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Surviving the Doctorate and Thriving as Faculty: Latina Junior Faculty Reflecting on Their Doctoral Studies Experiences

Juan Carlos González

This study examines the experiences of Latina faculty during their doctoral education. Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with tenure-track Latina faculty (who primarily self-identified as Chicanas, Latinas, and Mexican Americans) across the west and southwest United States. Resiliency theory was used to help structure and understand the findings. Findings show the nature and experiences of Latinas' resiliency during their doctoral programs in the areas of social competence, problem-solving, autonomy, and sense of purpose. The study concludes with a discussion on how academic leaders and institutional change agents can begin to address the education roadblocks experienced by academic Latinas.

In order to survive in the elite White university system, the collective goal of . . . diverse students who have been admitted is to succeed with this power system, but not to be "broken in spirit" along the way. No longer choosing assimilation as the path to success, as generations before them have done, these students forge new paths by creating and employing "critical resistant navigational strategies." (Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998, p. 216)

As of July 2006 there were an estimated 44.3 million (14.7% of the U.S. population) Hispanics¹ in the U.S. (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007a). This makes Latinas/os² the largest "minority" group in the country. In addition, Latinas/os are the fastest growing, with a 2050 projected growth to 102.6 million (or 24.4% of the 2050 U.S. population) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2004); this growth is not expected to be reflected in Latinas/os that seek higher education (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2006). In addition, while the size and growth of the Latina/o population has contributed to the problems of attaining the type of formal education that is available to Whites and other racial/ethnic groups (from K-12 to higher education), this does not excuse the fact that "the educational 'pipeline' for Latinos is rife with massive leaks" (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2006, p. 203). Overall

in 2006, of the 23.5 million Latinas/os that were 25 years or older, 40.7% had less than a high school diploma, 41% had graduated from high school, 5.9% had held associate degrees, 8.8% held bachelor's degrees, 2.4% held master's degrees, and 1.2% had earned professional and doctoral degrees (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007b). Also, when compared to Latinos (males), Latinas (females) had slightly higher graduation rates at all levels of education up to the master's and slightly lower attainment of professional and doctoral degrees (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2007b).

Furthermore, Latinas are not only underrepresented in all levels of formal education attainment from high school graduation to professional and doctoral degrees, they are also underrepresented in the faculty of colleges and universities. Data from the U.S. Department of Education (2006–2007) shows that of the 568,911 faculty employed in U.S. institutions of higher education in 2003, only 18,475 (or 3.2%) were Latina/o (see Table 1). In addition, Latinas/os continue to be underrepresented in the U.S. faculty, comprising only 3% of all U.S. male faculty and 3.7% of all U.S. female faculty, and Latinos continue to outnumber Latinas in all faculty ranks except as instructors and lecturers. This dismal situation for Latinas in the academy is one reason that many utilize their doctorates for employment outside of the academy. Other reasons Latinas do not enter the academy relate to the inherent racism that continues to exist in the academy that systematically excludes them (Olivas, 1988; Reyes & Halcón, 1988).

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Table 1
Number and Percent of Full-Time Faculty Members by Rank and Latina/o Origin, Fall 2003

	Hispanic (N = 18,475)		Faculty Population Total (N = 568,911)	
	# of Latinos (% of Total Males)	# of Latinas (% of Total Females)	# of Males	# of Females
Lecturer	466 (4.2%)	618 (5.0%)	11,175	12,273
Instructor	2,372 (5.3%)	2,408 (5.0%)	44,984	48,039
Assistant	2,812 (3.4%)	2,509 (3.6%)	83,564	69,500
Associate	2,338 (2.8%)	1,523 (3.0%)	82,758	50,203
Full	2,472 (1.9%)	957 (2.4%)	127,049	39,366
Total	10,460 (3.0%)	8,015 (3.7%)	349,530	219,381

In sum, the data presented show not only the lack of educational attainment among Latinas but also their lack of their representation on the faculty. It is this lack of representation that is the focus and purpose of this article on the doctoral experiences of Latina faculty. The general question guiding this research was: "What were the educational experiences of Latina faculty during their doctoral studies, and how did they survive and thrive in the face of institutional challenges?"

