% (72)	5.4% (53)	7.1% (70)	20.7% (203)
<i>PhD or other advanced degree</i>	.3% (3)	.1% (1)	.1% (1)	5.7% (56)	3.6% (35)	10.6% (104)	20.3% (200)
Total	3.9% (38)	4.7% (46)	.5% (5)	39.3% (386)	19.2% (189)	32.5% (319)	100% (983)

Table 1.2 Crosstabulation of “How far in school a parent wants their child to go” and “How far in school a student thinks they will go”

Correlations between how far in school a student thinks she will get and how well her parents understand spoken English are statistically significant ($b = .243$, $p \leq .01$), which indicates that the relationship is positive and it is not due by chance (see Table 1.4). However, it should be noted that the relationship is weak. One of the reasons for this weak relationship may be the result of other variables influencing the outcome, for example, the respondent's socioeconomic status². This relationship is important because it demonstrates that a student is able to obtain cultural and social capital from her parent, and that the parent may or may not be able to communicate with the school regarding opportunities for the student's future. Another possibility for the weakness of the relationship may be that the parents' native language may not interfere that greatly with Latinas' college decisions. It may be true that since the student already speaks English fluently, she may not need her parents to obtain the correct information.

Next, correlations between how far in school a student thinks she will get and parent satisfaction with their child's education were run. There is a positive statistically significant relationship found between these two variables ($b = .144$, $p \leq .01$). This statistically significant relationship demonstrates the association between the importance of education to parents and their plan for their child's future. This may be related to how students are learning the importance of education as they grow up, as symbolic interactionist theorists demonstrate, and the passing on of cultural and social capital. However, this relationship is also weak (see Table 1.5), which may be due to the effect of other variables also affecting the students' desire for their future after high school. It is also a possibility that the parents' satisfaction with their child's education is not the most significant factor affecting Latinas' decisions about higher education.

Additionally, it may be harder for parents who were unable to obtain an education to realize the quality of education that their child is obtaining. Regarding the national data, parental satisfaction with their child's education may also depend

		How far in school a student thinks they will get	How well parent understands spoken English
How far in school a student thinks they will get	Pearson correlation Sig. N	1 983	
How well parent understands spoken English	Pearson correlation Sig. N	.243** .000 475	1 539

** $p \leq .01$

Table 1.4 Correlations between "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "How well parent understands spoken English"

		How far in school a student thinks they will get	Parent satisfaction with their child's education
How far in school a student thinks they will get	Pearson correlation Sig. N	1 983	
Parent satisfaction with their child's education	Pearson correlation Sig. N	.144** .000 848	1 966

** $p \leq .01$

Table 1.5 Correlations between "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "Parent satisfaction with their child's education"

on the level of education the parent has obtained. Clarity on this issue may come from the qualitative interviews. All of the women who participated in the qualitative interviews were first generation students, either in college or going to college. Even though their parents did not have a college education, the interviewees received their parents' full support. The value of education in Latino families was reflected throughout the interviews. "My parents have always pushed me to go to college, they are very supportive" (Interviewee 2). "Where I come from, not a lot of people have a college education. If I don't want to be like them, I have to go to college and their (parents') values pushed me to go further" (Interviewee 7). Parental support for their daughters to pursue education after high school may also be perceived through variables that demonstrate other values in the Latino family; living at home may be one of them.

Parents who push their daughters to obtain a higher education may be more understanding of their daughters living on campus or near their universities outside of the home. Understanding of a college education can therefore, be demonstrated through the relationship between the parents wanting their child to obtain a higher education and parents wanting their child to stay at home after high school. On the one hand, it may be possible that parents want their daughters to stay in home to protect them; on the other hand, it may be possible that parents want their daughters to move out so they can pursue a higher education and become independent.

Correlations between how far in school a student thinks she will get and living at home while attending post secondary school were also conducted. There is a negative statistically significant relationship between these two variables ($b = -.165$, $p \leq .01$). As the student wants to

² Further analysis indicates that control for socioeconomic status does not affect the statistical significance of this relationship, however, the possibility of other variables affecting or mediating results still remains.

continue her education, parents are more understanding of her living outside of the home while attending college (see Table 1.6). The value of familism, family closeness and unity, may be reflected in the parents' desire for their child to stay at home. But we should also note that this relationship is weak. There may be various reasons why this relationship is weak, for example, the area where the student lives: she may live near a well-known college or university, and staying at home may be her best option. Other factors that may affect this relationship may be how much the student contributes to her family or her family obligations.

Puzzling results from qualitative data contradict the quantitative results. Women who participated in interviews for this research all mentioned they felt great support from their families for obtaining a higher education; six out of eight lived at home with their parents. Most women who lived at home with their parents lived relatively close to their universities, at the most 20 minutes away. One of the women who did not live with her parents lived on campus, and her parents lived a few hours away. The other woman who did not live with her parents lived with her boyfriend. It is a possibility that women from the national data have little access to colleges and universities near their family's homes. This may be a reason why there is a relationship within women from the national data set whose parents demonstrate support for them living outside of the home and their parents wanting the daughters to obtain a higher education. Women who participated in the qualitative interviews and lived with their parents felt large support from their families to obtain an education.

All of the women mention how their primary family obligation includes being there for their family and supporting each other. "It is a common understanding that we are there for each other" (Interviewee 3). "Help around the home and with whatever they need me" (Interviewee 5). One of the interviewees mentioned how she helps her family financially: "I help them

		How far in school a student thinks they will get	Living at home while attending post secondary school is important to the parent ³
How far in school a student thinks they will get	Pearson correlation Sig. N	1 983	
Living at home while attending post secondary school is important to the parent	Pearson correlation Sig. N	-.165** .000 753	1 853

**p ≤ .01

Table 1.6 Correlations between "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "Living at home while attending post secondary school is important to the parent"

		How far in school a student thinks they will get	Parents' highest level of education
How far in school a student thinks they will get	Pearson correlation Sig. N	1 983	
Parents' highest level of education	Pearson correlation Sig. N	.224** .000 983	1 1121

**p ≤ .01

Table 1.7 Correlations between "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "Parent's highest level of education"

with money, nothing too dramatic" (Interviewee 4); she said that she helps her family as much as she is able. The traditional value of familism may be reflected through the family unity described by the participants. Unexpectedly, the traditional roles of Marianismo, so highly talked about in past literature, were not reflected in the interviews for this project, as the interviewees did not relate to them.

In addition, correlations between how far in school a student thinks she will get and parents' highest level of education were conducted. There is a positive statistically significant relationship between these

two variables ($b = .224, p \leq .01$). As the student's desire to obtain a higher level of education increases, her parents' level of education also increases (see Table 1.7). This relationship may demonstrate the passing on of cultural and social capital. Further, the use of Symbolic Interactionist Theory might show how students learn meanings from their parents and their environments. While this relationship is statistically significant, we must also remember that the strength of this relationship is weak. One of the various reasons for this weak relationship may be because, although cultural and social capital about higher education

³ Coding of the variable "Living at home while attending post secondary school is important to parent" and "How far in school a student thinks they will get" is opposite. As a student wants to pursue a higher degree of education increases, their parents are less likely to want them to stay at home, which is why it shows the p-value is negative. This symbolizes how, as parents are more understanding of their daughters going to college, they are more likely to support them by agreeing that they can live outside of the home.

may not be able to be transmitted if parents do not have a higher education, it may also be an incentive for students to obtain a higher education. A lot of women may view their parents' experiences as learning opportunities and want better ways of life than what their parents had.

