

**Cultivando y Transformando:
Communities of Women Among Latinas in Academia**

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University of Pittsburgh, 2019

During its inception in the Colonial Era, higher education was founded for the purpose of educating aristocratic white men (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Today, men continue to hold the majority of institutional leadership positions and white men surpass the representation of women and men of all other races in professorial positions (Albertine, 2015; NCES, 2018). The founding ideology of white patriarchy continues to prevail and adversely affect the experiences of Latinas in graduate school and in the professoriate (Gonzalez, 2007; Perez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Rodriguez, 2010; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Nonetheless, Latinas will be one-third of the population by 2060 and thus one-third of the future of our country lies in Latinas' hands (Gándara, 2015). The transformation of academia from a white patriarchal to a Latina-engrained place is imperative because Latinas and our outcomes will shape the nation's future significantly.

The purpose of this research study was to examine Latinas in academia's communities of women in order to understand how being part of communities of women transforms the journeys of Latinas in academia. The study investigated how Latinas in academia make meaning of their communities of women, the funds of knowledge cultivated in Latinas' communities of women, and how bodymindspirit is cultivated in Latinas' communities of women. The design of the study and data collection and analysis were guided by Chicana feminist and *mujerista* epistemologies. Data was collected through three in-depth phenomenological interviews, along with the collection

and examination of artifacts. Research results were presented through first-person narrative profiles (Seidman, 2013) and thematic analysis.

The study revealed that there are foundational elements in Communities of Women of Color including: pre-established *conocimiento* about *el poder y el valor de la mujer*; shared space and place; epistemological solidarity; and endurance and evolution through time. Furthermore, transformational experiences that occur in Communities of Women of Color manifest in: bodymindspirit wholeness; reciprocal emotional, academic, and/or professional support; paying it forward; and disrupting patriarchal and oppressive environments.

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Preface

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1.0 Chapter 1: Introduction

The odds were heavily against her. She hid her feelings; she hid her truths; she concealed her fire; but she kept stoking the inner flame...The spirit of the fire spurs her to fight for her own skin and piece of ground to stand on, a ground from which to view the world—a perspective, a homeground, where she can plumb the rich ancestral roots into her own ample *mestiza* heart.

— *Gloria Anzaldúa, Borderlands: The New Mestiza = La Frontera*

This study is about understanding how Latinas transform academia in every day life via their communities of women. Thus, I sought to understand how and why communities of women were meaningful to Latinas in academia. In order to understand how Latina communities of women are transforming academia, I examined how bodymindspirit is cultivated in community and what funds of knowledge are exchanged within community. It was these processes (bodymindspirit cultivation and the exchange of funds of knowledge) that I linked to communities of women's transformation of academia into a more Latina-engrained place. However, before examining Latinas' communities of women and how or whether they transform academia, we must acknowledge the history and current state of academia and Latinas in academia.

To the detriment of women and racially minoritized people, patriarchy and racism are the foundation of higher education and remain engrained in it today. The purpose of higher education in the Colonial Era paralleled the purpose of European settlers' migration onto indigenous lands—to escape the English government and religion and to create a new England. As such, United States higher education was founded in the Colonial Era, beginning with Harvard in 1636, for the purpose

of educating aristocratic white men to become community civil servants as church clergyman and colonial statesmen (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The patriarchal governance structures and academic foundations of the colonial colleges continue to characterize institutions of higher education. Governance in the colonial colleges was such that “authority ran from the institution’s board of governors to the college president” (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 20). White men executed governance then. Today, governance structures remain similar at most institutions. Men hold the majority of institutional leadership positions, while women are underrepresented in leadership and Women of Color are even more so underrepresented (Albertine, 2015). White men surpass the representation of women and men of all races in professorial positions; the gender disparity increases as rank increases (NCES, 2018). For example, there are more white men than white women in associate and full professorial positions; however, white men and white women outnumber women and men of all other races in all faculty ranks (NCES, 2018). The percentage of Latina faculty members is marginal across all professorial ranks and decreases as rank increases; while Latinas represent 4% of lecturers and instructors respectively, they represent only 2% and 1% of associate professors and full professors respectively.

Meanwhile, the majority of men in university settings propagate established status quo and structural governance norms set by their predecessors (Brunner, 1999). Academic foundations were built on Eurocentric knowledge bases – Latin verse and Greek grammar. The relatively late (1960s) establishment of non-white disciplines such as Black studies, Chicana/o and Latina/o/x studies, Indigenous studies, and intersectional women’s studies programs and departments, and their continued structural and financial marginalization within universities are all evidence of the predominance and perceived legitimacy of the Eurocentric, patriarchal academic foundation (Cabán, 2003; Franklin, 2002; Stewart, 2015; West 2012). Moreover, there are everyday tangible

pieces of evidence that point to the permeation of white patriarchy in academia. For example, the choices we make as women about what and how much makeup to wear each day, our choices about the clothing we wear to university, how we craft our emails and how we address other men and women in writing often point to our compliance with or disruption of norms embedded with white patriarchy. Our choices about whether to use the titles Mr., Ms., Dr., Vice President, or Assistant Vice President before a woman or man's name is often partially determined by a culture of Eurocentric white patriarchy that has lived in academia since its inception. Requirements for tenure, the milestones for master's and doctoral degree programs, and even the aspects of dissertation work that are examined at a dissertation oral defense are all influenced by white patriarchy. At a dissertation defense committee members often focus on questions and comments regarding data collection, methodological choices, and analytic techniques. Doctoral candidates often prepare for these types of questions and topics of discussion. A defense is an opportune time to also examine the lived experience of the young researcher—the evolution of their positionality throughout their research investigation—or even how the candidate developed in bodymindspirit ways as a scholar, practitioner, and/or person over the course of the research. Yet, seldom do dissertation defenses focus on these aspects of the doctoral journey and dissertation research process. What we say, how we think, the questions we ask, and what we do are swayed in everyday life by the white patriarchal cultures in which we grow and learn. While we recognize this, it is equally meaningful and critical to recognize how we disrupt white patriarchy. Latinas in this study did at times conform to white patriarchy. For example, some participants sought advise about how to address and communicate via email with university and external community stakeholders in normative and persuasive ways, as a means to survive and thrive in their early professional careers. Also, participants shielded their authentic, holistic, bodymindspirit identities from people outside

of their Communities of Women of Color in order to preserve and protect themselves. Other times participants disrupted white patriarchy. To name a few ways in which Latinas in this study disrupted white patriarchy in academic, they: 1) led hunger strikes to establish Latinx studies departments and champion Latinx faculty, 2) changed the culture, expectations, membership, everyday efforts and demands of Latinx faculty and staff organizations to align with the needs of Latinx university members, 3) designed methods through which to transform white patriarchal classroom discourses by interjecting and inserting their ways of knowing into classroom discussion, and 4) developed bodies of educational literature about Latinx ways of knowing and forms of capital in community with other Latinas in academia. These actions, which transgress the culture of white patriarchy, are a testament to why I chose to examine the communities of women that Latinas in academia are part of and how these women and communities disrupt white patriarchal norms and cultures in postsecondary institutions.

At its inception, higher education, in the form of mission schools led by white men, contributed to the destruction of Indigenous people's knowledge, culture, and lives and "weakened the fabric of traditional [Indigenous] culture" to enforce Christianity (Wright, 1991). Researchers who write about and/or utilize decolonizing methodologies and critical feminist perspectives agree that the types of knowledge and cultural capital that are legitimized in the academy today remain largely unchanged (Brown & Stega, 2005; Hart & Metcalfe, 2010; Yosso, 2006). The persecution of marginalized people's knowledge continues. Due to white patriarchal notions about the type of knowledge that is valuable and patriarchal value structures in academia, knowledge about women, written by women is marginalized (Hart & Metcalfe, 2010).

Considering the history and continued perpetuation of racism and patriarchy in academia it is not surprising that Latinas are underrepresented in all aspects of higher education.

The hostile environments and systemic barriers in Latinas' pathways to higher education and academia are historically rooted in the founding ideology of higher education in the United States. This founding ideology grounded in white patriarchy continues to prevail and adversely affect Latinas. Research confirms that Latinas' graduate school experiences are laden with discrimination, racism, and hostile climates at the institutional, departmental, and program levels in academia (Gonzalez, 2007; Gonzalez, 2006). Furthermore, Latinas in the professoriate have to navigate academic environments that consistently invalidate their research, practice, and ways of knowing (Perez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Rodriguez, 2010; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Barriers to Latinas' pathways to higher education and the professoriate are also quantitatively evident.

Despite their numeric growth nationwide (Gándara, 2015) and in undergraduate and graduate education (NCES, 2013; NCES, 2017c), Latinas remain heavily underrepresented in terms of degree attainment. In the 2015-2016 academic year a total of 785,595 master's degrees were conferred, 59.2% of which went to women (NCES, 2017a). The racial distribution of the total number of master's degrees conferred to women who were U.S. citizens was as follows: 65.4% were conferred to white women, 15.2% to Black women, 9.9% to Latina women, 6.4% to Asian/Pacific Islander women, 0.6% by Native American/Alaska Native women, and 2.6% to women who identity with two or more races (NCES, 2017a). In 2013, only 4% of Latinas in the U.S. had earned a master's degree or higher by the age of 29, while 5% of Black women, 11% of white women, and 22% of Asian women had earned a mater's degree of higher by the age of 29 (the percentages for the Native American/Alaska Native and Pacific Islander populations of women were negligible) (NCES, 2013).

Moreover, the graduate education pipeline decreases at more advanced levels (Gándara, 2015; Ross et al., 2012; Solorzano, Villalpando, Oseguera, 2005). At the doctoral degree level, the pipeline decreases for Latinas, while it proportionately increases for Asian Pacific/Islander women and men (NCES, 2017b). The racial disparities between white students and all Students of Color remain significant. In the 2015-2016 academic year a total of 177,867 doctor's degrees were conferred, 52.7% of which went to women (NCES, 2017b). The racial distribution of the total number of doctor's degrees conferred to women who were U.S. citizens was as follows: 66.1% were conferred to white women, 10.3% to Black women, 7.8% to Latina women, 12.8% to Asian/Pacific Islander women, 0.5% to Native American/Alaska Native women, and 2.4% to women who identified with two or more races.

The danger is that Latinas will be one-third of the population by 2060 and thus one-third of the future of our country lies in our (Latinas') hands (Gándara, 2015). Anzaldúa (2007) affirmed, "we need to meet on a broader common ground" than culture to disrupt "dominant white culture" and oppression (p. 109; p. 108). The fact that our future as a nation will be shaped significantly by Latinas and our outcomes is a point of solidarity from which "commonality of feeling and interests" can grow and create impetus towards the transformation of academia from white patriarchal to Latina-engrained¹ (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 92). In order to: 1) bring Latinas' ways of knowing and scholarship from the margin to the center of academia, 2) dismantle white patriarchy and cultivate a Latina-engrained academia, and 3) thus open the pathways for Latinas into academia, consequently securing a more prosperous future for ourselves and our nation, we need

¹ To be clear, this does not mean an exclusionary culture, but rather an academic culture in which Latinas are part of the fabric and foundation. Academia that is Latina-engrained requires transformation away from white patriarchy.

to know about Latinas' communities of women. Centering knowledge about Latinas' communities of women weakens and breaks the strongholds of white patriarchy—creating an academic culture engrained with our ways of knowing in seamless ways. Understanding communities of women among Latinas in academia can inform how to create a Latina-engrained academia in ways that are less emotionally, physically, intellectually, spiritually, and professionally taxing to Latinas and that hold all stakeholders in academia responsible for action. Documenting what communities of women mean to Latinas is a foundation for developing structures and/or models that inform the contents and implementations of strategic plans for change in academia—change from white patriarchy to Latina-engrained.

1.1 Focus of Research

Gándara (2015) calls Latinas “the linchpin of the next generation” because they will be one-third of the female population by 2060, and because the mother’s educational level is the strongest predictor of students’ educational outcomes (p. 6). The insuppressible growth of the national Latina population means that whether academia changes to implement Latina ways of knowing in research and praxis or not, Latinas will have a significant impact on the future of this country and our education system. To ensure a better future not only for Latinas, but also for the entire nation, the culture of patriarchy and racism that works against Latinas in academia must change. The change that Latinas are making in the Ivory Tower through their funds of knowledge and their communities of women is the heart of this research study. Latinas’ funds of knowledge are the sources of knowing from which we draw in order to make meaning of the world. Due to an

intersection of patriarchy and racism in academia, Latinas' funds of knowledge, although rich and strong (Comas-Díaz, 2008), are rejected when they enter the Ivory Tower. The continued delegitimization of Latina women's funds of knowledge in academia is a problem, again, because Latina women will be one third of the national female population by 2060 (Gándara, 2015).

According to *mujerista* epistemology, Latinas' funds of knowledge are deeply rooted in a holistic "corporal, emotional, and spiritual sense of self as valid sources of knowledge" (Nygreen, Saba, & Moreno, 2016, p. 44). These sources of knowledge are part of our culture and are cultivated through relationships, including familial ones and beyond (Nygreen et al., 2016, p. 44; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). The sources of our ways of knowing are important to the topic of this study, because the state of patriarchy in academia upholds separatist ways of knowing that value and legitimize logic and reason as optimal funds of knowledge (Lara, 2002). Most often, logic and reason in academia are conceptualized as separate from and superior to other funds of knowledge (e.g. cultural, spiritual, corporal). Within the patriarchy of academia, holistic ways of knowing are not evaluated as optimal; the legitimacy and rigor of these ways of knowing are questioned. The separatist and hierarchal of ways of knowing established by academia are detrimental to Latinas in academia and our holistic ways of knowing at both physical and emotional levels (Lara, 2002; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Scholarship documenting Latina women's ways of knowing demonstrates the importance of communities of women for the inception of Latina political activism, the continued exchange and sustenance of Latinas' epistemological standpoints in praxis, and the continuous development of Latina epistemological standpoint scholarship (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Garcia, 1997; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). However, Latina ways of knowing, like that of Women of Color as a whole, remain on the margins of practice and research within academia (Facio & Lara, 2014;

hooks, 2015b). Anzaldúa (2007) and Isasi-Díaz (1996) argued that Latinas must come to terms with their shadow beast within—their indigenous mother and their white man, both of whom live inside of her and make up who she is. In other words, Latinas must unite their multiple, internal identities into one strong community to achieve a holistic *bodymindspirit conocimiento* (consciousness) for our liberation. In a parallel manner, I contend that the power to dismantle patriarchy and transform academia into a place molded by us and for us resides in the heart of communities of women of which Latinas in academia are a part of.