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For this study, resiliency theory is defined as a form of theoretical understanding and problem-solving that focuses on the assets of people and systems, rather than on the "deficits." Howell (2003) adds that resiliency includes having the ability to competently and positively adapt to new environments despite exposure to significant stressors due to risk or adversity. Benard (2004) lists four major components to resiliency theory that are applicable to this study: (a) social competence, (b) problem-solving, (c) autonomy, and (d) sense of purpose. Social competence is an indicator of overall positive adaptation and wellness and includes characteristics, skills, and attitudes essential in forming relationships and positive attachment to others. Problem-solving includes the abilities to plan, think critically, and develop insight. This is referred to in the resiliency literature as "good intellectual functioning" (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Autonomy includes the development of a sense of self, identity, and power. It also involves the ability to act independently and to feel a sense of control over one's environment (Howell, 2003). Sense of purpose includes having goals, direction, optimism, and sense of meaning. People with a sense of purpose have the deep belief that their life has meaning and that they have a unique voice in the world.

In addition, Masten and Coatsworth (1998) stated that resilience is a normative process of human adaptation

and is applicable to development in both favorable and unfavorable environments. Alva (1995) views resiliency as the process by which some students, who are considered "at risk" by the schooling enterprise, can overcome low expectations and excel academically. Given these interpretations and definitions of resiliency, the theory can help in understanding relationships between hostile institutions and resilient Latinas because it is based on the premise that people and systems have assets and strengths, not deficits and weaknesses, and therefore resilient individuals have a better chance to succeed in oppressive systems. In this sense, resiliency theory speaks precisely to the Latina educational experience due to the "at risk" label schools give many Latinas.

Why is resiliency theory important in looking at the Latina doctoral experience? The interviewees in this study possess the characteristics described in resiliency theory, but it is not articulated in this manner. Benard (2004) states that all individuals have resiliency, and the challenge is to find the strengths and resiliency factors that all people possess and help them use those traits to succeed. In this sense, resiliency theory helps dissect, explain, and contextualize the lived doctoral education paths of Latinas.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on resiliency mostly addresses issues such as "youth development, asset-building, positive psychology, wellness, health promotion, health realization, strengths-based social work, social capital and its subcategories, multiple intelligences, values-centered or spiritual intelligence, and emotional intelligence" (Benard, 2004, p. 1). With regard to resiliency in the schooling experience, resiliency literature mostly addresses these issues as they relate to the PK-12 system. Only recently has research emerged on the resiliency of college students of color (Arrellano & Padilla, 1996; Ceja, 2004; Goodwin, 2001; Holt, Mahowald, & DeVore, 2002; Horn & Chen, 1998; Jun, 2000; Taylor & Swetnam, 2000).

The importance of understanding resiliency in college students of color relates to the transcendent nature of the theory to all people who struggle in socially unjust systems of power. In this sense, faculty of color are also in need of resiliency in their interactions within academe. So that we can not only restructure institutional policies and programs but begin to alter the beliefs and power relationships that devalue all humans trying to succeed in oppressive institutions, resiliency must be understood as a social phenomenon that is inherent in all people that struggle against institutional oppression.

The following literature highlights studies that address college student resiliency, followed by studies dealing with faculty resiliency in their interactions with colleges and universities.

College Student Resiliency

Few studies exist on the resiliency of college students, but some researchers are beginning to use resiliency theory to explain the experiences of college students of color and women. Studies on the resiliency of college students of color mostly describe these students as economically and academically disadvantaged, sometimes as being first-generation college students and from the inner-city, and distinctions are made among undergraduate and graduate students. The literature either describes college students as resilient because of certain positive attributes and support systems, or resilient despite challenges.

College students of color that were resilient were said to be successful, which generally meant continuing college past the freshman year because they received scholarship money (Holt et al., 2002), mentorship (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995; Holt et al., 2002; Jun, 2000; Nora, 2003; Ortiz-Walters & Gibson, 2005), family support (Ceja, 2004; Holt et al., 2002; Horn & Chen, 1998; Jun, 2000; Nora, 2003; Zalaquett, 2006), peer support (Holt et al., 2002; Horn & Chen, 1998; Perna, 2004; Zalaquett, 2006), and community support (Jun, 2000; Zalaquett, 2006). At times it was merely their spirituality that helped their resiliency (Holt et al., 2002; Nora, 2003), and other times it was their grounding in their cultural backgrounds and identity (Castellanos, 1996; Goodwin, 2001; Johnson, 2006). For graduate students, resiliency was mostly viewed as successfully navigating and accepting their socialization into the culture of academe (Austin, 2002; González, 2006; González, Marin, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2002).