During the interviews, one of the questions asked was, "What encouraged you to obtain a higher education?" One of the respondents answered, "wanting more than what my brothers and parents achieved" (Interviewee 1). Although the participant was unable to obtain the correct knowledge and information about college from her immediate family, she used their experiences as an incentive for obtaining a higher education. During the interview, she mentioned how she has seen her mother and father struggle and she did not want to have a similar experience. It is also possible that some students may use their parents' experiences as guides to lead their own lives. The participant who was not in college mentioned that her goals and dreams are to have a family and children.

Most of the women who were interviewed were first generation students, either in college or going to college. Only one of the participants' parents had a college education, and another participant was not going to college. Parents' satisfaction with their child's education may also depend on the level of education the parents have attained. If the parents have not obtained an education, it may be harder for them to realize what type of education their child is obtaining because they may not have anything to compare it to. The interviewees who were in college or planning on going to college received full support from their parents on obtaining a higher education. Their parents have pushed them to continue their education. When asked, "What are your parents expectations from you?", one of the respondents answered, "To go to college" (Interviewee 4), while another answered, "To be independent and obtain an education" (Interviewee 5).

Moreover, regarding how Latinas' family values and traditions affect their decision-making processes about higher education, the qualitative interviews conducted with 18- to 19-year-old Latinas also provide more meaning to the secondary

data. Participants were able to share their personal experiences, giving us more rich and detailed information about Latinas' family values and traditions and how these affect their college-related decision-making process. Surprisingly, all participants had a very hard time describing their family values and traditions. Seven out of eight participants agreed that their main family value is family togetherness and the sense of family unity. This may be another demonstration of the value of familism in the Latino family, while the eighth participant mentioned that her main family value is education. Many Latino families and Latina students highly value education, which is reflected by one of the participants in the interviews.

One of the participants described that sense of family unity as follows: "It is that unconditional love ... when my older brother got in trouble, I was disappointed ... but no matter what, he is my brother so I have to be there for him, I went to see him every weekend when he was locked up, that shows our togetherness ... we would all go see him every weekend" (Interviewee 1). Another participant described her family togetherness as being there for each other; when her parents were sick and had to move out of the state, she decided to move with them to help them as much as she can. "Whatever they need me to do I'll be there" (Interviewee 4).

Additionally, when asked, "What are your family obligations?", all participants answered, "to be there for one another" as part of their response. All of the participants mentioned how they do not have any set obligations; they help when they are needed, and they try to focus mostly on their education. "All I have to do is focus on my education and work... cuz I'm the youngest and only girl, so I am spoiled... Sometimes I translate for my grandparents when they come visit and I take them to doctors' appointments, I drive them everywhere" (Interviewee 1). "I am trying to be a good role model for my sister" (Interviewee 5).

Parental expectations were also explored through these interviews. All the respondents mentioned how their parents want them to be independent. When asked, "What are your parents' expectations from you?", one of the respondents answered by

saying that her parents trust her a lot, and that they expect her to be more responsible than the average 19-year-old: "They expect me to do the right thing" (Interviewee 3). Another respondent answered that her parents expect her to "go to college, support myself and become independent" (Interviewee 4). Nontraditional roles were present within the parental expectation of the Latina interviewees, and most of the participants were encouraged to become independent and obtain a higher education.

Most interview participants did not consider their family a "traditional" family. One of the participants is biracial, and her family members practice various religions. She mentioned that this may be an explanation for why she does not consider her family to be traditional. Another participant's parents are on their second marriage and have stepbrothers and stepsisters, which is why they do not consider their family to be traditional. Three of the participants believed her family to be very traditional because it is composed of the mother, the father, and the children. Most participants did not consider their family to be traditional because they did not have the "typical" nuclear family and their parents had been married or divorced more than once.

Most participants depicted their family traditions as music, food, and holidays. Participants were asked to identify both their own traditions and their family traditions. All participants agreed that their traditions are the same as their family's traditions. One of the participants also mentioned relationships with family and friends. Another participant mentioned visiting family as one of her main traditions. "We visit each other during the year, because I have family members in different states" (Interviewee 4). This may depict the value of familism present within the Latino family. It can be tentatively concluded from this insight that, while family traditions may not have a large impact on the decision-making process of college enrollment for Latinas, the family value of familism is present. Family may be a way for Latinas to obtain cultural capital. It is possible that the cultural capital needed to make the decision regarding college may be more noticeable through family values.

When Latinas are considering whether to enroll in college, other factors may be very important as well, one of which is the role that the school may play as an institution.

EDUCATION

In a way, the educational system shapes the future of many young students. The relationship among school staff, teachers, and students may be important to Latinas’ college decisions. According to Latinas who participated in the Education Longitudinal Study in 2002, over 80% believe that their school provides good teaching (combining students who strongly agree and agree; see Chart 1.5). The quality of education a Latina receives could impact whether she applies to college or not. Additionally, 79.1% of Latinas believe their teachers are interested in students (combining categories of Strongly Agree and Agree; see Chart 1.6). This may affect how Latinas shape their future, as they have someone they may comfortably relate to and reach out to for information. Latina students may also view teachers as role models. Latinas’ perceptions about their teachers may affect their view of them as role models.

To gain a better image of the relationship between teachers and Latina students in U.S. schools, a crosstabulation was conducted between the variables of “Teachers praise students’ effort” and “Students’ belief in the importance of getting a good education.” Overall, most students (63.9%) believe that teachers praise student effort (combining students who agree and strongly agree; see Table 1.8). Regardless of students’ opinions on teachers praising their effort, 90% of Latina students value education as very important, and 9.6% of Latina students value education as somewhat important. Only 0.3% of students view education as not important. These findings are very important because they demonstrate that, even if the students do not feel that their work is being valued, they continue to place importance on education. This may demonstrate that Latina students learn to value education outside of the school, relying on other institutions for this support. The students who feel that their teachers do not praise their efforts in

Latina Students Believe Teaching is Good at Their School

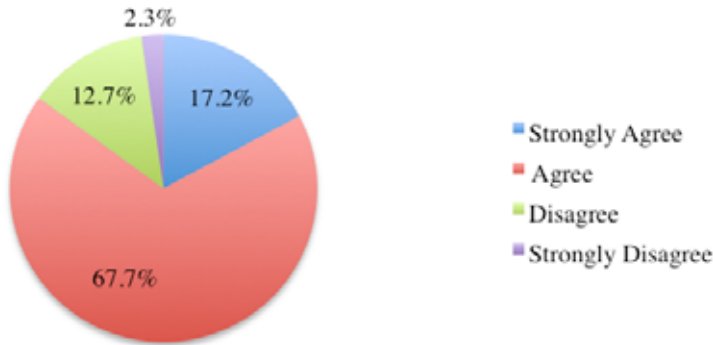


Chart 1.5 (ELS 2002)

Latina Students Believe that Teachers are Interested in Students

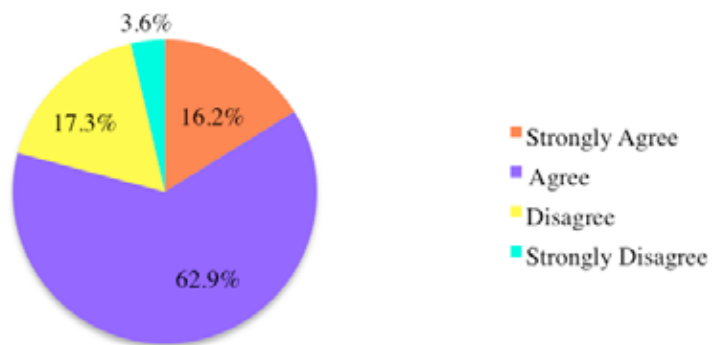


Chart 1.6 (ELS 2002)

		Importance of getting a good education			
		Not Important	Somewhat Important	Very Important	Total
Teachers Praise Effort	Strongly Agree	0	7 .707%	193 19.49%	200 20.2%
	Agree	2 .202%	45 4.54%	436 44.04%	483 48.78%
	Disagree	1 .101%	38 3.83%	238 24.04%	277 27.97%
	Strongly Disagree	0	6 .606%	24 2.42%	30 3.03%
Total		3 .303%	96 9.69%	891 90%	990 100%

Table 1.8 Crosstabulation of “Students belief that teachers praise student effort” and “Importance of getting a good education” (ELS 2002)

school may demonstrate the portion of Latina students who attend schools where the aim of policies, practices, and regulations do not assist Latina students in obtaining a higher education.⁴ To explore whether the school institution specifically aims to help Latinas continue their educational careers, a crosstabulation between the variables of whether English is the student's native language and if the student has ever been in a bilingual/bicultural class was conducted.