1.1.1 Key Terms

Academia: I use this term to describe the arena of post-secondary education inclusive of research, practice, and teaching, of which the participants in this study are all a part in one capacity or another. I use “academia” and “the academy” interchangeably.

Bodymindspirit: this concept is the opposite of “the western mind/body split” and means “the wisdom of the whole self” (Lara, 2002, p. 435). Bodymindspirit is state of self-awareness that is more than the sum of its parts (mind, body, and spirit). In this study, I will investigate how bodymindspirit is cultivated and developed in the relationships within communities of women.

Community of women: A community of women does not have to be a formal or cohesive group, although it can be. For example, the community of women may be composed of individual women who share a relationship that inspires and motivates them (Latinas in academia) as Latina woman, scholars, and/or practitioners. The relationships contribute to Latinas’ sense of support and empowerment. Latinas in academia cultivate different forms of knowledge and wisdom with these women. Women in the community may or may not be part of academia. The women in the

community may or may not know each other, but the Latina in academia knows all of them. For this reason, the community of women is defined as *her* community of women.

Ethnicity/Race: Ethnicity is a socially constructed concept that is “the result of a group formation process based on culture and descent” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 15). Culture is broad, including but not limited to, a group’s shared, “religions, language, ‘customs’, nationality, and political identification,” while descent is inclusive of “heredity and a sense of group origins” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 15). Race is one element of social structure, “which signifies and symbolizes social conflicts and interests by referring to different types of human bodies...race invokes biologically based human characteristics (so-called ‘phenotypes’)” (Omi & Winant, 1994, p. 55). I use the term “race” throughout this study to denote Latina/o/x as a racialized identity (Gallegos & Ferdman, 2012). I acknowledge, however, that ethnicity and race may be experienced as intersecting identities that are more or less salient depending on context, internal and/or external factors, and personal understandings (Johnston-Guerrero, 2016).

Latina/o/x: Latina/o/x refers to female and male sexes, and queer gender. Latina/Latinas refers to women. Latino/Latinos refers to men. Latinx/Latinx is a gender inclusive term. Latina/o/xs include: 1) women, men, and gender queer people born in Mexico, Central America, South America, or the Caribbean including Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, 2) women, men, and gender queer people born in any of these places, who are currently living in the U.S., and 3) women, men, and gender queer people born in the U.S. who identify their descent with any of these places (Gándara, 2015; Gonzalez & Gándara, 2005). Latina/o/x also includes women, men, and gender queer people who identify as descendants of Southwestern states that were once Mexico, but have been part of the United States since the Treaty of Hidalgo in 1848; these people never crossed the border, rather the border crossed them (Anzaldúa, 2007).

Latinas in academia: Latina-identified women in different capacities within academia—graduate students, faculty members, and practitioners. I choose the term, “academia,” because, although participants in this study may be graduate students, faculty, or administrators, they are all within the Ivory Tower—within academia.

Latina funds of knowledge: Latinas’ intellectual, corporal, emotional, and spiritual resources provide the ways in which we interpret the world. Combined, these resources are our funds of knowledge.

Mujerista / Mujerismo: womanist / womanism. Mujerismo is a living theory that centers on the “corporal, emotional, and spiritual sense of self as valid sources of knowledge” that Latinas cultivate (Nygren et al., 2016, p. 44). Mujerismo as a theoretical perspective that takes preference for Latinas’ intersecting and fluid ways of knowing (Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Nygren et al., 2016). The purpose of mujerismo is to propagate the legitimization and power of Latinas by fighting alongside Latinas for their liberation, that of the Latina/o/x community, and of marginalized communities broadly.

Patriarchy: Generally, patriarchy refers to a societal norm or system by which men possess power, thus shaping societal systems and norms that indicate what is appropriate or acceptable and what is not. In systems of patriarchy, women are subject to these norms, which are oppressive and contribute to the erasure of women’s identities and needs. I use this term to describe the strong history and presence of white, hegemonic, hierarchal, sexist, and elitist standards and norms in academia, which are bound to the continuance of racism, homophobia, and other forms of oppression and marginalization of People of Color, and particularly Women of Color, in academia (Hart, 2006; Hart & Metcalf, 2010). Pasque (2011) asserted that Women of Color in academia “are forced to become complicit in the perpetuation of patriarchy and postpositivist or ‘objective’

research in order to maintain a position within the academy” (p. 32). I use this to illustrate the power that patriarchy has in academia and, subsequently, the merit of this research study. To clarify, throughout this dissertation I combine the terms “white” and “patriarchy” to highlight the intersecting nature of whiteness and race, with patriarchy. I do this because academia as an institution in the United States is predominantly white, was founded by white men, and remains embedded with whiteness and patriarchy. This study is about Latina women and I want to make clear that Latinas in academia function in predominantly white and patriarchal cultures and climates within academia. Thus, I use the terms “white” and “patriarchy” together because they describe two significant cultures and/or conditions that permeate and characterize academia.

Spiritual: a “sense of transcendence beyond the self” that supports the process toward liberation from oppression, including but not limited to, institutional structures of oppression and is separate and different from religion (Comas-Díaz, 2008, p. 13).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

I designed this study from the perspective that Latina identity and Latina culture make the journey in academia possible and empowering for Latinas. The purpose of this research study was to examine Latinas in academia’s communities of women—the communities of women that they are part of and in which they cultivate knowledge, support, growth, and empowerment. This research study hinged on three concepts: communities of women, funds of knowledge, and bodymindspirit. The overarching question was: How does being part of a community of women transform the journeys of Latinas in academia? To answer this question, I focused on the following

research questions:

1. How do Latinas in academia make meaning of their communities of women?
2. What funds of knowledge are cultivated in Latinas' communities of women?
3. How is bodymindspirit cultivated in Latinas' communities of women?

1.3 Guiding Epistemological and Theoretical Perspectives

In this research study, I combined *mujerista* and Chicana feminist theoretical and epistemological standpoints. Specifically, I came to the study with a *mujerista* standpoint, because I am someone “who takes a preferential option for Latina women, for our struggle for liberation” and for our ways of knowing (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 61). In her groundbreaking work, Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz (1996) developed *mujerista* theology, a theory that legitimizes Latinas' lived experiences and ways of knowing regarding our religious and spiritual knowledge. As such, subsequent conceptualizations in education and psychological research (Galvan, 2006; Nygreen et al., 2016) elaborating on *mujerista* epistemology stem from Isasi-Díaz's (1996) *mujerista* theology. *Mujerismo* is grounded in the understanding of the individual Latina woman as a whole being with special emphasis on spiritual knowing that is connected to Latinas' *mestizaje* (combination of Indigenous and white European heritage) and *mulatez* (combination of Afro, Indigenous, and white European heritage) identities (Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Nygreen et al., 2016). *Mujerismo* underscores the sustenance that individual Latinas brings to Latina culture and community, as well as the sustenance that Latina culture and community bring to Latina individuals (Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Nygreen et al., 2016). The reciprocal relationship between Latina woman and Latina community

in *mujerismo* aligns with the core concepts (communities of women, bodymindspirit, funds of knowledge) in this dissertation study. What distinguishes *mujerista* epistemology from other feminist perspectives is the emphasis on the emotional and spiritual dimensions of knowledge being equally sophisticated and inseparable from intellectual political, and all other dimensions of knowledge (Nygren et al. 2016).

Meanwhile, Chicana feminism is a living theory rooted in critical decolonizing ideologies (Anzaldúa, 2007; Cordova, 1998; Perez, 1999; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001) and in the “everyday lives, epistemologies and pedagogies of the body” (Villenas, 2014, p. 207). As such, one of the aims of Chicana feminist theory, epistemology, and research is to participate in the co-construction of knowledge with participants and translate lived knowledge to research text while maintaining the authenticity of participants’ epistemological views. Chicana feminist thought seeks to resituate the personal, cultural, spiritual, and geographical identities of Latinas in ways that validate our experiences as Women of Color (Anzaldúa, 2007; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Villenas, 2014). This central purpose aligns with the purpose of my research study; Chicana feminism provided a valuable lens to inform my study design and data analysis.

Anzaldúa (2007) shapes Chicana feminist theory by illuminating the colliding components of Latina identity (Indigenous, Afro, and European due to colonization) that result in our *conocimiento* (consciousness). Anzaldúa (2007) conceptualizes the Latina epistemological standpoint as “new mestiza consciousness, *una conciencia de mujer*...a consciousness of the Borderlands” (p. 99). New *mestiza* consciousness extends the definition of knowledge beyond the intellectual to incorporate the intersections of historical and spiritual knowing grounded in *mestizaje* and the process of *conocimiento* (consciousness). *Mestizaje* refers to “the mixture of white people and native people living in what is now Latina America and the Caribbean” (Isasi-

Díaz, 1996, p. 64). *Conocimiento* involves accepting, understanding, and embracing all parts of our identity. *Conocimiento* denotes the epistemological quality of knowing that our multiple colliding identities are not problematic but powerful. This perspective aligns with my epistemological understanding of Latinas' multiple and complex identities, which are powerful and central to our funds of knowledge.

Latinas' ways of knowing are grounded in intellectual and spiritual ways of knowing based in Latina culture and are combined with ways of knowing based on the Western, U.S. context. Latina's culturally grounded ways of knowing are rooted in the "corporal, emotional, and spiritual sense of self as valid sources of knowledge" (Nygreen et al., 2016, p. 44). Meanwhile, in this study, Western, U.S. context ways of knowing encompass "western binary oppositions" that socialize us to separate and evaluate parts of ourselves in racist and gendered ways, corroborating with patriarchy (Lara, 2002, p. 434). For example, "you're a thinker *or* a feeler; rational thinking is good, intuition is bad...thinkers are white and/or men [good]; feelers are people of color and/or women [bad]" (Lara, 2002, p. 438). Western ways of knowing are relevant, because some Latinas (including all the women who participated in this study) live in the U.S. context. I approached this study from *mujerista* and Chicana feminist epistemological standpoints, meaning that I know that Latinas' ways of knowing extend well beyond the "narrow foundation of knowledge based in the social, historical, and cultural experiences of White men: the dominant and hegemonic ideology under which we all live, and in whose image the academy is constructed" (Brown & Stega, 2005, p. 10).

1.4 Methodology

While I used *mujerista* and Chicana feminist epistemologies as the guiding perspectives for the research design and data analysis in this study, I also used narrative inquiry methodology to ground my understandings of narratives as knowledge and to apply the methods through which to capture them. I situated this study in a combination of narrative and critical research paradigms. Aligning with a constructivist perspective, narrative inquiry proposes that reality is fluid and personal yet influenced by the world around the individual. Reality exists in the interactions between individuals, as well as between individuals and culture, time, places, and institutions (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry methodology aligned with my research study as I examined communities of women, the funds of knowledge that women cultivate within these communities, and the power that communities of women have on the journeys of Latinas in academia. I conceptualized knowledge as existing within the fluid, multidimensional, evolving relationships within communities of women.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to understand the role of communities of women on the journeys of Latinas in academia and how these communities cultivate funds of knowledge and fortify *bodymindspirit*, which *mujerista* and Chicana feminist theories argue signify an elevated sense of self, strength, consciousness, and way of knowing in Latina women. This study was about what communities of women mean to Latinas in academia and the outcomes that Latinas

in academia derive from being part of these communities. Both what Latinas in academia contribute to these communities of women and what they draw from as resources within these communities of women were within the scope of the research study. I sought to know what was born from communities of women that can and/or does disarm patriarchy in academia, or at least what aspects of communities of women—of ourselves, but in unison—defend Latinas in academia from the toxic, invalidating, and morally corrupt grasp of patriarchy.

The objective of this study was not to propose ideas based on Latinas in academia's communities of women to invalidate white men's ways of knowing. The objective was not to construct new norms and standards based on Latina ways of knowing, although it would be tempting in light of our historical oppression. The objective was to contribute knowledge for a transformed academy that functions² holistically and critically in a way where there is balance for the epistemologies of the oppressed, which liberation theologies, including *mujerismo*, propose are privileged in their oppression because they allow us to see complexities in knowledge and truth that Eurocentric, patriarchal, positivist, racist, and elitist epistemological perspectives neglect (Bonino, 1987 as cited in Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Isasi-Díaz, 1996). This epistemological balance can be achieved through a critical knowledge of and respect for the global history of oppression against People of Color and people of marginalized identities but only if this knowledge guides everyday actions and choices. It is possible that, in order to affect daily actions and choices, this knowledge of historical oppression would have to be understood through *bodymindspirit*—not merely through reason and intellect. For this reason, this study focused on how *bodymindspirit* was cultivated in

² To clarify, I use the term “functions” in place of “standards and norms” here because standards and norms will always delegitimize someone’s ways of knowing.

the communities of women that Latinas in academia are part of. Thus, this study illustrated how Latinas in academia contribute to the transformation of the academy—through their conceptualizations, navigation, and disruption of patriarchy. I anticipated that understandings of how Latinas’ communities of women disrupt patriarchy via their presence, cultivation of knowledge, and intentional action and agency would emerge in the data. Thus, it was within the scope of this study. Bodymindspirit is linked to spirituality, which was within the scope of this study. Although several participants spoke about their religion during data collection, it was not a central focus of this research.