College students were described as resilient for overcoming ability tracking in PK-12 (Jun, 2000), financial struggles (Gándara, 1995), racism and oppression (Castellanos, 1996; Goodwin, 2001), gender discrimination (Taylor & Swetnam, 2000; Turner & Thompson, 1993), stigmatization (Cuádriz, 1992; Goodwin, 2001), lack of mentors (Gomez & Fassinger, 1995), cultural assimilation (Goodwin, 2001), and hostile campus climates (Hurtado, 1992; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Specific to graduate students, some of the major challenges were lack of mentoring, lack of diverse teaching opportunities, and poor advising related to understanding academic culture (Austin, 2002; González, 2005; González, Marin, Perez, Figueroa, Moreno, & Navia, 2001).

Faculty Resiliency

The studies that examine faculty experiences do not use the term resiliency to understand success and struggle. Mostly, these studies dissect faculty experiences into support systems and challenges. Resiliency in faculty is supported when they feel satisfaction due to having job flexibility, opportunities for growth, and positive student interactions (Reyes & Ríos, 2005; Sorcinelli & Austin, 1992). Latina faculty specifically mentioned

being resilient due to the existence of Chicana/Latina campus organizations, Latina mentors, and on and off-campus networking opportunities with Latina/o leaders (González, 2005; Reyes & Ríos, 2005).

Faculty resiliency, however, is challenged when there is lack of student respect for the faculty's authority (Turner, 2002), or when they feel as though they are constantly having to prove themselves as academics (Reyes, 2005; Turner, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000) or be minority affairs experts (Turner, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000). Other challenges to faculty resiliency include, institutional isolation and marginalization (García, 2005; Gonzalez, 2002; González, 1995; Medina & Luna, 2000; Nieves-Squires, 1991; Turner & Myers, 2000), gender and racial/ethnic discrimination (Alger, 2002; Gonzalez, 2002; González, 1995; Reyes & Halcón, 1988; Turner, 2002; Turner & Myers, 2000), lack of or poor mentoring (Blackwell, 1989; García, 2005; González, 1995; Johnsrud, 1994; Nieves-Squires, 1991), tokenization (García, 2005; Medina & Luna, 2000; Turner, 2002), and difficulties in claiming their unique voice (García, 2005; González, 1995; Guanipa, Santa Cruz, & Chao, 2003; Medina & Luna, 2000; Nieves-Squires, 1991; Reyes, 2005).

The review of faculty literature highlights the challenges and opportunities that Latinas face in higher education. While the literature does not directly address resiliency, it does speak to the specific issues that are addressed through the concepts and theory of resiliency.

METHODOLOGY

For this qualitative study, 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with Latina faculty throughout the west and southwest United States. Semi-structured interviews began with general questions or topics that were used to create a more conversational dialogue between the interviewee and interviewers (Merriam, 1998). The flexibility of this method allows for a great deal of the questions and their answers to emerge during the interviews.

Two types of sampling methods were used—snowball and quota sampling. Snowball sampling (i.e., chain sampling) was used to identify interview participants. This method is defined as sampling that “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are rich information” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 78). During initial interviews a question was asked about other potential Latina interviewees that were known by the interviewees; many potential respondents surfaced with this method. Quota sampling, most popular with pollsters, is mostly used in survey research involving interviews when it is not possible to list all the members of the population of interest (Gay, 1996). The limit was initially set at 10, but 12 interviews were conducted due to extensive interest that was generated through snowball sampling.

The interviewees needed to satisfy four selection criteria to be interviewed. First, they needed to be new faculty, because the majority of the questions would ask them to reflect on their recent doctoral experiences. The majority of the 12 faculty were in their second and third year of the tenure track at the time the interviews were conducted. Only a few had been faculty for more than three years, but they were allowed to participate as interviewees due to their vast knowledge on doctoral education.