Slightly more than half (53%) of the Latinas who participated in the Education Longitudinal Study do not speak English as their native language. Most of those Latina students (68.7%) did not participate in a bilingual/bicultural class (see Table 1.9). There may be various reasons for this lack of participation in bilingual/bicultural class. For example, some of the schools may not offer a bilingual/bicultural class, or there may be policies or regulations prohibiting them. It is possible that Latina women simply decided not to participate in bilingual/bicultural classes even if their schools offered them. However, offering such classes may help students who do not speak English as their native language and encourage them to continue their education after high school. The relationship and communication among Latina students, their parents, and school staff may have a large impact on the decision-making process of young Latinas. Several additional correlations to understand the Latina experience in the educational institution were also conducted.

Correlations between "How far in school a student wants to go" and "Teachers expect success for the student in school" show a positive statistically significant relationship between these two variables ($b = .145, p \leq .01$; see Table 1.10). Expectations from teachers may also influence Latinas' college decisions. It is possible that teachers expecting Latinas to go to college share information with them about college, and that Latinas with teachers who expect them to go to college feel more support to pursue higher education. Teachers' interactions with students is very important because, as Critical Race Theory suggests, teachers may carry out the schools' practices and regulations. It may be difficult to

		Ever in a bilingual/bicultural class		
Whether English is student's native language		No	Yes	Total
	No	37.8%	15.2%	53%
	Yes	30.9%	16.1%	47%
	Total	68.7%	31.3%	100%
Total	1049			

Table 1.9 Crosstabulation of "Whether English is student's native language" and "Ever in a bilingual/bicultural class" (ELS 2002)

		How far in school a student thinks they will get	Teachers expect success for the student in school
How far in school a student thinks they will get	Pearson correlation	1	
	Sig. N	983	
Teachers expect success for the student in school	Pearson correlation	.145**	1
	Sig. N	.000 925	1060

** $p \leq .01$

Table 1.10 Correlations between "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "Teachers expect success for the student in school"

capture practices and regulations through teachers' expectations for their students' success, which might explain the weakness of the relationship. Other reasons for the weak relationship may result from other variables, for example, the students' age, the school (whether it is urban or suburban), or even socioeconomic status. This relationship may possibly be affected by teachers as role models, which may have a large impact on Latinas' post-secondary decision-making process. Latinas' choice of role models may indicate how they want to see themselves in the future. Teacher impact may affect Latinas' decision-making processes as well. When asked about their role models, only one of the participants from the qualitative interviews viewed her teachers and other school staff as her role models. "My role models are my high school band director and one of my advisors. Both are very good teachers and good people, I want to be like them" (Interview-

ee 3). She went on to say that her brother and sister had also greatly influenced her. Although Latinas appreciate their teachers and view them as good teachers, their influence may not be very significant for their college decisions. When asked, "Who are your role models?", most participants answered that it was their mother or their parents. One of the participants answered as follows: "My mom is my role model, she has suffered a lot, if she can overcome so much, so can I" (Interviewee 6).

Correlations between "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "Student in class often feels put down by teacher" are statistically significant ($b = -.083, p \leq .05$). The more Latina students agree that they feel put down by their teachers, the less likely they want to obtain a higher education (see Table 1.11), which may be due to stereotypes and discrimination. Latina students who feel unwelcomed

⁴ Unfortunately, these data do not allow for researchers to determine this in order to protect the anonymity of the respondents. However it is very possible that a lack of support for Latino students in these schools is present.

in the classroom and whose experiences in high school are not positive may not want to continue their education in college. Although this relationship is statistically significant, this relationship is also weak; various reasons may exist for this relationship. On one hand, it may be that, even if Latinas feel put down by their teachers, they are using this as an incentive to obtain a higher education; but it is also possible that Latinas who feel put down by their teachers are reaching out for other individuals for educational support.

Surprisingly enough, not all correlations were statistically significant within the education component of this project. Puzzling results demonstrate correlations between “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “Whether the student thinks that their teachers praise student effort” (see Table 1.12). Teachers’ praise for Latinas’ effort may not significantly influence their decision to go to college. Latinas’ past educational experiences may affect their experiences in school today; here, the lack of support for Latinas’ education in the past may affect Latinas’ perception of their teachers’ opinions. There could be various reasons why this relationship is not statistically significant; for example, Latinas’ reliance on teachers for this decision may not be as important as that of other people in their lives, such as their family members or friends.

Another correlation between the variables of “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “Punishment by the teachers and administrators is the same no matter who you are” is also not statistically significant (see Table 1.13). Most of the students participating believed that punishments in their school are the same, regardless of the involved student’s identity. However, even though this relationship is statistically significant, it is weak, which might be due to the students’ beliefs in receiving equal treatment from their schools’ authority figures. Latina students may believe that everyone is punished equally, and this may not affect their college decisions.

Additionally, when correlations between “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “Ever in a program to help prepare for college” were conducted, the

		How far in school a student thinks they will get	In class often feels put down by teachers
How far in school a student thinks they will get	<i>Pearson correlation</i> <i>Sig.</i> <i>N</i>	1 983	
In class often feels put down by teachers	<i>Pearson correlation</i> <i>Sig.</i> <i>N</i>	-.083* .012 921	1 1058

**p ≤ .01

Table 1.11 Correlations between “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “Student in class often feels put down by teacher”

		How far in school a student thinks they will get	Teachers praise student effort
How far in school a student thinks they will get	<i>Pearson correlation</i> <i>Sig.</i> <i>N</i>	1 983	
Teachers praise student effort	<i>Pearson correlation</i> <i>Sig.</i> <i>N</i>	.041 .220 915	1 1049

Table 1.12 Correlations between “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “Teachers praise effort”

		How far in school a student thinks they will get	Punishment is the same no matter who you are
How far in school a student thinks they will get	<i>Pearson correlation</i> <i>Sig.</i> <i>N</i>	1 983	
Punishment the same no matter who you are	<i>Pearson correlation</i> <i>Sig.</i> <i>N</i>	.031 .344 983	1 1056

Table 1.13 Correlations between “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “Punishment is the same not matter who you are”

expected pattern is shown to be present, but the relationship is not statistically significant ($b = .051$). As the student's desire to obtain a higher education increases, her participation in programs that help her to prepare for college also increases (see Table 1.14). There may be various reasons for this relationship; we have to remember that this variable refers to the student's perspective. Although students participated in such programs, they might not have acknowledged them, or they were unaware that it was a program specifically geared towards college preparation. It is also a possibility that Latinas attend schools where these types of programs are unavailable. Teachers creating other opportunities for students to learn about college may supplement schools that may not have such resources. During the qualitative interviews conducted for this project, three out of eight participants said that their school had a program that taught them about college; the other women mentioned that their schools did not have a special program that taught them about college. They mentioned that every teacher talked about college but there was never a special program that related to college. "Every class teachers would talk about college, sometimes they had college students come give presentations" (Interviewee 2).