Lastly, this study was not a comparative study for the means of providing knowledge and recommendations about how Latinas can perform to compete with white women, Latino men, or any other racial group in academia. In fact, that would be antithetical to the *mujerista* epistemology that guides this study (Nygreen et al., 2016). This study was not about examining the barriers and challenges that Latinas overcome in academia because there is extensive research on those issues. Rather, the topic of my study extends and brings a new perspective to research with Latinas in academia. This study was about opening the door to understanding how Latinas in academia ground themselves and how they draw strength at intellectual, corporal, and spiritual levels from the communities of women in their lives.

1.6 Research Design

Mujerista and Chicana feminist epistemologies guided the design of this research study. These theoretical and epistemological perspectives guided the questions I asked participants, how

and why I asked these questions, the information I disclosed with participants about my own lived experiences, and the data analysis. My interpretations of data were guided by *mujerismo*. Narrative inquiry methodology provided a guide for my choice in methods and how I organized these methods to carry out the purpose of this research study.

1.6.1 Participants

Eight Latina participants were recruited from multiple universities through purposeful sampling. Each participant completed a criterion survey (see Appendix B) to ensure she met the six criteria. The six criteria were: 1) she must identify as Latina; 2) she must identify as female; 3) she must identify as a current faculty member, practitioner, or graduate student at a university; 4) she must identify as having a community of women that is a meaningful part or contributing factor in her holistic development as a woman, scholar, professional and/or any other identity that is salient to her (e.g. mother, daughter, activist, volunteer, leader, family/community member, immigrant, spiritual being); 5) she must identify as being a spiritual person; and 6) she must understand and believe in the existence of multiple intersecting forms of oppression afflicting marginalized people. Student participants were enrolled in doctoral-level programs. Practitioner and faculty member participants were at varying levels of their professional careers.

1.6.2 Data Collection

Narrative inquiry studies and *mujerista* studies use combinations of various research methods including: ethnographic interviews, in-depth interviews, field notes, focus groups,

autobiographical writing, storytelling, *testimonios* (testimonies), letter writing, journal entries, and more to collect data (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Nygreen et al., 2016; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). I employed two methods of data collection. To learn about the participants' identities and journeys, I followed Seidman's (2013) in-depth phenomenological interviewing model. This is a series of three interviews with each participant. First, I completed a life history interview. Second, I conducted an interview focused on the topic of the research study and the study's research questions. The third and final interview continued discussions and meaning-making based on narratives shared in the first and second interviews (Seidman, 2013).

Then, I collected data in the form of an artifact. After the first interview, I asked participants to identify an artifact to discuss in the second and third interviews. The artifacts could be an object collected or produced by the participant. Importantly, I asked each participant to identify an artifact that she *already* owned, *because* it represented her community of women, her bodymindspirit, and/or her funds of knowledge. In other words, the artifact already held this significance for her prior to meeting me. Although all participants were able to identify artifacts they already owned, I did give each participant the option to collaborate with me on improvising another form of data collection that made more sense to her and aligned with her experiences. Due to the time and depth of the study, participants were compensated with \$45 after the completion of all three interviews.

1.6.3 Data Analysis

I conducted four levels of data analysis. In the first level of analysis I verified transcripts and memoed my emergent ideas (Creswell, 2018). I developed initial codes deductively. The first level of codes were based on the theoretical concept guiding each research question. In order to

make meaning of the initial codes in the second level of analysis, I classified codes into themes. A theme extended the meaning of the initial code based on a deeper analysis of the data under that initial code. In the third level of coding, I focused on assessing participants' interpretations of their stories. This level of analysis led to identifying epiphanies—"turning points...[showing the] unfolding in a chronology of their experiences, set within their personal, social, and historical context and including the important themes in those lived experiences" in participants' narratives (Creswell, 2018, p. 73). Fourth, I engaged in visualizing a holistic picture of each participant's narrative and of any commonalities across narratives. The purpose of this final step was to "interpret the larger meaning of the [individual participant's] story" (Creswell, 2018, p. 199). Data were presented in the forms of participant profiles (Seidman, 2013) and thematically (Riessman, 2008). Researchers conducting narrative analysis should "keep a story 'intact' by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases" (Riessman, 2008, p. 53). Therefore, I present findings organized by theoretical concepts. For each theoretical concept, I share each participant's narrative and interpretation.

Both *mujerista* and Chicana feminist epistemologies assert that the participants' analytic contributions are a critical part of the data analysis process (Delgado Bernal 1998; Isasi-Díaz, 1996). Similarly, member checking is a critical part of narrative analysis (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2013). Therefore, interview transcripts and participant profiles with analytic memos and clarifying questions were sent to participants (Saldaña, 2016). Participants had the opportunity to provide their own analysis and interpretations, which strengthened my own interpretations as well as the credibility of the findings.

1.7 Study Contributions

This study focuses on examining Latinas in academia's communities of women from the perspective that these communities are critical parts of these Latinas' journeys in the Ivory Tower. I approach the purpose of this study from a *mujerista* perspective that is meant to illuminate Latinas' ways of knowing and translate our ways of knowing into action to improve our lives. As such, I conceptualize the practical and research contributions of this study as directly connected to what good this study can do for my scholar sisters in academia—women so close to me that they are within *my* community of women and so far from me that I do not know their names, but I am aware of their presence, their strength, and their struggle. Although this study's participants are Latinas, sister scholars are Women of Color in academia. I understand the good of this study as being both about serving Latinas in academia and disrupting the marginalization we navigate to succeed in this oppressive structure. Disrupting the political position of our marginality is a critical step in disrupting the oppressive patriarchal, institutional structure.

1.7.1 Contributions to Research

By examining how communities of women help Latinas in academia cultivate bodymindspirit and funds of knowledge, this study illuminated how Latinas function, grow, and thrive holistically as individuals in a system that was not built for us and that often invalidates our ways of knowing, experiencing, and growing. A continuous flow of critical research studies, each one contributing to the battle against patriarchy and dualistic ideologies, is required to change academia and rebuild it based on our “epistemological privilege” as *mujeristas* and oppressed

people (Isasi-Díaz, 1993, p. 75). As such, theoretical concepts (bodymindspirit, funds of knowledge, and communities of women) in this study are used intentionally to break down Western dualistic ideologies about: 1) the qualities and markers of valuable and legitimate research topics, and 2) whose knowledge is powerful, rigorous, and legitimate (I.e. Knowledge from white bodies is legitimized and knowledge from Black and Brown bodies is de-legitimized.) (Lara, 2002). My contribution to research through this study was to identify and examine the foundational components of communities of women among Latinas in academia and to illuminate the transformative experiences that occur within these communities. Furthermore, this study demonstrated how *mujerista* concepts of *la familia/la comunidad*, *la lucha*, and *solidarity*, and bodymindspirit manifest within Communities of Women of Color in academia—extending knowledge about how Latinas actually live out and experience these theoretical concepts.

Furthermore, my research findings show what funds of knowledge are cultivated and exchanged between women in community and the roles that Communities of Women of Color play Latinas' path to *conocimiento*. Finally, there are currently two research studies focused on *mujerista* mentoring models. Villaseñor, Reyes, and Muñoz (2014) used existing *mujerista* research and their personal experiences in academia to theorize about what a *mujerista* mentoring model could look like. Meanwhile, Ek, Quijada Cerecer, Alanís, and Rodríguez (2010) examined how they organized to create a mentorship community to support their journeys through the tenure process as Latina faculty members. I use my study's research findings regarding the foundational components and transformative experiences that occur in Communities of Women of Color to make recommendation about the components that *mujerista* mentoring should include in order to develop authentic and meaningful relationships that benefit mentees and mentors. The existence of and transformative experiences that happen in communities of women contribute to the broader

purposes of 1) weakening the white patriarchy that permeates academia and 2) expanding *mujerista* research that illuminates “the wisdom, resilience, and survival strategies (*sobrevivencia*) present within Latina communities” as they thrive inside and outside of academia (Nygreen et al., 2016, p. 46).

1.7.2 Contributions to Practice

I engaged in *mujerista* research that “strives to nourish the wholeness of its participants and capture a holistic understanding of the phenomena of study” without compartmentalizing mind, body, and spirit in either the participants or myself (Nygreen et al., 2016, p. 46). Engaging in this holistic process with participants and learning how participants engage in similarly holistic process in communities of women informed my recommendation for higher education practice. Based on research findings, I made recommendations about how higher education practitioners and faculty who want to disrupt white patriarchy in higher education can use foundational components and transformative experiences that happen in communities of women as well as the concept of *bodymindspirit* to improve their practice and interactions with Latinas. These recommendations are based on the practices undertaken in communities of women. The purpose of the recommendations is to transfer the practices that happen in communities of women to academia, contributing to its *mujerista* rebuilding.

1.8 Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to examine Latinas in academia's communities of women—the communities of women that they are part of and in which they cultivate knowledge, support, growth, and empowerment. I combined *mujerista* and Chicana feminist theoretical and epistemological standpoints to conceptualize this research study and approach the data analysis. I situated this research study within the narrative research paradigm and used narrative inquiry methodology to ground my understanding of narratives and design the data collection methods. Data were collected via in-depth phenomenological interviews in a three-interview series; artifacts were also collected and discussed. This research study contributes to theory by documenting *mujerista* epistemologies and practices within communities of women. Based on the practices that occur within communities of women that empower Latinas, I make suggestions for higher education practice that can challenge the white, patriarchal culture of academia and move towards a *mujerista* culture in academia.

2.0 Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

I first present a discussion and overview of the theoretical framework guiding this study – grounded in the perspectives of *mujerismo* and Chicana feminism—because it provides the contextual background for the theoretical concepts in my research questions and literature review (funds of knowledge, *bodymindspirit*, and community). It is important to understand Latina funds of knowledge, *bodymindspirit*, and the closely related concept of spirituality before analyzing current literature that examines them in relation to communities of Latinas. Moreover, my overview of theory streamlines the broad concept of community into the specific context of this research study.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guided this research study was grounded in two living Latina theoretical perspectives: *mujerismo* and Chicana feminism. For each theory I: 1) review their origins; 2) give a brief overview; and 3) discuss the theoretical concepts relevant to this study’s research questions. *Mujerista* and Chicana feminist scholarship is born from the common mission to restructure and recreate which epistemological perspectives count as knowledge in academia and in the world at large (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Delgado Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Facio & Lara, 2014; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Moraga & Anzaldúa,

2002). This is the political, everyday mission of *mujerista* and Chicana feminist research³ (These are not always mutually exclusive and often intersect naturally.). *Mujerista* and *feminista*⁴ (Chicana/Latina feminist/feminism) ways of living and thinking serve particularly well in guiding this research study, because they “themselves are not about women’s right per se but about community rights,” *sobrevivencia* (beyond surviving) and *conocimiento* (reflective consciousness) (Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal, Elenes, 2006, p. 8). Community, which is sustained by the human spirit (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012), sits in the hearts of *mujerista* (Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Nygreen et al., 2016; Villenas et al., 2006) and Latina *feminista* scholarship (Télliez, 2005). To engage in *mujerista* or *feminista* living and scholarship means to allow oneself to be guided by *bodymindspirit*.

The main concepts in this research study—funds of knowledge, community, and *bodymindspirit*—intersect in such an integrative way that they are codependent in everyday life and in my scholarship. Santos and Morey (2013) stated that,

[We need theories] that will rewrite history using race, class, gender and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods. We need theories that will point out ways to maneuver between our particular experiences. (p. 89)

Although there is much more work to be done around theory and methodology, this is precisely what *mujerismo* and Chicana feminism do and continue to build towards. I used theoretical concepts from both *mujerismo* and Chicana feminism to guide and frame my research study. I

³ *Mujerismo* and Chicana feminism are not identical epistemologies or ways of identifying, seeing the world, or guiding scholarship. At the same time, they are not mutually exclusive and often intersect naturally (for more detailed explanation see Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal, and Elenes (2006)).

⁴ This term refers to Chicana feminists. *Feminista* and Chicana feminist are used interchangeably in this dissertation.

identify my bodymindspirit with *mujerismo* precisely because of *mujerismo*'s emphasis on bodymindspirit. *Mujerismo* is my worldview—a worldview that I enact (live out) daily.

2.1.1 Distinction between Two Living Theories: *Mujerismo* and Chicana Feminism

To begin, both *mujerismo* and Chicana feminism are living theories, which means that models or frameworks do not bind them. Instead, their basis and nature are the action of being fleshed out in everyday life. Theory in the flesh is manifested when “the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity” (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 21). This means that the theory is born from Latinas' lived experience and is manifested in our practice and action.