Second, they needed to self-identify as Latina or Chicana. When asked to self-identify, several listed various identities that were dependent on context. Five self-identified as Latina, four as Chicana, two as Mexican American, and one as Puerto Rican. The following seven identifiers were each stated by at least one interviewee: Mexican, Indigenous, Xicana de El Salvador/Peru, Afro Latina, Chicana Feminist, Fronteriza, and Hispanic.

Third, interviewees were selected because they were visible scholars and considered to be intellectual leaders in the Latina community. All were actively involved in the Latina community as scholars/intellectuals—working at institutions of higher education. Last, interviewees had to be raised and educated in the U.S. to ensure a sample that understood the educational experiences of U.S. ethnic minorities.

Before interviewing began, the consent form was explained, and then interviewees were asked to complete a short survey to provide some basic information, such as: (a) years at present institution and as faculty and graduate students, (b) degrees and fields of study completed, (c) previous institutions of employment, and (d) race/ethnic self-identification.

All the interviewees were recorded with a digital recorder, and the interviews transcribed with a digital transcriber. Data analysis was done with the N6 qualitative data analysis software (QSR International, 2006), which is used by researchers doing code-based analysis of complex data. N6 helps to organize data in a hierarchical tree-like form, which allows for the ability to connect concepts and make relationships among different parts of the data.

FINDINGS

The findings detail support structures and barriers that are more extensive than previously documented in the literature. Resiliency theory was used to structure the findings. The findings are shown through the lenses of the following resiliency theory concepts: (a) social competence, (b) problem-solving, (c) autonomy, and (d) sense of purpose.

Resiliency in Social Competence

The components of social competence include the abilities for communication, empathy, caring, compassion,

and forgiveness. In telling their stories, Latinas spoke about their areas of social competence and how they overcame associated challenges. Despite many having positive adaptations to higher education institutions as faculty, adjustments were difficult during the doctoral study phase. They all spoke about having positive experiences in forming relationships and positive attachment with other doctoral students of color, particularly other Latinas but having difficulty in building the same types of relationships with their white peers and faculty. Some of these difficulties were due to their resistance to the doctoral socialization they were experiencing, which was perceived to be “Anglo.” Resiliency theory focuses on the positive nature of individuals to resist experienced and perceived institutional oppression in the process of success, and this was essentially the process for Latina faculty that resisted the academic socialization of the doctoral attainment period and turned this knowledge and process of resistance into opportunities as faculty. The isolation and segregation that they experienced also speaks to their resiliency because they had to learn to survive despite these challenges. The following excerpts detail examples of Latina voices reflecting on their doctoral experiences.

Some Latinas talked about feelings of isolation and how they overcame these feelings. Many spoke about having to search for mentors, peers, and colleagues outside of their department because many times they were the only Latinas in their departments. One stated that while she was the only woman of color in her department, she found colleagues in other departments.

I felt isolated and just doubly the minority [at this institution] because students of color were few and far between. . . . [I]t was just the overall sense of isolation being on that campus and knowing that I was one of the few doctoral students who was a woman of color. There weren't enough opportunities to help cultivate relationships with people at the professional level. . . . That was really disappointing. . . . I had some negative experiences. . . . I felt I was exploited by the faculty because I was Mexicana . . . [but] I stood up for myself. . . . I'm proud of the fact that I defended myself.

Another Latina spoke about the racism, sexism, and white privilege that she experienced, and how difficult it was for her to overcome these prejudices. She stated that it got easier to live in such a flawed system because she eventually learned how to cope and survive the oppressive system.

The racism was constant. . . . That was the system, and I was just trying to rise above that. And that's why it is so important now to not stay silent. . . . And then the sexism, I really experienced it with [one] professor. Like, “You're Latina, so you're most likely not going to make it.” But what was more tiring than the racism and sexism was the

white privilege, and people not being cognizant of how they were treating us, or what they were saying that was so ignorant, or the assumptions that they made of how the world is.

Another Latina spoke about dropping out of the program and returning to finish a few years later. She initially left her program because it was an isolated and alienating place that did not support her work. But she returned to finish on the counsel and mentorship of a Latina mentor she met outside of the institution.