The interviews were able to provide more detailed information on how the school as an institution affects the decision-making process of young Latinas. Most women who participated in the qualitative interviews confirmed the teachers' support for a higher education (seven out of eight); they mentioned how their teachers really helped them to make a decision of applying to college. "One of the teachers asked everyday if I had applied" (Interviewee 3). Experiences of Latinas in schools and their relationships with their teachers may differ according to how diverse their schools were.

A very important factor that I believe may have a large effect on this decision-making process is the students' experience in school as minorities. Most of the women who were interviewed attended very ethnically and racially diverse schools (six out of eight). All four women agreed that their schools had a large Latino population. When asked about their school ex-

		How far in school a student thinks they will get	Ever in a program to help prepare for college
How far in school a student thinks they will get	Pearson correlation	1	
	Sig. N	983	
Ever in a program to help prepare for college	Pearson correlation	.051	1
	Sig. N	.119 927	1059

Table 1.14 Correlations between "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "Ever in a program to help prepare for college"

perience as minorities, seven out of eight women had positive reactions. "Awesome, I was homecoming queen, once in a while there was drama but always about girls and boys" (Interviewee 1). "My experience was fun, everyone got along with everyone" (Interviewee 2). This may be different if asked to a Latina who has attended a not very diverse school. Two of the women who participated in the study attended a school that was not ethnically or racially diverse. Their experiences were very different: one of the participants felt marginalized and discriminated against, while the other participant felt confident and optimistic. "It helped me because I had an easier chance at being remembered by teachers" (Interviewee 8). "There were not a lot of Latinos, people look at you differently and notice more how you act and dress" (Interviewee 7).

The school institution also carries actors who may be viewed as role models by students. Actors include teachers and other staff. When participants were asked who their main role models were, only one student chose school staff as her role model. Six of the participants said that their role models were their parents and family members, and one said she did not have any. "I don't know, don't really have one (role model), I strive to do better" (Interviewee 4).

Interviewees were also asked what some barriers as well as avenues of opportunities were that Latinas might encounter when obtaining a higher education. For barriers, responses varied from financial availability, discrimination, stereotypes, pregnancy, correct information, bad influences, and

traditional family beliefs. The value of familism and shift from traditional to non-traditional roles were reflected during the qualitative interviews. "Really traditional families where education is not a priority, where family came first. Kids mix up with bad kids, gangs and unnecessary stuff. Idea that they'll be fine without school is not right" (Interviewee 3). Additionally, importance of role models was also acknowledged during the qualitative interviews. "Financially, that's what happened to a lot of my friends.... Also not a lot of push, for many, not a lot of people in their family have gone to college. The feeling of I can't do it. Some of my cousins don't feel like college is for them because there is no one there to push them they all feel like it's too expensive, also they are not informed enough about scholarships and financial aid" (Interviewee 1). Information and quality of education are very important for Latinas to continue their academic goals after high school. "The type of school, I am lucky I went to a good school, a lot of Latinos don't have that opportunity to attend to a school with a quality education" (Interviewee 8). As stated in the quotes, Latinas acknowledge that not all Latinas are able to obtain a higher education, and there may be institutional reasons for this.

Avenues of opportunities that were discussed included correct information about college and resources to gain knowledge of what it is like to be in college and how to apply. Participants also mentioned that scholarships geared towards Latinas would be of great help. "Scholarships directed to Latinas would open more opportunities" (Interviewee 2). Additionally, Latinas in-

interviewed agreed that there are differences that are present in schools within students and that teachers may perceive them. But they are optimistic that Latinas should not focus on the negatives if they want to pursue their dreams. "To not focus on the differences but on the similarities and know that even if you are different you will succeed if you put your mind into it" (Interviewee 8). As shown with the quantitative data, most Latinas in schools in the United States do not speak English as their native language. Latinas interviewed believe that there is a need for schools to acknowledge that not all students speak English, but they should not be held back because of this. "I think it would help if there was a larger understanding on the different languages or more classes that help you learn English as you go along" (Interviewee 7). Opportunities presented by Latinas who were interviewed may also be a reflection of the lack of opportunities available at the schools they attended. Some of these opportunities may be present at other schools, but it is a large possibility that they are not all present homogeneously at all schools. Additionally, a very important avenue of opportunity mentioned by all participants is less discrimination in the schools. Although most Latinas who participated in the interviews attended very diverse schools, they acknowledge that discrimination is present in the school institution. Even though most women interviewed described their schools as very positive settings and they enjoyed their experiences in their schools, they continued to claim that discrimination is present. Latinas who were interviewed mentioned they feel that it is harder for them to obtain a higher education than it is for their non-Latino classmates.

Finally, Latinas who participated in the interviews were asked if they believed the pay-off of going to college is more, equal, or less than what they are putting into college. One of the participants said that, financially, sometimes the pay-off is not equal. "All you need is training and good communication skills ... at my job all people in higher positions have no degrees ... my district manager at my job has no degree ... makes a ton of money ... my mom's boss, same thing, he owns a big corporation and has no degree, just good training ... a lot of time people don't even get jobs in their degrees" (Interviewee 1).

Financially, some Latinas indicated that college costs are too expensive for the types of jobs a person may obtain once graduated. The rest of the participants said that the pay-off is greater than what they had ever expected: that they learned to grow and also learned a lot more about themselves. "More than expected, the amount of knowledge I learn about myself. No one that can stop me but me. I am lucky to have a supportive family, a lot of friends whose parents would rather have them do something else" (Interviewee 3). Some of the women interviewed view the pay-off of college as a self-determining journey. Financially, they do not see it as a pay-off. Family support for higher education was a very important factor and topic of discussion throughout the interviews. Most Latinas who were interviewed for this project feel a large family support for college enrollment. Latinas interviewed have demonstrated pride in obtaining a college education.

DISCUSSION

Family

Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methodologies has given us a better idea of how Latinas decide whether or not to continue their education. The qualitative interviews were very helpful in gaining detail information about Latinas' experiences in their homes and schools. Although the qualitative interviews are nonrepresentative, they have served as a means to gain a broader perspective on what Latinas' experiences are like within their families.

Family values and traditions were explored through descriptive statistics within the following variables: "Individuals that Latina students have gone to for college information in tenth grade." Additionally, crosstabulations between variables of "Students' belief that teachers praise effort" and "Importance of getting a good education," "How far in school a parent wants their child to go" and "How far in school a student thinks they will go," and "Parent's highest level of education," and "How often the child discussed going to college with their parents" were also conducted to gain a better picture of how the family is influencing Latinas' decision to go to college.

Furthermore, several correlations were conducted to understand better how family values and traditions affect the decision-making process of college enrollment for many young Latinas. The following correlations were statistically significant and positive, but they were weak: "How far in school a student thinks they will pursue" and "How well their parents understand spoken English"; and, "How far in school a student thinks they will pursue" and "Parent satisfaction with their tenth grader's education." The results for the correlation of how far in school a student thinks she will get and living at home while attending post secondary school were significant in the expected direction, but the strength of the relationship was weak. The results from this data analysis can be seen directly as relevant to the theoretical frameworks that were used for the understanding of this issue: Symbolic Interactionist Theory, Cultural and Social Capital, and Critical Race Theory. Additionally, family values and factors affecting this decision-making process, such as familism and role models for Latinas that were depicted by past scholars, were vibrant in the data analysis and interviews.