Mujerismo and Chicana feminist theory share in common that they are living theories. That being said, feminista scholars have also underscored how the two diverge at times. When explaining the differences between the terms, *feminista* and *mujerista*, as used throughout the book, *Chicana/Latina Education in Everyday Life: Feminista Perspectives on Pedagogy and Epistemology*, Villenas, Godinez, Delgado Bernal, and Elenes (2006) stated,

Feminista refers to Latin America and/or Greater Mexican/Chicana feminist movement, while *mujerista* refers to a Latina-oriented ‘womanist’ sensibility or approach to power, knowledge, and relationships rooted in convictions for community uplift. Often we use the former to signify the mobilized and historical base for Chicana feminist thought. We use the latter to call attention to the sensibility and orientation to everyday Latina communal relationships and issues—especially because *el feminismo* as a concept often does not have meaning for ordinary women as they go about their everyday lives. (p. 7)

Villenas et al.'s (2006) explanation is important for three reasons. First, it asserts that *feminista* may not be a salient term or self-identity for Latinas in everyday life, which means for Latinas outside of academia and research scholarship. Second, the explanation illustrates that *feminista* is a term more strongly connected to “Greater Mexican/Chicana” women, while *mujerista* is “Latina-oriented.” These distinctions support why I choose to lead this study from a *mujerista* perspective. First, I myself am not Chicana or Mexicana. Second, I want to ensure that the women I interview, regardless of their ethnicity, can identify with the theoretical approach of this study. The third reason that Villenas et al.'s description is important to this study is because they make a direct connection between *mujerismo* and “community uplift,” which supports the relevance of examining Latina in academia’s communities of women through a *mujerista* perspective.

Villenas et al. (2006) argued that Latinas in everyday life develop critical perspectives and pedagogies for their “survival/subversion of patriarchy, poverty, and discrimination and in their interactions with often insensitive institutions such as schools, hospitals, and social service agencies” (p. 2). Villenas et al. (2006) called this the “living theories that have emerged as mature women strive for individual and communal wholeness” (p. 2). Their analysis around Latina everyday worldviews further supports this study’s use of *mujerismo*, because achieving “wholeness,” which they claim to be a central part of Latinas’ everyday lives, is the epicenter of *mujerismo*. *Mujerismo* is therefore an appropriate perspective to examine how Latinas in academia’s communities of women cultivate funds of knowledge and *bodymindspirit*. My epistemological standpoint, and thus the perspective through which I designed the study and approached the data collection and analysis, is born from and rooted in the fusion of *mujerismo* and Chicana feminism.

2.1.2 Latina Funds of Knowledge

Funds of knowledge, the focus of my second research question, is a central theoretical concept in both *mujerismo* and Chicana feminism. Rather than arbitrarily assigning this concept to one theoretical perspective, I define and analyze it prior to the overviews of *mujerismo* and Chicana feminism and use both theories to do so. To know where Latinas stand in the environments within and beyond academia, I must show how we make meaning of the world, what matters to us, and who we are. To be clear, my intention is not to generalize or insinuate that there is one Latina identity—but rather to show the complexity of our identities and ways of knowing. My discussion of funds of knowledge illustrates Latinas’ intersecting and interconnecting bodymindspirit (corporal, intellection, and spiritual) identities. My description of funds of knowledge may not resonate with every Latina. However, since my discussion of funds of knowledge is based on the scholarship of Latina feminists and *mujeristas*, which means these scholars take preference for the ways of knowing of *mujeres* Latinas, I trust that parts of my discussion will resonate with Latinas’ real life experiences.

From a *mujerista* perspective, Nygreen et al. (2016) explained that Latina funds of knowledge encompass intellectual, corporal, emotional, and spiritual sources from which Latinas interpret the world. Anzaldúa (2007) defined Latina funds of knowledge through the concept of new *mestiza* consciousness. New *mestiza* consciousness is Latinas’ abilities to fully embody, embrace, and navigate between cultural worlds and identities while using multiple ways of

knowing to successfully negotiate our intersecting identities⁵. According to Anzaldúa (2007), new *mestiza* consciousness means that we (Latinas) draw knowledge from our state of *nepantlism*, “an Aztec word meaning torn between ways...[being] a product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another” (p. 100). By groups, Anzaldúa refers to Indigenous and European peoples coming together through colonization. As such, being in *nepantlism* means possessing multiple identities that create one greater whole along with political and cultural ways of knowing through which we interpret the world. In the Chicana feminism section, I further explain the multiple identities that create one greater whole in the Anzaldúan concepts of new *mestiza* consciousness and *conocimiento* (reflective consciousness). New *mestiza* consciousness, *nepantlism*, and *conocimiento* involve knowing and fully embracing our corporal, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual selves all together and all at once to reach greater clarity and power in our ways of knowing. This is indispensable in legitimizing ourselves and our funds of knowledge.

Latina funds of knowledge are also examined in the context of Latina mother-daughter pedagogies (Villenas, 2001; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). Villenas (2001) illustrated the importance of Latina culture-based, moral and ethical education, in Latina mothering as mothers teach this to their children to supplement traditional schooling. Moral and ethical education is a salient part of Latina funds of knowledge that is passed down from generation to generation between mothers and children and in Latina communities (Villenas, 2006). Latina funds of knowledge are created, exchanged, and preserved through “*consejos, cuentos, and la experiencia*” (advice, stories, and the

⁵ To clarify, I discuss intersecting identities through the lenses of Chicana feminism and *mujerismo*. Intersectionality theory has a core focus on violence against Women of Color (Crenshaw, 1991). I do not incorporate this theory here, because violence against Women of Color is beyond the scope of this study.

experience) (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 675). In essence, a significant feature of Latina funds of knowledge is that we cultivate them in community with others whom we love, care for, and/or are connected to at some bodymindspirit level—children, family, friends, *mujeres*, and beyond.

Spiritual and bodymindspirit ways of knowing also constitute Latina funds of knowledge. Galvan's (2006) work illustrated the power of Latina spiritual ways of knowing in the sustenance of Latina communities and the *sobrevivenica* ("not survival, but beyondness") of Latinas (p. 163). Latinas' connections with Catholic Virgins who transcend Catholicism contribute significantly to our identities and the ways we understand ourselves and the world. Elenes (2014) discussed how spirituality is the foundation of Chicana feminist pedagogies. Chicana spirituality "understands that Guadalupe and various Nahuatl female deities such as Tonantzin, Tlazolteotl, and Coatlicue are interrelated" so that Guadalupe goes beyond Catholic, patriarchal tradition to encompass masculine energy and rebelliousness as part of her identity (p. 45). Elenes argued that spirituality is the cornerstone of Chicanas' worldviews because "when Chicanas invoke spiritual practices in their cultural productions, they are linking them to a politics of memory aimed to maintain one's consciousness that recall and reinforce the spiritual in everyday life" (2014, p. 46). Similarly, La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre is Oshun in West African Yoruba spirituality. La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre is the patron saint of Cuba, and Cuban women invoke Oshun to draw strength from our Afro and exile identities, thus nurturing our spirituality and life narratives (Gonzalez Maldonado, 2017). We decolonize⁶ ourselves and cultivate our connection with Oshun, Yobura deity of love, physical and abstract beauty, and seduction as forms of power. La Virgen de la

⁶ In this study, I refer to decolonization within the context of academia, specifically using decolonizing epistemologies, theories, and methodologies to decolonize our minds and identities. I also refer to decolonizing in everyday life through everyday actions as we (Women of Color) embrace and embody our multiple identities through our personal, spiritual, and professional lives.

Caridad del Cobre as Oshun transcends Catholic, patriarchal tradition. Through her, we transcend intersectional oppressions based on our sex and race. Perez (2014) explained that Latina spirituality is a:

pilgrimage toward understanding that the (re)harmonization of the body-mind-spirit and the synchronizing of humanity to the rest of the natural world is sane, healthy, necessary, a craft that is not only personal, but perhaps the most pressing ideological and political work. (p. 24)

Mujerista scholars know that this political work is done by Latinas in everyday life. Thus, mujerista research hinges on the fact that “Latina women’s intimate daily lives are sources of valuable knowledge” because we put our funds of knowledge into observable practice in daily life (Nygren et al., 2016, p. 47).

Bodymindspirit is interrelated with Latina spirituality. Bodymindspirit is part of Latina identity and a source for funds of knowledge (Lara, 2002). I would argue that spirituality becomes bodymindspirit when our spiritual way of knowing interlocks with our mind and body to begin (what scholarship would name) our political work in daily life. As Latinas living from bodymindspirit—we would name it simply living from our truth. Bodymindspirit will be discussed further in the next section and is interwoven through the whole study.

Latinas’ funds of knowledge are largely based on Indigenous and Afro ways of knowing (Facio & Lara, 2014; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001). Many of us do not conform to the traditional patriarchal standards of knowledge and epistemological standpoints that founded academia. Consequently, Latina funds of knowledge have historically been, and are currently, invalidated in academia. This is apparent in numerous ways, including: 1) the exclusion and/or marginalization of intersectional/endarkened feminism from the (white) feminist movement, 2) the

exclusion and/or marginalization of Feminist of Colors' scholarship from women's and gender studies programs, 3) the division between white feminism and intersectional feminism, 4) Latinas' overall underrepresentation in postsecondary education as administrators, professors, and students, and 5) in the statistically negative relationship between the number of Latina faculty and professorial rankings (hooks, 2015a; hooks, 2015b; NCES, 2013; NCES, 2017a; NCES, 2017b; NCES, 2018).

2.2 Mujerismo

Aida Isasi-Díaz, a Cuban exile, Catholic nun, and theologian, was the first to conceptualize *mujerismo* in written scholarship (1996). As such, *mujerismo* was born from a religious perspective. The purpose of Isasi-Díaz's activist work and scholarship was to “disrupt ‘injustice [as] an all-pervading system’ dominant in the Catholic Church and the world, which manifests as sexist oppression and ‘racism/ethnic prejudice’” (pp. 40-41). *Mujerista* theology, in scholarship and practice, works toward one core outcome: the “liberations of Latinas” from intersectional oppressions, which “cannot happen apart from the liberation of all Hispanics and all oppressed people” (Isasi-Díaz, 1996; p. 106). Specifically, she focused on Latinas' (and ultimately the greater Latina/o/x community's) liberation from five forms of oppression in the world: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and systemic violence. Isasi-Díaz explained that the “process of [her] conscientization” (p. 41) guided her understanding of her own oppression, that of Latina women, and consequently led her to develop a “preferential option for Latina women, for our struggle for liberation” and ways of knowing (1996, p. 61). Thus, she co-

constructed *mujerismo* at a theoretical level on the ground, through activist work in community with Latinas in Peru for three years in the mid-1960s and then with Latinas in the U.S. Importantly, during this time period Peruvian women first coined the term, *mujerista*, to distance themselves from feminist movements (Vuola, 2002).

Through this work, Isasi-Díaz (1996) conceptualized *mujerista* theology as the process of “creating a voice for Latinas, not the only voice but a valid one; and...about capturing public spaces for the voices of Latinas” (p. 2). Situated in the discipline of theology, Isasi-Díaz’s (1996, 2004) examination of Latina spirituality is set in the faith-based communities of what she calls “grassroots Latinas—common folk—grassroots people—at the parish level” (Isasi-Díaz in an interview with Isherwood, 2011, p. 8). I explain the meaning of “grassroots Latinas” further, because it illuminates Isasi-Díaz’s theoretical perspective and philosophy of spirituality and spiritual epistemology, which is relevant to my research questions.

Isasi-Díaz’s (1996) definition of grassroots Latinas is influenced by her socialization as a novitiate (Catholic nun in training). As a novitiate, she was trained and socialized to understand spirituality as something developed and achieved in solitude, only within the confines of the seminary and self-reflection, because “‘spirituality’ was often used to set the nuns and priests apart from and above other [common folk]” (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 31). The term, “grassroots Latinas,” symbolizes what the Catholic Church would call common folk, people who have not experienced the process of initiating into a religious order. However, Isasi-Díaz made the choice to deviate from colonized notions of spirituality and cultivated her spirituality “in solidarity with the poor and the oppressed more than in fasting and mortifying the body...more than in being detached” from common folk (1996, p. 33). She felt that spiritual knowledge and development happened in community with and between grassroots Latinas not in the solitude of the church or seminary. Her

scholarship underscores that grassroots Latinas hold and cultivate spiritual funds of knowledge. The three concepts that Isasi-Díaz (1996, 2004) identified as central to the spiritual fabric of Latina communities are: solidarity, *la familia/la comunidad* (the family/the community), and *la lucha* (the struggle/fight).

2.2.1 Overview

Mujerismo is a theoretical perspective. It is not a theoretical model or framework. Consequently, it is devoid of structural restraints in the forms of stages or levels. Literally, *mujerismo* means womanism: Latina womanism. *Mujerista* perspectives intersect with those of Black feminist thought's womanism, such as embracing Women of Color's epistemological standpoints, our intersectional oppressions, our agency and power, our multiple complex ways of knowing, and the presence of spirituality in our being (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Walker, 1983).

Mujerismo, like womanism, is about the uplift of the community (hooks, 2015a; Walker, 1983). It strives to include and not to exclude. *Mujerismo* is both thought and physical action towards Latinas' liberation leading not only to "empowered individuals but also to transformed societies in which all people have access to well-being, freedom, and liberation" (Bryant-Davis & Comas-Daiz, 2016, p. 9). This study seeks to understand how Latinas in academia engage in this process, specifically through their communities of women.

Beyond Isasi-Díaz's foundational work in theology, psychologists have used *mujerismo* to frame scholarship and practice about Latina psychosocial health and therapies (Alberta & Castellanos, 2016; Bryant-Davis & Comas-Díaz, 2016; Casteñda-Sound, Martinez, & Duran,

2016; Nygreen et al., 2016). Latina mujerista psychologists use *mujerismo* to re-structure therapy practice and disciplinary understandings and conceptualizations of Latinas. They too, like Isasi-Díaz (1996) and Chicana feminist scholars (Villenas et al., 2006), emphasize *mujerismo* as a living theory—one that embodies and comes from our lived experiences in everyday life. We theorize from the ground of our communities and bodymindspirits *into* academia—not the other way around. In the first book about the psychologies of African American women and Latinas’, which was written by African-descent womanists and Latina mujeristas, Bryant-Davis and Comas-Díaz (2016) reminded us that “although in name these theories [womanism and *mujerismo*] may be early in development, in praxis they are long-standing, often overlooked realities of numerous racially and ethnically marginalized women” (p. 5).