I left [my doctoral program because] I was an alienated graduate student. . . . I didn't know what I was doing [or] who I was working with. I felt like I'd been there five years and there wasn't one faculty member that I could say really gave a damn about whether or not I was in the program. And that didn't work for me. So I left . . . [and when I returned I] literally dropped in there for the dissertation. And the rest of the time I was away at [another university] where I had more of a support base. . . . [My mentor at that institution helped me return because] she took me under her wing without really knowing it, and I became part of a writing group with her off campus.

In sum, regardless of the negative experiences that these Latina faculty recollected, they were resilient and found ways to survive their doctoral programs and advance in the academy. They also found ways to find positive aspects of negative experiences and to forgive those who oppressed them. In the resilience literature forgiveness is important in developing social competence. While many of the Latina interviewees spoke about professors taking credit for their work, they nonetheless found ways to continue, to survive the doctoral process, and to advance into faculty positions.

Resiliency in Problem-Solving

Resiliency in problem-solving includes the abilities to plan, think critically, develop insight, and be flexible and resourceful despite existing challenges. These components are glued together by a "figuring-things-out quality" (Benard, 2004, p. 17). Latinas addressed their problem-solving resiliency throughout the doctorate in "figuring out" motives and agendas of professors and dissertation advisors. However, they were also successful in thinking critically and developing insight about their culture, identity, and how they were being socialized to adopt more mainstream approaches. This included having or developing the ability to think critically about the racism, sexism, and classism they were experiencing throughout the institution in formal and informal settings. The following are some excerpts of Latinas sharing their experiences and resiliency in problem-solving their way through the doctorate.

One Latina spoke about the problems she experienced with racism in the academy from professors and peers and how she solved these problems. In one incident, her professor did not let her write a paper grounded in Chicano theory because this was not part of his knowledge base. She explained that in graduate school her mission was to finish, get out of school, and serve her community. Instead of dealing with the professor and educating him, she dropped the class and took an independent study with a Chicano professor and wrote her paper. She dropped a lot of classes as a doctoral student because in her eyes the university's racism was not going to get in the way of her mission and purpose. She is now a highly successful academic, in part because she resisted (and continues to resist) what she perceives as Anglo socialization as she problem-solves her way through the racist academy.

Professors still don't know how to deal with students of color, or issues having to do with students of color [in the classroom]. I remember I wanted to write a position paper, and obviously you can't rely on mainstream literature to help you frame it. You need a lot of the Chicano theory, and I remember this professor was like, "I'm looking at your bibliography, and I'm not really familiar with these readings. Can you choose a different topic?" . . . But to me the irony of any graduate program is that we teach students to teach and learn, but faculty are not critical of their own teaching and learning. . . . So I dropped the class. I thought there was no way I was going to waste my time.

Many of the interviewees spoke about having to be resilient to complete their dissertations and survive hostile dissertation advisors. In particular, one Latina reflected on her experience with her dissertation advisor and spoke of his offensive remarks about her research participants because they were people of color. These types of stories were very common among the interviewees. The hostility one Latina experienced led her eventually to stand up for herself and to challenge the whiteness and maleness of her advisor. Even though she knew that challenging the chauvinism of her white male professor could have led to her not graduating, she felt she had no choice but to stand up for herself and demand respect or suffer the consequences. Her resiliency led to his respecting her throughout the dissertation writing process, but the relationship ended shortly afterwards, and they have not collaborated on research projects since.

[My dissertation advisor was] . . . very anti-bilingual education, anti-all the things that the research shows are actually really good, and that my research was showing were good. So that was problematic. He was insensitive and offensive. . . . It was his very upper-class, white privilege also that was coming through . . . [T]his is why Latinas don't get Ph.D.s. This is why they get railroaded out. I felt so, at times, railroaded by him, and not critiqued

in a helpful way. . . . It got to the point where I went toe-to-toe with him, I arranged a meeting, I said, "I can't work with you like this. This is how your actions make me feel." And he was blown away. He had no idea that he was acting so crazily offensive, unproductive, and unsupportive. . . . I was ready to bail and I didn't care. But he changed [after that meeting], not radically, but he changed enough to make a working relationship . . . and I had enough friends from grad school who were always so affirming, and I knew my work was good. So I had enough going in that I could try to buffer his attitude and his treatment.