Symbolic Interactionist Theory

Results possibly suggest that Latinas derive the meaning of what it is to value education from the symbols they see at home and their relationships with their parents and other family members. As Latinas grow up, they start associating different meanings to symbols; the meaning of education may be associated with success and better life chances. The Latino family emphasizes education to offer better opportunities to their children. Latinas with parents who do not have a higher education may use their parents' experiences as incentives to obtain a higher education. Additionally, even if some of the parents may not have a higher education, they continue to emphasize the importance and value of higher education to their daughters. As they grow up and they see their parents struggle, they may also begin to associate higher education with other doors of opportunities. Many of the women interviewed for this study mentioned that the reason why they want to obtain a higher education is so that they will have better opportunities and fewer struggles

than what their parents had. Similarly, as demonstrated in the secondary data set of the Education Longitudinal Study, 73% of Latinas' close family members want them to obtain a higher education. This shows that Latino families know that education is an avenue of opportunity to a better future. The importance of obtaining a higher education can be understood through different symbols, which then gain a certain meaning as Latina students grow up. With the crosstabulation of "How far in school a student wants to go" and "How far in school parents want their children to go," the majority of the participants want their children to graduate from college. This also demonstrates how parents teach their children the symbols and meanings of obtaining a higher education by placing a high value and importance in college education.

Additionally, as Latinas learn certain symbols, and later on their meaning and value, they are able to associate these meanings with certain roles they play. Contrary to past literature, the role of *Marianismo* was found not to play an active role in the interviews conducted for this study or the correlation between "How far in school a student thinks she will get" and "Living at home while attending post secondary school." This relationship was negative and statistically significant. As more parents become more understanding of their daughters obtaining a higher education and living outside of home, the goal of obtaining a higher education for Latinas increases. Latinas continue to associate different meanings to diverse roles of the family as they grow up; as the results show, they are no longer basing their role to stay in the home and set their own ambitions last. It may be that in the United States today, Latinas are encouraged to become more independent. In a way, they are defining a new role within the Latino family: the role of the student, emphasizing their studies and academic performance first. Contrary to the literature reviewed for this project, most women interviewed did not have a lot of family obligations⁵. Although they did help out in the home when they were needed, their main role was to focus on their education. Latina women are

perhaps becoming more independent, and their families are also becoming more understanding of their need for independence as an avenue of opportunity to obtain a higher education.

Furthermore, Latinas associate the different roles, symbols, and meanings with different people whom they may look up to and view as role models. This may include their parents, siblings, and family members. Most Latinas in the qualitative interviews view their family members as their role models, more so than they view individuals found in the education institution. When asked who their role models were, most Latinas interviewed answered that it was one of their family members because they have seen them struggle and work hard to be where they are today. Latinas may learn the meaning of struggle and hard work as they grow up, and they are able to associate it with their parents and other family members.

Moreover, the value of familism is also learned in the family through different symbols and meanings attached to those symbols. Latinas are able to learn the meaning of familism by having family unity and closeness, which is demonstrated by one of the participants as "unconditional love" (Interviewee 1), or to be there for each other no matter what. As found in the interviews and secondary data set, the value of familism appears to be very important for Latinas. Family unity and closeness were emphasized throughout the interviews and demonstrated by the quantitative analysis of family and parental support for Latinas obtaining a higher education. Most Latinas described helping their family whenever they were needed, especially through translating for their parents.

Symbolic Interactionist Theory also identifies how traditions are associated with symbols and meanings through the family as children grow up. Most of the traditions described by Latinas who were interviewed depicted holidays, music, and food. Symbols of certain music and certain flavors are interpreted as traditions by Latinas. Visiting family members several times a year was also described as a very important tradition by several Latinas. But

traditions did not seem to have a large impact on defining their educational future. However, Latinas may be able to gain different Cultural and Social Capital about college from the visiting of family members, which may influence their decision whether or not to continue their education after high school. While this remains a viable possibility, it was not explored in the interviews and thus may be a topic future scholars should investigate further.

Cultural and Social Capital

Cultural capital can be gained through different institutions, the family being the primary one. Latinas are able to gain some cultural capital from their parents, siblings, and other family members. With the results found for this project it seems clear that there is a lack of communication between the parents and the schools. This means that parents without access to cultural capital that benefits the college decision are in a situation where necessary information for college is not being received. The correlations of "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "How well their parents understand spoken English" demonstrate that a language barrier may affect the student's decision to obtain a higher education. If parents are unable to communicate with the schools, they may not be able to share important information about college with their children if the parents themselves do not have that information. Additionally, all Latinas interviewed are first-generation students going to college, so young women could not gain from parents' capital on college here: for example, how to find financial aid, how to fill out applications, what schools to apply to, what classes are like, and what it is like to live in a dorm; this is information that parents may not have because they did not go to college themselves. Despite this, parents in both the quantitative and qualitative data are very supportive of their daughters' obtaining a higher education. Although Latinas' parents may not have the correct capital for Latinas about college, Latinas continue to reach out to their parents and family members to discuss the topic of college. This is explored in the crosstabulation between "How often student discussed

⁵ Latinas' obligations were unfortunately not a topic that could be explored with the secondary data set. Since the qualitative interviews are not representative, these results should be cautiously interpreted. I encourage other scholars to investigate whether this shift in roles and obligations is occurring for all young Latina women.

going to college with their parents” and “Parents’ highest level of education.” The majority of Latina students nationwide are discussing college enrollment with their parents, no matter what level of education their parents obtained.

The correlations between “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “Parents’ highest level of education” also show the importance of the transmission of cultural capital from parents to children in the process of Latinas’ obtaining a higher education. This statistically significant relationship depicts how students with parents who have gone to college have a better chance to obtain a higher education. This may be due to the passing of cultural capital; Latinas whose parents have a college education are able to obtain the correct knowledge and information about a higher education, which is essential when deciding whether or not to go to college. As education itself is a form of capital, parents with a higher level of education have a larger access to important capital. Additionally, Latinas whose parents have a college degree are more likely to have more money and a higher socioeconomic status, both of which are forms of capital, thus making it easier for those Latinas to obtain a higher education without that financial burden or at least with fewer financial worries. In essence, Latinas whose parents attended college have an abundance of capital they can draw on as they make their decision about higher education⁶.

Furthermore, social capital can also be gained through the family. One of the main traditions that women revealed during the qualitative interviews was visiting family members throughout the years. Most of the visits occur in different states or the family’s country of origin. In the national data, most family members (over 70%) want Latinas to obtain a higher education. By visiting family members, Latinas are able to network and gain different relationships that may be able to help them gain chances later on in life. Both quantitative and qualitative data reveal that family members are supportive of higher education. These family members may be able to supplement support with capital that

benefits young Latina women.

Critical Race Theory

Different practices and regulations by the school institution may also affect young Latinas’ college enrollment decision-making process. Communication between the parents and the schools is very important and may possibly affect Latinas’ educational experience. The correlation between “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “How well their parents understand spoken English” is an example of how the translation of various documents and translators between the school administrators and the parents may have a large impact. When parents have a lower level of understanding for the English language, it is more difficult for them to participate in school functions and meet with teachers about their children’s class participation. If schools are able to increase communication between Latino parents and teachers and/or school administration, it may benefit Latina students as an avenue of opportunity to increase their chances for obtaining a higher education. Correct information about college would be able to be shared with parents who do not have access to that information, which could then be passed on to their children.