In addition to *mujerista* scholarship in theology and psychology, “Chicana scholars have built upon *mujerismo* to better understand Latinas’ lives in a complex, often unwelcoming, social context” (Mejia et al.2013, p. 304). Delgado Bernal (2006) and Godinez (2006) used *mujerismo* to examine Latina women’s multiple and complex ways of knowing and how they use them to achieve agency and empowerment in everyday life. Carillo (2006) examined the “humorous practices of an informal syndicate in Detroit, an *union de viejas arguenteras* (collective of wise women)” (p. 181). Through what Carillo analyzed to be *mujerista* humor of the home, she examined how six Latinas reclaimed sexist humor and transformed it in a way to empower themselves and combat the intersectional oppression they experience in public and private spaces—causing a change in themselves and the spaces in which they live. Delgado Bernal (2006) used *mujerismo* to frame how Chicana self-identified college students coped with, abated the effects of, and thrived despite racism, sexism, and classism in college. She focused on how these students use their “cultural knowledge base” to combat overt and covert attacks on their identities

in white, patriarchal academia.

Godinez (2006) used a *mujerista* perspective to argue for the legitimacy of K-12 Latina students' cultural funds of knowledge. To make a case for educational reform and illuminate the flaws and exclusionary structures, policies, and practices of K-12 education system, Godinez (2006) built an argument around the richness and legitimacy of Latinas' funds of knowledge and demanded change. The resonating threads that unite *mujerista* research across disciplines and fields of study are: 1) the *lucha* to liberate ourselves from intersectional forms of oppression, 2) the need to illuminate our ancestral, undying ways of knowing; 3) our awareness that without individual intrinsic change there cannot be community change and vice versa, and finally 4) the resolve that liberation can only be gained incrementally through *lucha* in community and for community.

2.2.2 Relevant *Mujerista* Theoretical Concepts

The following concepts constitute *mujerismo* as a theory and epistemology. There are additional theoretical concepts beyond these; however, the following concepts have been included because they are relevant to this study's research questions.

Bodymindspirit. To begin, *bodymindspirit* is a concept at the borderlands between and within *mujerismo* and Chicana feminist theory. Put simply, the core of *bodymindspirit* (Lara, 2002) is the unity between the three elements. The purpose of *bodymindspirit* is to dismantle the Western binary that forces and assimilates us into believing that our body, mind, and spirit are separate and in opposition (Lara, 2002). Through this white, Western, patriarchal ideology and conditioning we are weakened and imprisoned in a perpetual state of internal battle as we fight to

be one thing at any given time and space. We are socialized to avoid *el encuentro* (the encounter) of the three, but in the encounter they (mind, body, and spirit) intersect and form a *trenza* (braid)—in the *trenza* of the three lies our power. Bodymindspirit, then, is more than the sum of the three parts; it is an entirely different, more intuitively, and intellectually powerful way of being, feeling, and thinking.

La familia/la comunidad. Isasi-Díaz theorized that *la familia/la comunidad* is a core concept in the identity of Latina women. In theorizing *la familia/la comunidad*, Isasi-Díaz (1996) analyzed both the positive and negative characteristics. While *la familia/la comunidad* (specifically referring to Latina/o/x family and community) can be a positive and supportive space for Latinas; it can also be a place where intersectional oppressions are reinforced. Specifically, she explained that it can be supportive in terms of extended kin and non-kin networks that offer cultural, emotional, physical, spiritual, and economic knowledge and sustenance. Simultaneously, in Latina/o/x *familia* and *comunidad*, like in non-Latina/o/x community, Latina bodies are not always safe. Our bodies are objectified and afflicted by continuous attempts at stripping them of their power and multidimensional meaning.

La lucha. Latinas’ “daily ordinary struggle...to survive and to live fully” (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 129). This is the ability to “deal with suffering without being determined by it” and to enjoy life (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 129). *La lucha* is part of Latina women’s consciousness and “self-understanding” (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 130). It means defining ourselves not by the intersectional oppressions we experience, although those oppressions and our critical consciousness of them matter greatly, but by our agency over our lives and ourselves. The struggle is not *part* of our lives; it should not be thought of as a battle with the goal of a simple victory. The concept of victory is simplistic, patriarchal, and antithetical to *mujerismo* and *lucha* as a bodymindspirit process.

Instead, “the struggle for women’s liberation is the best struggle, and this is why that struggle is...life. ¡La vida es la lucha!” (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 27).

Solidarity. Isasi-Díaz (1996) defined solidarity as both a theory and a strategy. Solidarity as a theory—a way of thinking— “opposes the theory of oppression by reconceptualizing every aspect of society” (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 92). Solidarity as theory combats control and domination, “the main characteristic of oppressive structures and relationships” and instills “commonality of feeling and interests” (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 92). As a strategy, solidarity, by proposing mutuality as a way of thinking and acting, if acted upon has the potential to induce “radical change” worldwide (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 92). In part, Isasi-Díaz (1996) redefined solidarity, because she conceptualized it as embracing opposing others and identities—not only coming together with those with whom you share common life experiences. Solidarity relies on understanding, believing in, and acting upon two elements: commonality of interests and mutuality.

Spirita. Comas-Díaz (2008) theorized *spirita* as a form of Latina spirituality and spiritual/cultural intuition. According to Comas-Díaz, she developed the term, *spirita*, to designate women of color’s spirituality. The spirit of liberation among women of color (*Spirita*) is a way of life. *Spirita* nurtures a deepening of women’s cultural values and fosters a reconstruction of their identity. It enhances women’s awareness of oppression and promotes a racial gender empowerment. In short, *Spirita* mobilizes women to take control of their lives, overcome their oppressed mentality, and achieve a critical knowledge of themselves. (p. 13)

Spirituality. For this study, I theorize spirituality as being interconnected with the body and the mind. Elenes (2014) defined spirituality as “the way I understand my position in the world in relation to larger existential questions about the meaning of life and death. Through spirituality

one is connected with the world, with one's ancestors and descendants, and one's contemporary relations" (p. 43). Elenes' definition of spirituality is useful because it articulates how spirituality connects us with our past, present and future, reinforcing its interconnected, holistic, and omnixistent nature. Furthermore, Anzaldúa (2015) theorized spirituality as a form of activism that Latinas embody when we "struggle to decolonize and valorize our worldviews, views that the dominant culture imagine as other, as based on ignorance" because, rather than being nested in rationality, it is nested in bodymindspirit (p. 90). Lastly, in distinguishing spirituality from religion, Isasi-Díaz (1996) theorized that spirituality resides in *la lucha* for our (Latina) liberation and every step we take steps toward it. For her, spirituality is in being "passionately involved with others more than in being detached, in attempting to be faithful to who I am and what *I* believe God wants of me more than in following prescriptions of holiness [set by organized religion] that require me to negate myself" (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 33). Her definition underscores that spirituality is intimately personal—residing in the deepest parts of us—but must also be fleshed out in our actions in daily life and in community with others with whom we connect at some bodymindspirit level.

2.3 Chicana Feminist Theory

The Chicana feminist movement originated from the Chicano⁷ movement of the late 1960s and 1970s, which was influenced by and coexisted with the Black Power, anti-Vietnam War, and

⁷ The movement is labeled "Chicano" rather than "Chicana/o" to represent that although Chicanas were critical in the foundations and implementation of the movement, they struggled to find a place and recognition for their work in the movement (Garcia, 1997). This Chicana struggle within the nationalist Chicano movement contributed to the emergence of Chicana feminist thought. Chicano and Chicana as a racial identity refer to those "who see themselves as people whose true homeland is Aztlán [the U.S. Southwest]" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 23).

second wave feminist movements (Garcia, 1997). The Chicano movement protested against the “second-class status” of Mexican Americans living in “‘ethnic nations’ or ‘internal colonies’ under the domination and exploitation of the United States” (Garcia, 1997, pp. 2-3). In response to the oppressions of living in a Euro-American-dominant country, Chicana/os came together to fight for social, political, and economic “self-determination and autonomy for Mexican-American communities throughout the United States” (Garcia, 1997, p. 2). The movement brought Chicanos from all disciplines together in efforts to use their work for social liberation and rights; poets, artists, playwrights, and writers used their work to contribute to the momentum and power of the Chicano movement. This uprising of the arts is known as the Chicano Renaissance. Although Mexican-Americans were in constant protest historically, the Chicano movement became the strongest uprising of Mexican-American and Chicana/o identified people (Garcia, 1997).

Chicana women held significant roles in the growth and empowerment of the Chicano movement starting from its foundations. However, involvement in the national Chicano movement led Chicanas to reevaluate their own ideologies and needs based on their gender-specific positions within the nation, the Mexican-American and Chicano communities, and the Chicano national movement (Garcia, 1997). Chicana feminist thought represents a movement of resistance against the intersectionality of gendered patriarchal oppression, racial oppression, and class-based oppression, which affect Chicanas and Latinas in everyday life (Garcia, 1997). Unlike the Chicano nationalist movement, Chicana feminist thought is not founded on resistance against the broader cultural-political oppression central to the national Chicano movement. Chicana feminists fought against Chicano nationalist ideologies that subjugated Chicanas to traditional gender roles for the survival of the Chicano culture. Chicana feminists exposed the oppressive, destructive, and sexist nature of this ideology, which is created and perpetuated by *machista* (sexist) norms and traditions

within Chicano culture. Importantly, some Chicana feminists attribute the origins of *machismo* in Chicano culture to Anglo patriarchal norms used to perpetuate oppression among and within the Chicano cultural community (Garcia, 1997; Hurtado, 1996).

Nonetheless, Chicana feminist scholarship began in the late 1960s to expose intersectional gender, sex and race-based oppression and to examine their experiences as Chicanas negotiating between Chicana/o and American cultures. The first series of Chicana feminist conferences, which occurred in the early 1970s, bolstered Chicana feminist thought. Because the Chicana feminist movement sprouted from the Chicano national movement, most foundational Chicana feminist writings focus on: 1) the role of Chicanas in the national movement (Sosa Riddell, 1974/1997; Vidal, 1971/1997), 2) exposing *machismo* in the culture and the Chicano national movement that oppressed Chicanas (Flores, 1974/1997; NietoGomez, 1995/1997a; NietoGomez, 1995/1997b), and 3) the rights of Chicanas in relation to the national movement, specifically involving child and healthcare (Gomez, 1976/1997, 1979/1997).

2.3.1 Overview

Anzaldúa's (2007) *Borderlands: The New Mestiza* is the foundational scholarship for the Chicana feminist theoretical lens. In this book, originally published in 1987, Anzaldúa grappled with the intersection of cultural history, ethnicity, religion, and gender experienced by Chicana women—who are interchangeably called *mestizas*, simultaneously fully native to the Americas and non-Western identified and/or of Native American or European descent. One of Anzaldúa's aims was to extend the theoretical work of the 1960s and 1970s pioneer feminista scholars like Marta Cotera and Ana Nieto Gomez and to develop a feminist transnational framework that

illuminated the lived experiences of not only Chicana women but women of color in the U.S. and across the Mexican border. At the heart of Anzaldúa's scholarship was the geopolitical context as she examined the geographic and political position of Chicanas, which may be applied to articulate the experiences of Women of Color living in the U.S. who identify with their country of origin at varying and multidimensional levels. Beyond articulating a geographical borderlands, however, Anzaldúa conceptualized the heart, soul, and intellect as borderlands that Chicanas exist in simultaneously, fully, and daily. Anzaldúa (2007) conceptualized geographic, corporal, spiritual, and intellectual borderlands as the core of Chicana and Latina women's personal and political existence. Proper use of Chicana feminism as a theoretical lens requires one to examine the metaphysical positioning of Latinas—their tangible experiences, gendered and racialized identities, corporal and spiritual/intuitive funds of knowledge, and how their identities and funds of knowledge empower their thriving at multiple levels, and in multiple life contexts. Chicana feminist theory means seeing, understanding, and embracing that a person is *whole*—corporal, spiritual, gendered, racialized, emotional, intuitive, and intellectual—and that these parts are indivisible and greater than their sum. Chicana feminist theory is a theoretical lens, a perspective. It is not bound to structure in the forms of model, stages, or levels.

2.3.2 Relevant Theoretical Concepts

The following concepts constitute Chicana feminist theory and epistemology. There are additional theoretical concepts beyond these; however, the following concepts have been included because they are relevant to this study's research questions.

Conocimiento. Anzaldúa (2015) referred to *conocimiento* as “the politics of embodied

spiritualities,” because *conocimiento* is a bodymindspirit process (p. 90). *Conocimiento* (reflective consciousness) is the realization that “the life you thought inevitable, unalterable, and fixed in some foundational reality is smoke, a mental construction, fabrication. So, you reason, if it's all made up, you can compose it anew and differently” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 558). This realization happens as we experience seven nonlinear and intersecting stages on the path to *conocimiento*. Anzaldúa (2002) referred to stages and spaces interchangeably. In the first stage, a world you have organized and understand stops making sense and:

in the midst of this physical crisis, an emotional bottom falls out from under you, forcing you to confront your fear of others breaching the emotional walls you've built around yourself. If you don't work through your fear, playing it safe could bury you. (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 544)

In the second stage, you enter a state of bodymindspirit *nepantilismo*. In the third stage, you can no longer bear to live torn between worlds (*nepantilismo*) and enter into “despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 545). In the fourth stage, you pick yourself up from the grey fog of self-blame, “reconnect with spirit, and undergo a conversion” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 545). In the fifth stage, you try to make sense of your newly awakened reality as you “sort, and symbolize your experiences and try to arrange them into a pattern and *story* that speak to your reality” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 545). The sixth stage, Latinas take the new schema they developed in stage five into the world and test it out. It inevitably falls short. It does not apply perfectly; there are holes. This causes us to hold our emotions in, anchoring us in one static place and consequently inhibiting our own power and the “resources that could mobilize [us]” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 545). In the seventh stage, you reach the:

critical turning point of transformation, you shift realities, develop an ethical,

compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others, and find common ground by forming holistic alliances. You include these practices in your daily life, act on your vision—enacting spiritual activism.

(Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 545)

Cultural intuition. In Chicana feminist epistemology, the researcher inserts herself into the research holistically by using her cultural intuition (Anzaldúa, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 1998). This means that the researcher is encouraged to use her: 1) personal experiences (inclusive of collective community experiences and memories), 2) professional experiences, 3) existing literature, and 4) the analytic research process to shape her epistemological and methodological views and, consequently, her own identity or position in the research process (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Through the process of cultural intuition, Latina researchers' personal and professional experiences become invaluable to conducting research. The validation of the researchers' personal and professional lived experiences is a critical part of Chicana feminist research, because it affords the researcher the same validity it requires the researcher to afford the epistemological views of participants. Consequently, the acknowledgement and application of cultural intuition in Chicana feminist epistemology "is one means of resisting traditional paradigms that often distort or omit the experiences and knowledge of Chicanas" (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 555).

La facultad. *La facultad* is the invocation of our third eye to "see in the surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see deep structure below the surface" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 60). *La facultad* is a sense of heightened awareness that cannot be reverted once reached. It means that we come to understand people and events not through our intellect, defined in the Western world as rational mind and thought, but through an awareness and perception from "the realm of the soul" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 61). Through *la facultad* we access an understanding that goes deeper

than intellectual. *La facultad* is a “less literal and more psychic sense of reality” (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 61). *La facultad*, *bodymindspirit*, and *spirita*, which come from Chicana feminism, *mujerismo*, and *mujerista* psychology, respectively, share common elements.

New *mestiza* consciousness. Latina understanding of ourselves as whole beings is driven by our multiple funds of knowledge—corporal, spiritual, intellectual, cultural, and intuitive. Drawing from the work of philosopher, José Vasconcelos, Anzaldúa (2007) explained that new *mestiza* consciousness means embracing our identities as *mestizas*—our European, Afro, and Indigenous descents—that form a new cosmic race. New *mestiza* consciousness means:

to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytic reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes. (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 101)

New *mestizas* become increasingly conscious of all the parallel and intersecting aspects of any single thing, thought, event, politic, or state of being, thereby departing from one-dimensional ways of thinking and being. New *mestiza* consciousness is interrelated with *conocimiento* (a form of intersecting multidimensional reflective consciousness) (Anzaldúa, 2002) and *nepantlismo* (*nepantlism* - state of being “torn between ways”) (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 100). In everyday life, when the theory is fleshed (lived out), these theoretical concepts integrate and coexist.

Nepantla. *Nepantla* is a place:

where the outer boundaries of the mind's inner life meet the outer world of reality, is a zone of possibility. You experience reality as fluid, expanding and contracting. In *nepantla* you are open to other perspectives, more readily able to access knowledge derived from holistic awareness. (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 544)

Nepantla also means being open between different ways of being and knowing and possibly merging these differences to more accurately live and represent one's own identity.

Shadow beast. Anzaldúa (2002) urged Latinas to embrace our shadow beast (the white man in us). Coming into wholeness means opening the door to understanding and living that part of us. Lara (2002) conceptualized the shadow beast as the one “who attempt[s] to subvert our transformative work by instigating anxiety, shame, or another stifling violence. This ‘thug’ within and without is a live presence impacting our ability to fly” (p. 436). We combat the shadow beast daily.

2.4 Literature Review

My literature review focuses on the three concepts that anchored my research study: (1) communities of women, (2) bodymindspirit, and (3) funds of knowledge. First, I define community broadly in terms of Latina/o/x community. Second, I conceptualize Latina community more specifically to Latinas as a gendered group. I organize the literature review on Latina communities into two separate categories: 1) Latina communities situated beyond academia, and 2) Latina communities situated within academia. My analysis is based on the themes that emerged in and from those research studies.

2.5 Latina/o/x Community, Culture, and Ethnicity

Before delving into a review of Latina communities, I will define the concept of community

and related concepts within a Latina/o/x context, explain why this is important to consider prior to examining Latina communities, and briefly review how the concept of Latina/o/x community has been examined in research. First, it is important to distinguish between the concepts of community, ethnicity, and culture because they are interrelated, interdependent, and difficult to separate both conceptually and in real life. Community can be examined at different levels and from different perspectives. Latina/o/x community can mean the population of Latina/o/x identified people living in the United States. In this sense, Latina/o/x community includes the entire U.S. Latina/o/x population and holds racial and political significance at a national level (Garcia, 2011). The Latina/o/x population, however, is composed of subgroups defined by ethnic identities. Omi and Winant (1994) defined ethnicity as a socially constructed concept that is “the result of a group formation process based on culture and descent. Culture is broad, including but not limited to, a group’s shared, “religions, language, ‘customs’, nationality, and political identification,” while descent is inclusive of “heredity and a sense of group origins” (p. 15). In his examination of Latina/o/x culture and community, Garcia (2011) distinguished a subtle nuance in how Latinas/o/xs conceptualize ethnicity whereby “direct ‘blood’ ancestry is less important, with *belief* in a descent being more critical [italics added for emphasis]” (p. 13). According to Garcia, ethnicity “lies in the core of one’s identity” and serves as the “basis for community formation” (2011, p. 13). Ethnicity is an important concept when discussing community, because Latinos often identify with their national origin group (Garcia, 2011). While Latinas/o/xs may identify as being part of the larger, racial, political Latina/o/x national community, they may also identify as being part of their ethnic community—a subgroup within that national Latina/o/x community (Garcia, 2011). As such, ethnicity, culture, and community are interdependent concepts.

Therefore, the concept of community is as broad and complex as the concept of Latina/o/x.

Since Latina/o/xs are “not one group, but many”, many Latina/o/xs identify with their ethnicity (e.g. Cuban, Guatemalan, Puerto Rican, Mexican, etc.) alone or in addition to “Latina” or “Latino.” This is the case because “Latina” and “Latino” are more recently growing terms that identify us as a racial, national and political community in the United States (Arreola, 2004; Gándara, 2015). The diverse ethnicities and self-identities among Latina/o/xs make it challenging to generalize about Latina/o/x community characteristics. Nonetheless, the salience of Latina/o/x people’s affiliation with Latina/o/x community at a national pan-ethnic level, *and/or* at the ethnic community level are both critical parts of Latina/o/x identity and everyday living. The affiliation with our communities makes up our political identities in the United States and is the lens through which we⁸ see the world and our intersecting identities (political positions) in it. Latina/o/xs’ identification with community, whether at national political or ethnic community levels, attests to the centrality of community for Latina/o/xs as a pan-ethnic group. Whether we identify as Latina/o/xs crossed by the U.S. border (Mexicans) or as Latina/o/x exiles from 90 miles across the Atlantic Ocean (Cubans)—our national community/subgroup communities are the cornerstone of our *lucha* (the struggle/fight) for *sobrevivencia* (“not survival, but that beyondness”) in the United States (Galvan, 2006, p. 163).

2.5.1 Diverse Conceptualizations of Community

Moreover, it is worth noting that researchers’ fields of expertise determine how they examine the Latina/o/x population and the concept of community. For example, political scientists

⁸ In this section my use of the pronoun, “we,” refers to Latina/o/xs; in prior and subsequent sections it refers to Latinas.

and geographers examine the Latina/o/x population in the United States as a large, national ethnic and racial community of people (Arreola, 2004; Garcia, 2011). When examining community in a Latina/o/x context, research focuses on Latina/o/xs *as* a community. They investigate Latina/o/x community trends including political activism, the effects of political policies on the Latina/o/x population and Latina/o/x communities, and the history and demographics of Latina/o/x communities by regional location (Arreola, 2004; Garcia, 2011). The larger national conceptualization of Latina/o/x community that these researchers offer is important because it highlights how diverse the Latina/o/x population is, which means that Latina/o/x culture is diverse depending on ethnicity and regional location (Garcia, 2011). This is the case because regional location determines the density of Latina/o/x communities and the political environment in which Latina/o/xs live. For instance, there are continuous communities (founded by and still predominately inhabited by Latina/o/xs), discontinuous communities (founded by, but no longer predominately inhabited by Latina/o/xs), and new communities (where Latina/o/xs are predominantly new immigrants and have gained a significant presence where they previously had none) of Latina/o/xs across the nation (Arreola, 2004). The political contexts of where Latinas/o/xs reside vary by region: the West Coast (e.g. California), the Southeast (e.g. Texas), the Northwest (e.g. New York), and South Florida (e.g. Miami) (Arreola, 2004; Garcia, 2011). The ethnic compositions of Latina/o/x communities also vary by regional location (Gándara, 2015; Garcia, 2011).

Geographers and political scientists' examinations of Latina/o/x communities in the United States is different from what I seek to understand about Latina communities. Importantly, however, it does illustrate that the concept of community is a salient part of Latina/o/x identity. Acknowledging these factors (regional location, type of communities, and ethnic makeup of

communities) within varying regional political contexts is important as I prepare to conduct research with Latinas in academia regarding their communities of women. Just as these factors influence the characteristics—the sense and the fabric—of Latina/o/x culture and community, they may also be influential to Latina communities (Arreola, 2004; Garcia, 2011).

Educational researchers, on the other hand, draw from sociology and ethnic studies to examine Latina/o/x communities (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Yosso, 2005). Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth framework analyzed community in Latina/o/x culture as a central source of knowledge creation and place of knowledge transmission. The community cultural wealth framework examines the types of social capital that are rich in Latina/o/x communities and from which Latinas and Latinos draw to thrive in the world. Communities are important in Latina/o/x culture, because we learn from our interactions with others in our communities. Our communities provide the funds of knowledge – cultural ways of knowing—that guide how we see and make meaning of the world (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Gúzman, 2012). Yosso's framework exemplified how community is a core part of Latina/o/x culture. Galvan (2001, 2006) examined rural Latina communities, specifically. Through ethnographic research, Galvan examined how rural Latinas developed and embodied their pedagogies, epistemologies, and spiritualities within their community of women. Research about Latina/o/x communities across disciplines and fields of study support that community(ies) is a core element of Latina/o/x culture, thus suggesting that there is much more to learn with and from Latina/o/x communities, and, in the case of this study, of Latinas in academia's communities of women specifically.

2.6 Latina Communities in Everyday Life

Since this dissertation is grounded in *mujerista* and Chicana feminist thought and because *mujerista* and *feminista* scholars are especially concerned with multiple aspects of Latinas' lives, I delve into these bodies of research to review Latina communities in everyday life. I divided everyday life into two spaces: space beyond academia and space within academia. First, I review research studies on Latina communities beyond academia to identify core elements in these communities. Then, I review literature on Latinas in academia to identify core elements and discern the functions of community. I approach my review of communities of women in this way because scholarship about Latina communities takes place in diverse settings (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Villenas, 2001). Meanwhile, the experiences of Latinas in academia are not examined from perspectives that focus on community per se. Furthermore, the two contexts in which I review Latina communities, beyond academia and within academia, do share some common elements. Nevertheless, organizing the literature review this way is important, because learning about communities of women that exist beyond academia can inform recommendations for how to cultivate conducive and fortifying environments for communities of women within academia. Distinguishing between communities of women beyond and within academia is important to understanding the nuances and commonalities that exist between these communities.

The studies I reviewed for Latina communities beyond academia have diverse settings, purposes, and methods. Therefore, the review is organized by salient community elements: 1) spirituality, 2) mothering, 3) grassroots political activism, and 4) self-legitimization and power (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Mejia et al., 2013; Villenas, 2001, 2006). In the second section of the review, Latinas' communities within academia, my analysis focuses on three themes: 1) legitimizing

Latina funds of knowledge, 2) cultivating Latinas' multiple intersecting identities, and 3) creating *mujerista* mentorship (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002; Ayala, Herrera, Jimenez, & Lara, 2006; Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012; Ek, Quijada Cerecer, Alanis, & Rodriguez, 2010; Espino, Muñoz, & Kiyama, 2010; Espino, Vega, Rendon, Ranero, & Muñoz, 2012; Facio & Lara, 2014; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Martinez-Roldan & Quiñonez, 2016; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002; Segura 2003; Tijerina-Revilla, 2009, 2010; Villaseñor, Reyes, & Muñoz, 2014).

2.6.1 Latina Communities Situated Beyond Academia

The following qualitative studies by Latina *feminista* and *mujerista* researchers examined the lives of Latinas in diverse settings beyond academia. The settings in which these studies took place include: Latinas' homes, rural and faith-based communities (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Villenas, 2001, 2006), and Latinas volunteering in a community health project (Mejia et al., 2013). In addition to their varied settings, these studies relied on diverse methods and on Latina participants' unique worldviews and lived experiences. I found four community elements that were salient: spirituality, mothering, grassroots political activism, and self-legitimization and power. My review of spirituality is based on Galvan's (2001, 2006) research studies, because they specifically focus on this topic and because spirituality among Latinas is relevant to my third research question. Later, I return to a discussion of spirituality in the context of Latina communities within academia, because spirituality emerged in that body of literature as well. My review of the latter three community elements, however, is based on all of the research studies (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Mejia et al., 2013; Villenas, 2001, 2006). Community elements are characteristics or components of

communities, which existent research demonstrates are salient parts of communities. Because this is an in-depth qualitative, narrative inquiry research study, I do not attempt to generalize about community elements. Neither in my literature review nor in the discussion of findings do I claim that all Latina communities have certain elements in common. Although the studies' findings were rich beyond these themes, the four themes previously mentioned were illustrative of Latinas' experiences and epistemologies specifically within communities.