Another interviewee spoke about the Ph.D. process and figuring out that it was necessary to finish and move forward with more important things. While many of the interviewees saw the dissertation writing process as isolating and dehumanizing, she saw it as necessary. She understood it as a process that needs to be completed so that you can be respected and can contribute to the Latina community, but she also acknowledges that it is difficult to finish without the support of her dissertation chair and committee—in essence, this is what she learned to survive and thrive as she tried to complete her dissertation. She outlined the process and what is needed to complete it.

[The Ph.D. is about] jumping hoops so you can belong to the club. . . . So, while finishing is more about having the determination and also a supportive faculty and committee that kind of get back to you with comments and everything . . . it's also about just getting your union card. . . . It's about getting the degree so that you could have the respect.

Resiliency in Autonomy

Autonomy involves the ability to act independently and to feel a sense of control over one's environment (Benard, 2004). For Latinas at institutions of higher education, independence and control involve the expression of their ethnic and bicultural selves. Benard (2004) stated, "Positive ethnic identity is associated with high self-esteem, a strong commitment to doing well in school, a strong sense of purpose in life, great confidence in one's own efficacy, and high academic achievement" (p. 21). In this study I found that these characteristics were shared by all 12 interviewees.

Furthermore, the practice of autonomy for Latinas included the development of sense-of-self, identity, and power. The uniqueness of being bicultural and bilingual offered Latinas challenges because they constantly had to affirm their identity and be cognizant of how race and ethnicity were affected by power. In the process they developed networks with the larger Latina community within and beyond the university so that they could replenish their sense-of-self and participate in their

Latina culture. They also used resistance in the process of maintaining their autonomy because in racially and ethnically discriminatory institutions they felt the constant need to refute negativity about their ethnicity, gender, and culture. Mehan, Hubbard, and Villanueva (1994) call this process "accommodation without assimilation" because Latinas resisted negativity directed toward them because of their race and gender but continued to excel academically.

One Latina faculty member reflected on her doctoral experience with anger due to the pervasiveness of racism and white privilege that she encountered. While she reflected on an experience of academic survival, she also stated how survival was inevitable because she carried with her a strong sense of Chicana identity and epistemology. She resisted expectations that she behave passively and instead was aggressive in protecting her identity. Her experience was very similar to many of the other Chicana interviewees.

[Throughout the doctoral program] there was no way that I was going to listen to a lot of the [racist] stuff . . . and accept it. . . . So, because I am a Chicana, there was no way that I could stay silent. There was no way that I was going to be pacified or even make white people feel good about themselves. I was going to let you know, "Yea, you're racist. This is who you are, and you have white privilege. And the job is . . . how are you going to recognize your privilege and change yourself?" So I didn't have a lot of friends, which was okay with me. . . . And I had to speak from a Chicana experience . . . So there was never a time where I could just go home or go to a class and stay silent. There was never a point in the doctorate where I could say, "I'm just going to kick back and relax and not worry about what these people say." . . . And I learned to pick and choose my battles.

This Chicana described her experience of understanding her biculturalism: She had to fight against a culture that taught her passivity because she learned that only the aggressive survive in academe.

I was grateful I had a research assistantship and said, "Thank you for giving me a job because I need it because I'm poor. How can I serve you? What can I do to benefit you?" While that's culturally embedded to some degree, [these experiences] hardened me. . . . Yes, I'm different. And, yes, I'm not of the same caliber as such and such, but my life is much more complicated, and not many people can deal with having fragments of themselves placed in these different spheres of life. . . . And I inhabit these different spaces as well as I can, not because I want to, but out of necessity.

With regard to resistance, these Latinas became more assertive when they felt they needed to protect their ethnic identities. They also resisted messages about their academic unworthiness. Some skipped classes in

protest, and others switched to programs that were “less” racist. They resisted racism and sexism in the curriculum and from professors and peers. In one example, an interviewee spoke about resisting a professor’s Eurocentric ideals even though this could have prevented her from completing her degree and skipped class to make a point that the students of color in the class would not tolerate racism from the professor.