Barriers and Avenues of Opportunity

Latinas who were interviewed described that one barrier that may be holding other young Latinas back from obtaining a higher education could be very traditional families. Some of the interviewees for this qualitative portion of this project agree that very traditional gender roles may impact Latinas’ decisions on going to college. One of the participants mentioned that she had friends whose parents are very traditional and would rather have their daughters working at home working than in college. Although traditional roles do not appear to be as common, it appears that, when they are present, they may continue to affect Latinas’ college enrollment decision-making process. Parental support for higher education may be very important and affect traditional roles. It is possible that, with parental support for higher education, traditional roles such as

marianismo may shift to nontraditional roles. With more parental support for their daughters to go to college, parental expectations of their daughters may also change. Marriage was another barrier identified by Latinas who were interviewed. One of the women interviewed was not in college because, although she was not married, she lived with her boyfriend. She discussed how her choice of living with her boyfriend affected her decision not to go to college because, if she had not moved with him, she would have continued her education. Cohabitation, marriage, and dating may also affect Latinas’ decision on going to college. Similar to this participant, other women participating in this project mentioned how they had friends or relatives who did not continue their education after high school because of marriage. It is a possibility that Latinas who decide to obtain a college education are also deciding to wait on marriage⁷. In some cases, this may contrast with their family values within traditional roles.

Although Latinas may face many barriers in obtaining a higher education, avenues of opportunities were also discussed with the participants for this project. Women who were interviewed agreed that family and parental support for higher education affected their decision on college enrollment. Most of the participants who were going to college were the first ones in their families to go to college. They all felt great pride on obtaining a higher education and proving stereotypes wrong. These women have learned to use their parents’ past experiences as an incentive to want more than what their parents have and find better life chances through higher education.

Education

Quantitative and qualitative methodologies were both used to obtain a better depiction of how Latinas decide whether or not to attend college. Descriptive statistics with the following variables helped obtain a better sense of the school institution and Latinas’ experiences: “Latina students believe teaching is good at their school” and

⁶This argument may be relevant to all children whose parents have this access to Cultural Capital and other types of Capital. Further research should investigate how relevant this is to the Latina student population specifically, as well as other student populations.

⁷Delaying marriage to obtain a higher education is a national pattern (Casper and Bianchi 2002). Future scholars should explore the role of traditional roles in the process to determine if this is an experience unique to all women or if it is specific to Latina women.

“Latina students believe that teachers are interested in students.”

Several crosstabulations and correlations were analyzed to understand better the Latina experience in school and how this may affect her decision-making process about higher education. Crosstabulations were conducted to demonstrate a picture of Latinas and higher education. A crosstabulation was conducted between the variables of “Student believes that teachers praise students’ effort” and “The importance of getting a good education” for that student. Overall, most Latinas value education as very important. Although not all Latinas believe that their work in school is valued, they continue to focus on education as an important value. This may demonstrate how the importance of education is not learned through the school but through other socializing institutions, such as the family. A crosstabulation was also conducted between the variables of “Whether English is the student’s native language” and “If the student has ever been in a bilingual/bicultural class.” Whether schools offer programming for students who do not speak English as their native language may affect Latinas’ experiences in education. Crosstabulations will be discussed in the following section.

Correlations for variables to explore Latinas’ educational experiences may raise questions of what Latinas are really experiencing in the school institution. Correlations between the variables of “How far in education a student wants to go” and “Students’ favorite teacher desire for the respondent after high school” were conducted. Results are statistically significant, but the relationship is weak. The rest of the correlations were not statistically significant: “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “Whether the student thinks that their teachers praise student effort”; “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “Student’s belief that punishment is the same no matter who you are”; and, “How far in school a student thinks they will get” and “If student has ever been in a program to help them prepare for college.” These puzzling results may lead to scholars reviewing these types of variables and conducting further research on the relationship between teachers and Latina students. Re-

sults will be explored in the next section. Additionally, to be able to understand the results of this data analysis and interviews, theoretical frameworks such as Symbolic Interactionist Theory, Cultural and Social Capital, and Critical Race Theory were used in this project.

Symbolic Interactionist

Theory. Teacher influence may or may not be important when Latina students decide whether to obtain a higher education. In order to understand the previous puzzling results, scholars can think about the various possibilities for teacher influence on Latinas’ decisions to go to college. Latinas are able to associate meanings and symbols with the resources that their teachers share with them. When teachers are able to emphasize the importance and value of obtaining a college degree, Latinas may begin to associate the meaning of obtaining a higher education with the symbol of college and a college degree. The correlation between “How far in school a student wants to go” and “The students’ favorite teacher desire for the respondent after high school” demonstrates how the respondent’s favorite teacher impacts her decision to go to college. The results from this correlation demonstrate that the relationship between these two variables is weak, but the direction of the relationship is positive and significant. It is possible that the students’ favorite teachers are emphasizing college to their students and that this is how some students learn the meaning of obtaining a higher education. Teacher influence may be important for students to obtain a higher education. On the other hand, it may be that Latina students are not influenced by their teachers regarding college: although Latinas value their teachers, their teachers’ opinions may not matter as much as those from other sources, such as the family.

Even though teachers’ influence may be important to some students, only one of the Latina student participants in the qualitative interviews said she viewed her teachers or school staff as role models. Combining this information with the quantitative data, it is a possibility that because only 13% of the English teachers are Latinos and only 18.2% of math teachers are Latino in the United States (ELS 2002), Latina students may not be able to

identify with their teachers or school administrators and therefore may not view them as role models. Role models are important because they may serve as symbols of what the student wants to be like in the future. Role models may also be a way for students to have an individual as a guide or someone they may be able to rely on for help. Role models are able to share with Latinas different symbols, which Latinas are able to attach meaning to later on. For example, most Latinas who were interviewed for this study viewed their parents as their role models because they had seen them struggle and persevere. Latinas learn to associate their parents with how they are able to overcome struggles; later on, Latinas view them as role models. Latinas may not have role models in the school institutions, and it is possible that this is creating a barrier to higher education. It is also possible that Latinas’ role models may not have such a great influence on the decision to obtain a higher education since nationally, most Latinas want to obtain a higher education. We must also remember that Latinas do not have to find role models with the same racial or ethnic background as themselves. Latinas’ role models may be individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds or races/ethnicities. These individuals may impact Latinas’ college decisions. Future research should explore who Latinas’ role models are, how they identify with these individuals, and how this may or may not affect their college decision-making process.

Cultural and Social Capital

Latina students are also able to gain cultural and social capital through those involved in the school institution. A factor that impacts young Latinas’ decision-making processes is correct information and knowledge about college, in other words, cultural capital about college. However, it turns out that most students are not going to their teachers for college information; rather, they are going to their parents, siblings, and family members. This is vital for students because, if some students are not able to gain the needed information from their parents, they are not turning to the schools for this information. Therefore, communication between the parents and schools becomes very important in order to ensure that Latinas have the right in-

formation about college. According to the national data, less than half of Latina students go to their school counselors for college information, and only 5.4% go to their school coaches. Latina students would be able to gain cultural capital about college if they were able to go to their teachers for this information. It is a possibility that because some students do not feel comfortable with their teachers, they do not go to them for such information. Unfortunately, understanding why these women did or did not go to particular individuals for advice was not explored in this secondary data set. Future researchers should investigate this more fully to understand young Latinas' college decision-making processes better.

The correlation between the variables of "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "Whether the student believes that their teachers praise student effort" is not statistically significant, although the relationship operates in the expected direction. This may demonstrate how, even if the students believe that the teachers are praising their efforts at school, they are not gaining as much from school institution agents that helps them make the decision on whether or not to go to college. Also, the correlation between the variables of "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "Whether a student was ever in a program to help prepare them for college" was not statistically significant. It is a possibility that students do not have the opportunity to participate in such programs. It may be that Latinas are reaching out to other sources and institutions, such as the family, for necessary college information, which is why this may become a barrier if the parents or family members do not have the correct information.