Spirituality. I seek to understand how Latinas cultivate bodymindspirit. Therefore, understanding spirituality, what it means, and how it is cultivated and manifested by Latinas, is critical. Galvan's (2001, 2006) work with Latina community demonstrated that spirituality was a core element in Latina community. Galvan's (2001, 2006) work highlighted the strength of spirituality in a *campesina* community of Latinas. A *campesina* is defined as a "rural or peasant woman" with limited resources who lives and works in a rural area (Galvan, 2006, p. 162). Both of Galvan's research studies are based on her ethnographic research in four rural communities and one neighborhood in Sierra Linda, Guanajuato, a town-like city in Central Mexico. The community context in which the experiences of *campesinas* were examined was a small savings group (SSG) organized by a literacy project, of which all the women were a part. The SSG was a place where women could save money, read, write, converse, reflect on community issues, experience *convivencia* or "living life among others," and lead efforts to secure resources for their larger Latina/o/x community (Galvan, 2006, p. 163). The purpose of Galvan's (2001) first study was to illustrate *campesina* pedagogies by capturing the women's teaching and learning experiences in their SSGs, families, and Latina/o/x communities. Galvan sought to learn with rural women

because their pedagogical processes remain largely unexamined in scholarship within academia⁹.

Spirituality is the source of strength from which *campesinas* draw to combat daily struggles in their communities, work, and homes (Galvan, 20001, 2006). *Campesina's* spirituality influenced their determination to become part of the SSG community as a means to help themselves and their larger Latina/o/x community (Galvan, 2001). *Campesinas* interpreted their participation in the SSG as an opportunity and space to grow in communal spirituality with each other. Spiritual funds of knowledge shaped *campesinas'* pedagogical practices among each other as they gathered in the SSG community: 1) to pray and converse about their personal struggles and the problems in their larger community, and 2) to seek out each other's wisdom regarding how to heal the ailments to their minds, bodies, and spirits (Galvan, 2001, 2006). *Campesinas* wrote communal prayers for the rights and the wellness of their communities and shared their personal physical, spiritual, and mental ailments with one another. In return, they cultivated mutual support and shared healing suggestions based on *curanderismo* (healing folk medicine) and *espiritismo* (spiritual guidance and knowledge).

Campesinas' knowledge and practice of *curanderismo* and *espiritismo* illustrate the merger of Catholicism and ancestral spiritual tradition. To be clear, although *campesinas* expressed their faith and spirituality through Catholic Church rituals, Galvan (2001) clarified that *campesinas'* spiritual epistemologies go beyond the religious knowledge and rituals of the Catholic Church as they evoke their ancestral epistemologies and practices of *curanderismo* and *espiritismo*. Regarding the complexity and power of Latina spirituality, Castillo (1997) explained that

⁹ I choose the phrase “scholarship within academia” intentionally because “academic scholarship” would connote that whatever artifacts representing and containing knowledge in *campesinas'* homes and communities are not academic or scholarly.

Catholicism is the “religion she [referring to Latinas] has been taught,” but it is something beyond that as evidenced in her knowledge and belief in spiritually grounded *curandierimso* and *espiritismo*, which precede our forced initiation into Catholicism via European colonization that “is the unspoken key to her strength and endurance as a female through all the ages” (p. 95). Latina spirituality has developed through history and in the present as in the nexus of colonial religion and ancestral wisdom/knowing (Anzaldúa, 2007; Galvan, 2006). It is relevant to consider the interconnection between spirituality and Catholicism that Latinas may experience when designing this study’s interview protocol.

Galvan (2006) offered a more extensive analysis of *curanderismo* and *espiritismo* among *campesinas* in her subsequent research study, which relied on the lived experiences of the same *campesinas*. The purpose of Galvan’s (2006) second study was to examine how *campesinas*’ spiritual epistemologies shaped their pedagogical practices in everyday life and within the context of their organized community (the SSG). Although the research study findings were not organized in this particular manner, in my own analysis of the findings, I came to understanding that they demonstrated three specific aspects of *campesinas*’ spirituality: 1) a connection between spirituality and the wellness of the larger Latina/o/x community; 2) a spiritual epistemology colored by a merger of Catholicism and ancestral tradition; intuition was a significant outcome of this merger; and 3) spirituality as the primary resource for *campesinas*’ *lucha* (the struggle/fight) for *sobrevivencia* (“not survival, but that beyondness”) (Galvan, 2006, p. 163). The following are examples of how these three spiritual aspects are illuminated in Galvan’s (2006) work.

For *campesinas*, spirituality and community are interconnected. Spirituality was intimate, personal, and communal. Spirituality existed within themselves but was sustained by their spiritual connections to saints, loved ones (on earth or beyond), and in their oral exchanges through their

cultural idioms including “their dress (crosses, *escapularios*), devotion to a particular saint (Jovita to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, for example), language (statements like, *Dios se lo pague*—May God repay you), and actions (active church life)” (Galvan, 2006, p. 167). *Campesinas* developed their ancestral spiritual intuition, however, through ancestral knowledge. This was evidenced in *campesinas*’ use of dreams to connect with ancestors and loved ones who had passed in order to receive insight about how to heal their physical and emotional ailments. *Campesina* spiritual epistemology—which consisted of a merger of Catholic devotion and ancestral spiritual intuition and knowledge—was cultivated at intimate and communal levels to sustain their physical and emotion health. *Campesina* spiritual epistemologies powered their *lucha* (struggle/fight) through and beyond “their people’s socioeconomic and historical conditions” (Galvan, 2006, p. 174). *Campesinas*’ spiritual epistemologies fostered their *sobrevivencia*, which means “not survival, but that beyondness” (Galvan, 2006, p. 163). Regardless of social conditions, *campesinas* drew from the knowledge and power they did have to fulfill their personal “women’s wholeness” and uplift their larger Latina/o/x community (This will be further discussed in the “grassroots political activism” section below.). Galvan (2006) asserted that because *campesinas* are “overlooked on the bases of their gender, class, and ethnic status, [they] are left with little choice but to rely on their own sources” (p. 170). Based on *campesinas*’ lives and narratives, Galvan (2006) concluded, “spiritual epistemologies of ancestral knowledge, dreams, and intuition are the crucibles of *mujerista* pedagogies” (p. 170). Galvan’s (2001, 2006) work informs the development of my protocol questions regarding how Latinas in academia and in their communities of women cultivate bodymindspirit.

Mothering: Activist, transformative, and communal. The literature shows that Latina mothering in community settings is activist, transformative, and communal. It works to change the

social conditions of Latina women and of the whole Latina/o/x community (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Mejia et al., 2013; Villenas, 2001, 2006). Mejia et al.'s (2013) work is based on a community organized Photovoice project of which Latina mothers living in North Portland were a part. Villenas' (2001, 2006) two studies are based on a larger ethnographic research project with Latinas in Hope City, North Carolina. Both researchers' projects underscore activism and community transformation as part of Latina motherhood.

Through integrative data collection via Photovoice, Mejia et al. (2013) offered a new method for scholars engaged in participatory action research (PAR) who want to contribute to Latinas' agency and validate their, often marginalized, funds of knowledge. Mejia et al. engaged with a community of Latina mothers to capture their perspectives about a wider community-based initiative regarding children's health and obesity in North Portland. The initiative had a specific focus on children's health inequities and "critiques of community realities in immigrant communities" (Mejia et al., 2013, p. 305). The PAR participants consisted of two groups: community-researchers (the Latina mothers themselves who lived in the community, spoke predominantly or exclusively Spanish, and took photos) and facilitators (Latina professional researchers who assisted with collaboratively translating community-researchers' data, analyzing data, and facilitating group discussions about data). Community-researchers consisted of five Latina mothers who had been actively volunteering in two North Portland schools where their children were enrolled. Facilitators consisted of three researchers who assisted in community-researchers' Photovoice data collection and analysis processes. Mejia et al. used Photovoice as a method for participants to: 1) capture knowledge by taking photographs, 2) analyze and discuss it in a communal setting with community researchers and facilitators, and 3) expose and address their Latina community's concerns to the greater white North Portland political community.

Latinas used Photovoice to capture images that reflected their perspectives and interpretations of their community's social conditions and the health initiative. In the case of this study, Photovoice helped Latinas' experiences and funds of knowledge become part of the larger community-based research initiative. Photovoice also contributed to the politicization of their perspectives, because their data points brought a *mujerista* epistemological standpoint to the wider community-based health initiative (Mejia et al., 2013). The data that community-researchers gathered embodied a “mujerista approach [that] recognizes the need to reject patriarchal forms of facilitation and encourage collective storytelling” (Mejia et al., 2013, p. 310). Community-researchers (Latina mothers) captured photos that symbolized their exclusion in the “metropolitan, organic, and ‘hip’” atmosphere for which Portland was known (Mejia et al., 2013, p. 314). They took photos of the unhealthy school lunches served to their children, the holes in the sidewalks and streets where they lived that made it difficult to bike around the city (Walkability is a feature in which Portland takes pride.), and the dilapidated bus stops in their neighborhoods. For community researchers, mothering was activist and transformative for the greater community narrative as they created a communal narrative of their real experiences as Latinas in North Portland.

Villenas' (2001, 2006) findings on mothering were based on her ethnographic research with Central and South American Latina migrant workers who were laboring in the poultry industry of Hope City, North Carolina. Although Hope City had a population of nearly 5,000 people, only 184 were Latina/o/xs, and this was double the amount of Latinos across the county and state. As such, the women of Hope City were part of a unique and relatively fast-growing Latina/o/x community facing “southern racisms, labor migration, and white and Latino patriarchies” (Villenas, 2001, p. 4). Villenas (2001, 2006) underscored the community activism and communal mothering practices that were part of Latina mothering within the “racialized

patriarchal economy” of Hope City (Villenas, 2001, p. 11). Hope City Latinas spoke about their family roles as well as about their roles as activists within their communities of origin. They explained how their identities as mothers and caregivers extended beyond their homes and was rooted in community activism. Mothering and activism went hand-in-hand; it meant “knowing how to *enfrentar el hogar y la sociedad* (face the challenges of the home and the community) with all the contradictions of pleasure, pain, and ambiguity of lives institutionally marginalized” (Villenas, 2006, p. 153). Their identities as mothers and community activists were possible because of the mothering they received growing up. In her analysis, Villenas (2006) shared that “those shades of gray, those spaces of possibilities to make new meanings, to be create and self-fulfilled” that mother’s teachings provide for daughters to build lives beyond their own were the impetus of their leadership through community activism and their decision to come to a new country seeking greater economic stability (p. 157). Latinas in Hope City explained how their mothers’ mothering enabled them to go to school and become community activists, because their mothers took on the burden and responsibilities of housework so that they could have more opportunities to learn and engage outside of the home.

Within the context of Hope City, Latinas were community activists who fought against and redefined deficit notions about their needs and their mothering practices, which were created by “the dominant public sphere (i.e. conversations among services professionals, the newspapers and school rhetoric on language deficiency and child abuse)” (Villenas, 2001, p. 8). Race, gender, legal status, and language determined Latinas’ economic mobility; yet “the perfected use of cheap labor in Hope City...went unquestioned in the practice of benevolent racism” (Villenas, 2001, p. 12). Villenas (2001) defined benevolent racism as “insidious ‘helping’ practices” manifested through the normalization of white/Western middle-class cultural (including mothering practices) and the

pathologizing of Latino culture” (pp. 8-9). Hope City’s white community members trusted Latinas to do the work of migrant laborers but did not trust their work as mothers. Latinas in Hope City countered their perceived identities in the white community with their role in the Latino community as mothers and educators in their homes. Villenas’ findings demonstrated how “against their deficit framing, Latina mothers created ‘counterstories’ through which they claimed dignity in their role as mothers/educators who imparted what they believed to be a ‘better’ education of morals and values than what Hope City had to offer” (2001, p. 4). More specifically, Latinas’ life history interviews illustrated that they created counterstories by: 1) constructing themselves as educated women; 2) interpreting the family and community education of their home countries as superior; and 3) situating themselves in “*el hogar*” (the home) as homemakers while critiquing the education and values of U.S. white women. For Latinas in Hope City, “*buena educacion*” (quality education) meant good morals, etiquette, and loyalty to family, and respect (Villenas, 2001, p. 12). This is a common understanding of *buena educacion* among Latinas (Quiñones, 2016). Latinas in Hope City reconfigured their role in the home with pride and honor, thereby disrupting white middle-class patriarchal perceptions about their lives, morals, and levels of education.

Beyond the connection between mother and community activism, Latinas in Hope City and in Central Mexico elaborated on the intergenerational and communal nature of mothering and their mother-daughter pedagogies (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Villenas, 2006). Pedagogies were cultivated between grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. Pedagogies were born through the words (oral lessons, *consejos, y dichos*), bodies (physical actions), and spiritual epistemologies of mothers and grandmothers. Latinas exchanged knowledge intergenerationally about both society’s sexist expectations and their mothers’ and grandmothers’ *mujerista* expectations (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Villenas, 2006). To be clear, expectations collided as mothers and grandmothers acknowledged

both sexist and *mujerista* notions and at times necessarily embodied both to navigate through life. Although for the most part mothers and grandmothers did not use terms like *mujerista* to express such expectations, it was these “pedagogies of economic survival, of cooperative mothering, and of individual fulfillment in connection with community” that fostered Latinas’ will to *luchar* even beyond the methods used by the generations of *mujeres* before them (Villenas, 2006, pp. 154-155). Moreover, mothering continued to be communal and intergenerational for Latinas in Hope City and Central Mexico, as Latinas sought to secure more economic stability for themselves and their families (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Villenas, 2006).