[I had a] faculty member tell us he didn’t know anything about Latinos ‘cause he had come from the south. . . . And I thought that statement was problematic because if you’re in [a state where] Latinos are 20% of the population, you should make an effort to educate yourself. . . . I’d [also] get upset at some of the discussions we would have in class, and I remember that in solidarity [with other Chicanas in the class] we didn’t show up one week.

For the 12 interviewees, going through doctoral studies not only posed unique challenges but also allowed the opportunity to further develop their sense of autonomy. Although some of the Latinas had this ability before entering their programs, it was clear from the interviews that the doctoral experience sped up this developmental process for many.

Resiliency in Sense of Purpose

Having a sense of purpose is characteristic of resilient individuals. The Latina interviewees spoke a lot about their sense of purpose as it related to educational attainment, success, and diversity awareness. Some of the more common responses when asked about their sense of purpose were altruistic and included their purpose to family, community, and society. Werner and Smith (1992) stated that sense of purpose is important for young people because it produces healthy outcomes despite adversity. Despite the challenges of racism and sexism, Latina interviewees found a way to articulate and justify their continued existence in the academy through their sense of purpose, which included the long-term advancement of the Latina community. The following are excerpts that document this sense of purpose for the Latinas in this study.

This interviewee expressed the same type of sentiments that were common among Latina faculty—they were the only Latinas in the academy, and therefore sometimes it was difficult to maintain their purpose in light of the discrimination and tokenism that they suffered. Nevertheless, they all remained true to their purpose, completed their Ph.D.s, and secured academic positions.

I’m [less than] one percent in the whole fricken country, and statistically I’m the one who’s not going to make it, so [I wish I would have told my professor,] “What are we going to do here? How are you going to help me make

it?” I don’t know how many of my colegas [colleagues] that were Chicanas dropped out. And that was a very painful experience.

Another Latina faculty member spoke about how the dissertation writing stage was extremely negative and isolating. Writing began to occupy her to such a degree that she could no longer spend time with her family and in the community. It challenged her sense of purpose because at first she was sure that she was getting the Ph.D. so that she could give back to her Latina community, but she was concerned that becoming a writer was taking her away from the community and putting her behind a computer. She began to question whether she really belonged in a Ph.D. program, as opposed to with her family and in the community, but she persisted because she knew the Chicana community needed more Ph.D.s. She emotionally recalled:

[When I was processing with my professor about my dissertation writing, I told her,] “I feel like fuckin’ shit. I feel like I’m betraying my community. I feel like I’m wasting my time here. . . . I’m living in fuckin’ Disneyland . . . in a life that’s not real. I feel like I’m a hypocrite cause I’m not doing anything [for my community], and I don’t even spend time with my family.” And empecé a llorar [I started to cry]. . . . I thought, “Am I going to get caught up in this la la land of writing these papers, and saying this is for the community, and then doing shit?” . . . But I saw the process through because I knew that this was not only for myself, but for our gente [people].

For many of the Latina interviewees, when asked about their purpose for educational attainment, they gave mostly altruistic responses. Many Latinas stated that the purpose of their doctorate was to better prepare to be of service to their students and community. One interviewee stated, “I was motivated to pursue education due to my desire and passion for education and for helping others.” And another spoke about the purpose of educational attainment as centering on diversity awareness.

The purpose of an education is . . . to really broaden people’s understanding in multiple ways, like I don’t just think of diversity of ethnic diversities, but of ideas. So, when I teach diversity in my class I make the point that I probably have more in common with a white man from [my state] than I have with a Latina in [another state] that is Mexican American because there is a difference in our upbringing. It doesn’t mean that I don’t relate to that person, but the minute I meet somebody who’s [from my state], their age, gender, or demographics are irrelevant because we will have regional similarities. So, just learning and teaching different perspectives is really the purpose for education attainment.

DISCUSSION

Academic leaders and institutional change agents need to understand that the face of today's colleges and universities is changing rapidly, and in order to serve the students of tomorrow they need to build environments, enact policies, and create the type of culture that will sustain our higher education systems and allow all students to participate. It is no surprise that the academy has a history of exclusivity, racism, sexism, and elitism that works against people of color and women to preserve the status quo. If institutions do not begin the necessary process of planning and self-reflection to reverse their historical trends, many students with academic talent will either not participate or enter with an attitude of change and marginality in search of justice and equity in places where it is not visible. In particular, the fast growing Latina intellectual community is beginning to acquire the type of social, cultural, and intellectual capital to penetrate higher education forcefully and change these institutions from within, and many other students of color are engaging similarly.