To understand further how the school as an institution is aiming to help Latinas continue their education, the crosstabulation between the variables of "Whether English is the student's native language" and "If the student has ever been in a bilingual/bicultural class" shows that most Latinas were not involved in bicultural or bilingual classes, even though they did not speak English as their native language. It is possible that schools do not offer such classes; it is also possible that Latinas are not aware of them or participating even

though their schools offer these classes. Most Latinas do not speak English as their native language. In many cases, this may be a reason of Latinas' progress in school. English language programs may help Latinas finish high school, obtain a higher education, and gain cultural and social capital from classmates and school agents.

Additionally, society values types of cultural capital differently; the cultural capital that Latinas possess may not be valued as highly as that of other students. Latina interviewees who attended more diverse schools felt more comfortable than students who went to less diverse schools, and they were most likely to participate in school extracurricular activities. Since extracurricular activities are a way to obtain college-related cultural and social capital, they may increase Latinas' opportunities for gaining information and connections that can help them make decisions about college. Access to such activities and different types of school courses may depend on policies and regulations according to demographic areas.

Critical Race Theory

Policies and regulations can affect whether schools have college preparatory classes or bilingual/bicultural classes. Resources provide opportunities for Latinas to become involved in their schools and continue their education. Bilingual and bicultural classes may affect Latinas' college decisions because they can help Latinas perform better in school, thus opening the doors to higher education if English is not their native language. Additionally, they may be able to feel more comfortable in an environment where more than one culture is acknowledged. Bilingual and bicultural classes may also benefit Latinas' parent-teacher communication, which may help Latinas obtain all sources of information they may need to apply to college.

Latina interviewees who attended more ethnically and racially diverse schools described a better relationship with their teachers than interviewees who attended less-diverse schools. The correlations between "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "Whether the student thinks that their teachers praise student effort" were not statistically significant, although they patterned in the expected

direction. Although most Latinas believed their teachers were good teachers, their teachers' praise for student effort has not demonstrated any impact on their desire to attend college. It is possible that the lack of teacher involvement and school support in the past has lessened Latinas' reliance on teachers as their main support system today. While most students believe that their teachers praise their efforts and Latina students felt very positive about their teachers, perhaps Latinas simply do not let teacher opinions influence their decisions for their future. Since students might not compete for their teachers' praise, it might not be valued so highly.

Additionally, teachers may reflect school regulations because they are agents of the school institution. The correlation between "How far in school a student thinks they will get" and "Punishment is the same no matter who you are" is not statistically significant. Most students believed that the punishment was the same no matter who the student was, and this does not affect Latinas' college decisions. Because policies and regulations might not be equal throughout the schools, Latina students do not let them affect their decision to continue their education. Rather, Latinas might be using these policies as an incentive to go on to college. Another possibility is that teachers might carry out punishments independently of school policy and students know it: for example, some teachers might employ stereotypes in the classroom, limiting the level of discrimination at a school to just those classrooms where stereotyping exists.

At first glance, the combination of significant and non-significant results from the national data might seem to contradict the relationship between Latina students and teachers. However, what is more likely is that the relationship between teachers and Latina students is very complex and extends outside the classroom. Some interviewees mentioned that their teachers took them and other students on road trips to visit colleges, while other interviewees did not remember most of their teachers' names. Meanwhile, interviewees who felt marginalized by their teachers used them as an incentive to prove them wrong by continuing with their education. The Latina student-teacher relationship varies ac-

according to the students' attitudes towards their teachers, and vice versa. The impact teachers make on their Latina students is an area of study yet to be explored adequately, but doing so could elucidate the role of teachers in the Latina college decision-making process.

Barriers and Avenues of Opportunity

Several barriers exist that have hindered Latinas' pursuits for higher education, and these have been discussed in the literature (Hernandez 1995; Crosone 2005; LeCroy and Krysik 2008; Olive 2008). When interviewees were asked, "What are some barriers for Latinas to obtain a higher education?", their answers included financial difficulties, pregnancy, stereotypes, discrimination, bad influences, men and marriage, and traditional families, but almost all of the interviewees agreed that economic reasons are a main reason. Although some financial policies and regulations exist to increase the number of Latina college students, many of the interviewees were unaware of them because they were not informed. All of the interviewees agreed that one of the main barriers for Latinas is discrimination. One interviewee shared that discrimination is everywhere, but it is more noticeable when a person is a double minority—both female and Latina (Interviewee 3). Discrimination in schools may impede Latina students from trying their best, which might discourage them from continuing their education in a harsh environment. Very traditional families are also viewed as a barrier to higher education. Two of the interviewees mentioned how some parents prefer to have their daughters at home or working with them instead of letting them go to college. Rather than demonstrating a lack of parental support, this might indicate insufficient communication between schools and parents regarding what college can provide. Finally, one participant mentioned how men and marriage are a big problem because Latinas often fall in love or get attached to a man and are unable to continue their education because they have to help support their family (Interviewee 5). This may be related to the possible shift from traditional to nontraditional roles, but nonetheless, traditional roles continue to exist despite the increasing number of Latinas in college.

Other barriers identified by the Education Longitudinal Study data and results include the lack of communication between parents and school staff. Communication is key for Latinas to obtain information about college. In many cases, parents do not have this information because they did not complete college. If teachers and school administrators cannot communicate with the parents, and students are not reaching out to schools, information about college may not be transmitted. As we have learned, the Latina student-teacher relationship is very complex. Although the degree of teacher influence on Latina college decisions varies, if Latina students start to view their relationships with their teachers as significant, and if schools begin to communicate more effectively (bilingually or not; so long as it meets the parents' needs), barriers can be transformed into opportunities.

All of the interviewees agreed that information is the best way to help Latinas make college decisions, particularly knowledgeable and accurate information about college, financial aid, the application process, and college life. Schools should be able to provide sufficient bilingual resources for students and their parents. Additionally, for Latinas to use their teachers as resources and connect with them, they have to be able to feel more comfortable in the classroom environment. Scholarships were another opportunity discussed in all the interviews. Because college is so expensive, scholarships geared towards Latinas may help them to continue their education. Interviewees viewed the elimination of discrimination as the most important opportunity; although most participants attended more diverse schools, they all had experienced instances of discrimination growing up as Latinas in the United States.

Correlations and crosstabulations from this study demonstrate that more communication and teacher interaction with students may open opportunities for Latina students to obtain a higher education. Additionally, teachers' expectations for their students may also encourage Latinas; connecting with teachers and viewing them as role models may facilitate Latinas' access to the correct information about college.

Various reasons might exist for the weak or not significant correlations between

the variables calculated for this project. Other variables that were not accounted for could be mediating these relationships. Another possibility is that these variables are simply not the best ones to describe the Latina experience in the educational institution. Although the relationships were weak, relationships between variables were in the expected directions. However, future research should try to capture the school and family experiences as closely as possible so we can best understand what relationships exist.

The mixed results of this project lead me to believe that the Latina experience in education may be similar to that of other students with the same socioeconomic status. Students with lower socioeconomic status might lack access to cultural and social capital that aids the college decision-making process. At the same time, there are some specific experiences that not all students from lower socioeconomic statuses encounter. The secondary data set results from the Education Longitudinal Study may help us understand the similarities of Latinas with students from other ethnicities who share the same socioeconomic status: for example, Latinas' perception of their teachers, their schools' college preparatory or bilingual/bicultural course offerings, their attendance in such courses, and even their communication with their parents about college. However, due to the qualitative section of this study, I have discovered that some of the Latina students' experiences are very different from that of other students: the shift from traditional to nontraditional roles for Latinas; the personal reasons for pursuing higher education (identified by Latinas as wanting to have better life chances than their parents); and, Latinas' utilizing their parents' experiences and stereotypes as incentives to continue their education. Additionally, the acculturation, enculturation, and assimilation processes, as well as different policies and regulations aimed at impeding Latinos from obtaining an education, may be experiences specific to Latina students. Latinas' experiences in the school institution and their family values and traditions may share similarities with those of students with equivalent socioeconomic status, but at the same time they may also be different.

CONCLUSION

Theories such as Symbolic Interactionist Theory, Cultural and Social Capital, and Critical Race Theory were used to clarify the Latina's educational experience and her family values and traditions at home. Quantitative and qualitative methodologies were utilized to decipher secondary data and one-on-one interviews. Research questions of: *How do family values and traditions affect eighteen to nineteen year old Latinas decision-making process of going or not going to college?* and, *How does the school as an institution affect the decision-making process of college enrollment for young Latinas?* were analyzed in this research.

Contrary to stereotypes, Latinos do value education. After this project, I was able to support the argument that Latinos highly value education through the use of both qualitative and quantitative data. Although there is a low high school completion record within the Latino community at large, the number of Latinas going to college is slowly increasing. Today's generation of Latinas are finding more family and parental support to obtain a higher education. Even though most of these women are first-generation college students, and they are unable to gain as much cultural and social capital about college or the correct information about college, their parents and family members know the importance of a college education and want this for their daughters. Latinas use their parents' and family experiences as an incentive to be able to have a better future and not struggle the way they did.

The relationship between Latina students and the school is very important for Latinas so they may gain information about their options for their future. There appears to be a lack of communication between Latinas' parents and the schools. Such communication is very important for Latinas and their futures. On the one hand, it is important for parents to understand what the role is of the school as an institution; on the other hand, it is important for agents of the school institution to understand how Latino families view education. Schools must be responsive to the needs of the parents as they attempt to help their children to obtain a college education. Guiding Latina students towards college, better life chances, and new op-

portunities must become the goal of both the parents and the schools.

Furthermore, within the school institution, most Latinas do not appear to view their teachers or school staff as role models. Because there are not a lot of Latino teachers, perhaps Latina students do not feel comfortable to connect with them and view them as role models. Although the Latinas interviewed and those participating in the secondary data agree that they have good teachers, they do not view them as role models and they do not seem to constitute an important support system. If, over time, Latinas have not felt supported by the school institution to pursue a higher education, they might look for that support from other sources, such as the family. Teachers and schools should make supporting and inclusive learning environments a priority. In this type of environment, students should be encouraged if they want to pursue a higher education. Regardless if some students do not want to pursue college after high school, schools should provide supportive and inclusive environments to all students.

Future Research

There were several shortcomings with this study. First, data that specifically addressed Latinas' family values and traditions in relation to their educational aspirations would have provided more definitive conclusions and indicated whether these are values and traditions specific to Latino families. Second, many women who wanted to participate were unable to do so because of fears related to immigration (either theirs or their parents'). Researchers should be cognizant of this and seek to create safe environments for interviewees while attempting to obtain research information. Additionally, scholars should continue to analyze the variables used in this study or similar variables, as doing so would increase our understanding of the Latina educational experience and college decision-making process. Deeper analysis may uncover if relationships between Latinas and their teachers are stronger; or if their family values have a greater influence on the Latina college decision-making process. A larger sample for qualitative interviews may reveal details about

the experiences of second-generation Latina students. Additionally, a more diverse sample for the qualitative section may give researchers a better basis for comparing and contrasting the Latina's experience to that of other students as well as other participants. Participants from different socioeconomic statuses, races, and ethnicities may help compare and contrast Latinas' educational experiences and their family values and traditions at home. Ethnic and racial diversity in schools may also affect the experiences of Latina students and their college decisions. This may also depend on the schools' demographic tendencies and financial resources, which should be explored further. Finally, the dimension of friends and peers was not investigated in this study and further research on this area may be important for understanding the Latina decision-making process. It is also important for future research on Latinas in higher education to understand how our society is growing and what may be some ways to help fight policies and regulations that are holding this population back from bettering their futures. I want to encourage future researchers to continue scholarly work on Latinas and higher education and influences on their decision-making process. Scholars should consider focusing on policies and regulations across the United States that may affect Latinas' education and if these are impeding their pursuit of higher education. In the future, researchers should also identify the incentives that young Latinas have encountered to obtain a higher education.

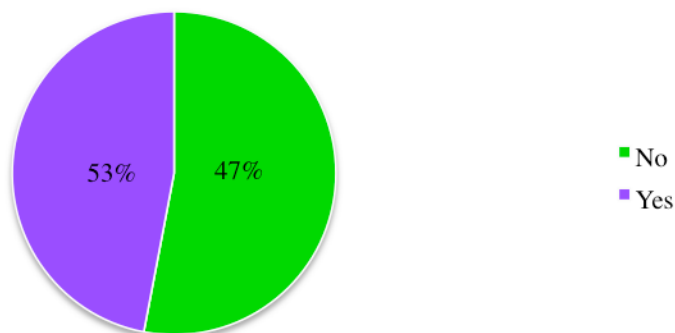
The purpose of this research was to understand the Latina educational experience and family values and traditions at home. Latinas' roles in the family may be changing, and their claim for independence may be augmented through higher education. The family and school institution play a large role in shaping Latinas' life chances. Because the Latino population is growing rapidly, it is important to learn about this population, their goals and ambitions, and how they are affected by policies and regulations.

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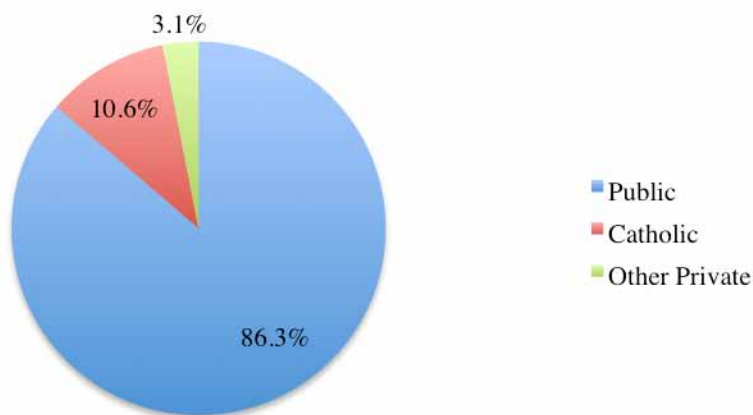
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Latina Students Who Speak English as Their Native Language



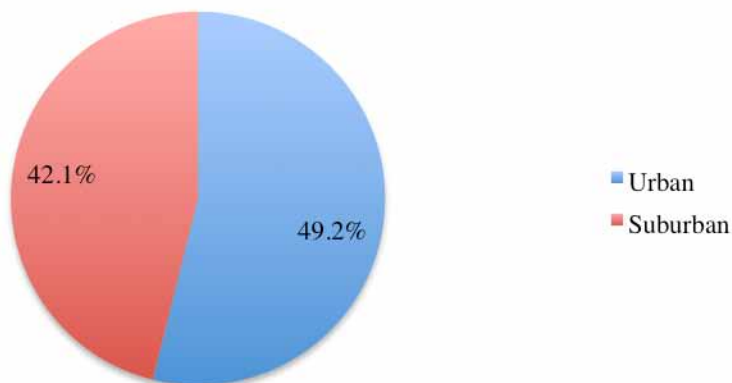
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