The Latinas in this study have not only been successful in attaining education but also in showing resiliency in the face of struggle. Despite many of them earning doctorates from elite universities, they still suffered from a culture of low expectations from professors because they were women of color. In summary, they had a lot of experiences that required them to be resilient and, in the end, they persisted and attained their doctorate.

Ultimately, these Latina academics found their voice in the academy and today continue to be resilient as they struggle toward tenure and promotion. They have taken the lessons, experiences, and struggles from their doctoral studies to better adapt to life as faculty. While as doctoral students many struggled to build positive and caring relationships with peers and professors because of the racism and sexism they suffered, as faculty they have become more knowledgeable and conscious of the language and behavior of resistance, which has made them more caring, empathic, compassionate, and forgiving intellectuals. This has led to more fulfilling lives in academe.

In addition, their doctoral experiences also taught them to deal with racist and sexist professors and dissertation advisors, and this made them better negotiators as faculty. If these Latinas had not figured out how to live in discriminatory institutions and work with racist and sexist people, they would have been weeded out of the system and would have never completed their degrees. They learned how to accommodate without assimilating, and through these lessons the most important learning experiences were learning the system of oppression and how to challenge it.

Also, obtaining their doctorates taught them about the privilege of having freedom to research the intellectual knowledge associated with their gender and ethnicity,

but it was something they had to fight for. This was not easy because many academicians criticized their research on Latinas, saying it was somehow going to "ghettoize" them, or that it was biased because they were "too close" to the research participants. Nevertheless, Latinas did use the discriminatory academy to develop their confidence as academics and excel in all of the formal and informal requirements of doctoral education.

In the end, they maintained their resiliency mostly because they had a strong sense of purpose. They were clear in that they would attain their doctorates despite experiencing institutional discrimination because their families and communities depended on them. Their sense of purpose not only helped them in their educational attainment throughout graduate school but as faculty members trying to mentor young Latina academics.

Now, more than ever, it is necessary that institutions address these fundamental epistemological, institutional, and cultural issues that affect Latinas in higher education. As some scholars, such as Keefe and Padilla (1987), suggest we are presently experiencing the type of paradigm shift where institutions are no longer in control of the domains that homogenize students to their liking, particularly Latinas/os who by nature of their biculturalism are becoming more selective of their acculturation to things such as "academic-identity." Furthermore, their resiliency is facilitating their academic success as much as the institutional opportunities they are receiving. The belief of many higher education scholars and leaders is that diverse students are entering institutions of higher education and "forcing" an institutional response to their presence (Ibarra, 2001; Larmer, 1999; Leland & Chambers, 1999).

It is the responsibility of institutions and institutional leaders to take advantage of Latina resiliency and their intellectual and cultural knowledge and create structures to facilitate their success. For as long as Latinas have been involved in U.S. higher education, particularly in the last 35 years, it has been known in the Latina intellectual community that institutional structures have been oppressive toward them (Cuádras, 2005). If American higher education does not take deliberate action to become more inclusive and receptive to the educational needs of Latinas/os, its ability to strive and thrive through the twenty-first century will be severely limited.

NOTES

1. Hispanic, as defined by the U.S. Census (2007a), refers to people whose origins are Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or from other Hispanic/Latino countries, regardless of race. Due to the term's association "with a history of colonialism and continued new-colonist action by the United States government" (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000, p. 511) toward the people it identifies as Hispanic, the term "Latina" (the feminine of the masculine Latino) will be used throughout this research.

2. The choice to use "Latina" through the paper was because it was the term used by the majority of interviewees when asked to self-identify their race/ethnicity—five self-identified as Latina, four as Chicana, two as Mexican American, and one as Puerto Rican. González and Gándara (2005) state that the term was "coined by the Mediterranean countries to resist Anglo dominance in the 19th century [and] is currently being used by people of Spanish-speaking ancestry in the United States to express ethnic pride" (p. 392).

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