Grassroots political activism. The following is an overview of grassroots political activism, a common thread across the research studies on Latina communities. Latina communities have a mission to uplift the entire Latina/o/x community (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Mejia et al., 2013; Villenas, 2001, 2006). Latina communities partaking in grassroots, community-organized activist projects tell a story from their Latina perspectives and also from the perspective of the greater Latina/o/x community. Latina communities re-story (tell their truth) their own and the larger Latina/o/x community narratives. By re-storying their own and the larger Latina/o/x community’s living truths, Latinas are activists who secure resources for themselves and their community.

In Villenas’ (2001, 2006) ethnographic study with Latinas in Hope City, Latinas came together to disrupt the deficit notions of themselves as mothers and of the Latina/o/x community as uneducated and in need of white people’s help and teachings. Latinas in Hope City lived in an atmosphere of benevolent racism. For example, white social workers believed Latina mothers needed to be educated on good mothering practices and police officers consistently criminalized Latino men who had not committed any crimes. Professional and social services agents in Hope City believed that the Latina/o/x community needed to learn the “‘modern’ way” of living, which

meant the white way (Villenas, 2001, p. 8). Thus, enactments of benevolent racism meant that the resources available for the Latina/o/x community were determined by racist ideologies.

To combat benevolent racism, the invalidation of Latina/o/x culture, and Latina funds of knowledge and their mothering practices, Latinas transformed the dominant narratives within their spheres of power. In their spheres of power, Latinas were activists and transformative in ways that had inevitable effects on the greater Hope City community. In their homes, Latinas imparted moral education, which they believed was not provided by and was superior to education from social workers who attempted to reform their mothering practices (Villenas, 2001). By intentionally exchanging cultural ways of knowing and Latina pedagogies with their children and family members and by discussing their methods with other Latina mothers in their community, Latinas continued to cultivate their own culture and knowledge. Latinas disrupted benevolent racism by raising their children and interacted with others in the Latina/o/x community in ways that intentionally kept Latina ways of knowing alive and strong. Although white social workers and professionals wanted to provide resources based on benevolent racism, consequently contributing to the erasure of Latina ways of knowing and Latina/o/x community cultural knowledge and practices, Latinas re-storied their experiences, knowledge, and practices within their homes on a daily basis. They continuously combated deficit perspectives impinged on them and the Latina/o/x community based on race and culture.

Latinas in North Portland engaged in a similar process of re-storying as they disrupted white people's rhetoric about the area in which they lived (Mejia et al., 2013). While the dominant white narrative depicted North Portland as walkable, bikable, and sustainable city that provided a high quality of life for residents, Latinas captured their experiences in North Portland through photographs that reflected resource inequities based on race. As Mejia et al. (2013) explained,

“Community-researchers also grew confident enough to engage in a critical reflection of their community and of social consequences of being ‘foreigners’ in a land they had intended to make their permanent home” (p. 312). Latinas documented their struggles and, in the process, politicized their identities and that of the larger Latina/o/x community by capturing the racism and inequities they combated daily and incorporating their lived experiences into a North Portland health initiative. For example, Latina community researchers’ data emphasized the need to have healthy and affordable food options available to them in their local neighborhoods. As Mejia et al. stated, Latina community researchers took photos that racially and economically privileged people on the community-based health initiative were often oblivious to:

Instead of sanitized images with a caption explaining why families did not make use of the parks, madres [mothers] took bold pictures of abandoned school lots and associating them with the rise in gang activity, complicating views of social inequality by openly speaking out on the inability to afford healthy food in a rapidly gentrifying area where supermarkets mainly cater to middle-class residents. (2013, pp. 316-317)

Through Photovoice, Latinas incorporated their pedagogies and funds of knowledge into the methodological process, facilitating a “mujerista approach [that] recognized the need to reject patriarchal forms of facilitation and encouraged collective storytelling” (Mejia et al., 2013, p. 310). By capturing and sharing their truths through Photovoice, discussion, and analysis, Latinas re-storied the North Portland narrative and that of their Latina/o/x community.

Finally, in Galvan’s research (2001, 2006), Latinas in the SSG reformed their social and economic circumstances and expectations daily. Because 80% of the men in their communities immigrated to larger cities in Mexico or across the Mexico-U.S. border to work, Latinas in the SSG relied predominantly on themselves and each other for social, economic, and holistic support.

However, despite the absence of most men “their [men’s] beliefs with regard to women’s place in society holds strong” and Latinas were “collectively forsaken for not conforming to community gender-specific expectations” (Galvan, 2001, p. 610). Galvan (2001) observed that Latinas cultivated their pedagogies in the SSG via the act of *convivencia* (coming together), sharing spirituality, and fostering their own and each other’s well-being. These were acts of transformation and activism, because they disrupted gender norms, propelled Latinas’ *sobrevivencia*, and fostered their self-worth and power.

Latinas grassroots activism for the purpose of preserving and strengthening themselves and their Latina/o/x community embodies what Anzaldúa (2015) argued is one of Latinas’ purposes within the Latina/o/x community,

Our task has always been to heal the personal and group *heridas* of body, mind, and spirit...I define healing as taking back the scattered energy and soul loss wrought by wounding. Healing means using the life force, and strength that comes with *el animo* to act positively on one’s own and on others’ behalf. (p. 89)

In the face of benevolent racism, limited resources, and *la lucha* to create home amidst non-Latina/o/xs who “other” them by questioning their culture, education, intelligence and personal identities—Latinas persevered. They persevered by cultivating, and they persevered to cultivate their ways of knowing. Latinas developed their agency within and beyond the Latina/o/x community through whatever ways were possible. By doing this, Latinas’ daily life practices were transformative and activist; they contributed to the sustenance of Latina ways of knowing and living and to the development and evolution of Latina/o/x culture and community.

Self-legitimization and power. The following is a summary of self-legitimization and empowerment, a common thread across the Latina community studies I examined. Within Latina

communities, women offered themselves and each other validation and developed their body, mind, and spirit strengths (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Mejia et al., 2013; Villenas, 2001, 2006). This is important because the studies revealed that Latinas had limited spaces in which they could engage in mutual acts of self-legitimization and empowerment outside of the Latina communities. The Latina community setting was especially powerful because it was a place where women could share their truths among women who shared common life experiences. The opportunities to do so created unity among Latina women and a renewed sense of validation and strength in what they experienced and how they interpreted, traversed, and gained wisdom/strength from those experiences (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Mejia et al., 2013; Villenas, 2001, 2006). Within their communities of Latinas, women legitimized their ways of living and knowing.

Latinas in Hope City combated racism and developed pedagogies of the home for the purposes of: 1) disrupting racist perceptions about themselves and their family, and 2) passing on culturally-based moral education to their children (Villenas, 2001). Additionally, Latina community in Hope City was a space where women discussed how they coped with intersectional race, sex, and gender-based oppressions. Latinas shared their perspectives and approaches for how to morally raise children. Latinas' childrearing creeds disrupted U.S. white notions about good mothering and legitimized Latina mothering practices. For example, women "claimed their family and community education of their home countries as superior" and made it their mission to engage in these educational practices within their homes in Hope City (Villenas, 2001, p. 15). Through home-country based mothering practices, Latinas protected their power to mother accordingly and enacted self-legitimization in the face of Hope City's benevolent racism, which depicted them as unfit mothers in need of white ways, resources, and pedagogies. Latinas in Hope City exchanged stories of pride and wisdom rooted in their own upbringing in order to legitimize and empower

themselves, their funds of knowledge, and their pedagogical practices (Villenas, 2001, 2006).

Latinas in North Portland engaged in a similar process of creating a counternarrative that reflected their lived experiences in their neighborhoods and schools (Mejia et al., 2013). Photovoice was a powerful method for Latina community researchers, because through it they grew to see the value of politicizing their *mujerista* identities in public and community settings. For example, the process of Photovoice incited Latinas to publicly start “questioning paradoxes and inconsistencies that society had of Latinos and society” (Mejia et al., 2013, p. 315). Additionally, by using Photovoice, Latinas were able to present their perspectives on health to the greater community health initiative members. Latina community researchers’ “photos were efforts to fashion knowledge often too raw to assimilate by those better positioned socially and economically” (Mejia et al., 2013, p. 316). By capturing their reality and presenting it to the greater community-based health initiative, Latina community researchers legitimized their ways of knowing and daily lived experiences. This is critical, because racially and economically privilege community members may have otherwise remained ignorant of Latinas’ politicized identities in the context of North Portland. This matters, because, by legitimizing their perspectives to the greater community, Latinas created their own agency and offered it to their Latina/o/x community as well.

Finally, *campinas* in Galvan’s studies (2001, 2006) felt that their SSG community was a safe place to *convivir* (“to live life among others, to learn and share”) *desahogarse* (undrown themselves, speak up, and breathe again) of the body, spirit, and mind ailments that overwhelmed them (2001, p. 616). The SSG provided Latinas a space where they could communicate about both the common challenges they shared and diverse/diverging experiences and perspectives they had. Importantly, the SSG enabled Latinas to create a community of women in which they were

“not alone in their feelings that they act as father and mother of the family, lack the support of another adult, and their children respond aggressively to the absence of male figures in the family” (Galvan, 2001, p. 617). Moreover, the spiritual connection between women was related to a sense of liberation from the feeling and reality that, for some women, “both family obligations and male domination hinder[ed] [their] personal and social development outside the home” (Galvan, 2001, p. 609). In Latina communities, women helped each other cope with the contradictions of their intersectional identities as mother, women, educators, workers, activists, oppressed persons, providers, historians, and creators in the larger Latina/o/x community, and in their individual lives.

Through daily communication, they gave one another mutual validation and the power to keep going in *la lucha*. Their mutual encouragement to keep *luchando* was especially evident as they persisted together to strengthen their Latina community in the face of the larger Latina/o/x community’s patriarchal judgments about their engagement outside of the home (in the SSG). Galvan (2001) articulated the courage and power that Latinas cultivated in their SSG communities of women:

As women come together they attempt to shatter a discourse socially enmeshed with the idea of governance, where to be singled out as a woman without ‘government’ (*mujeres sin gobierno*) requires great strength, self-assurance, and resiliency. An integral part of the SSGs, therefore, is the continual support of women’s personal development. (p. 618)

While the SSG was set up to bring Latina/o/xs together to work towards economic stability, it was the Latinas in the SSG who created community within that group. By creating a holistic bodymindspirit community, Latinas healed and validated themselves and one another. Latina communities were bastions of Latina everyday pedagogies, which are “found among ourselves in our churches, our reunions, and in our everyday learning and teachings with our family and

community members” (Galvan, 2001, p. 607). Engaging in Latina pedagogical practices within communities is powerful because it legitimizes and propagates our ways of knowing. Thinking and acting true to our Latina identities and ways of knowing combats attempts at our erasure.

Summary of Latina communities beyond academia. Latina communities outside of academia serve multiple purposes for Latinas and the Latina/o/x community in general. While generalizations about Latina communities may be erroneous due to the diverse circumstances, contexts, and ethnicities that make up these communities, research shows that Latina communities are spaces in which Latinas cultivate and grow spiritual knowledge in reciprocal ways that are critical to the quality of their lives. Latinas in community create a climate where the self-legitimization of our power and knowledge is embraced. Latinas’ activism in communities, whether via grassroots or external organizing, is a way through which Latinas affect larger Latina/o/x community evolution. Finally, Latinas in communities outside of academia engage in transformative and communal mothering practices that facilitate their own and subsequent generations’ well-being and quality of life.

2.6.2 Latina Communities Situated Within Academia

Upon reviewing the literature on Latina communities, I discovered that this work mostly takes place in the context of what Isasi-Díaz calls grassroots Latinas—“common folk,” those who are not involved in formal academic scholarship (Isasi-Díaz as cited in Isherwood, 2011, p. 8). I would argue that the concept of communities of women within academia has not been thoroughly examined due to the patriarchal nature of academia and consequently of academic research. This is the case because there is a distinct juxtaposition between the concepts of community and

scholarship—an independent endeavor in academia. The gap in the research and the split between scholarship and community is not surprising because “constructed western binary ways of thinking...[create] false splits keep[ing] us from ourselves, each other, and our visible and invisible world” (Lara, 2002, p. 436). To make visible a part of Latinas’ experiences in academia that remains largely invisible due to the split between scholarship and community, I illuminate the presence of communities of women among Latinas in academia. Through the light of *mujerismo*—an awakening to see the whole self—I attempt to discern the presence and functions of community for Latinas in academia. I identified scholarship by and about Latina communities within academia in three categories: 1) research written by Latinas in community (Espino et al., 2012; Espino et al., 2010; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Villaseñor et al., 2014), 2) research that examines the experiences of Latinas in academia in the context of a physical community setting (Ayala et al., 2006; Ek et al., 2010; Santos & Morey, 2013; Tijerina-Revilla, 2009, 2010), and 3) research written by Latinas that includes a discussion of community when analyzing Latinas’ experiences in academia (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006; Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012; Martinez-Roldan & Quiñonez, 2013; Segura 2003). I define research written by Latinas in community as three or more Latina scholars collaborating on research. My analysis of scholarship by and about Latina communities within academia is divided into three themes that emerged from these research articles and my analysis of them. Latina communities within academia: 1) legitimize Latina funds of knowledge, 2) cultivate Latinas’ multiple, intersecting identities, and 3) create *mujerista* mentorship. My analysis illustrates how these three themes, enacted by Latina communities within academia, consequently transform academia.

Before reviewing these three categories of Latina scholarship, I provide a brief summary of the environment that Latinas in academia experience. I do this to contextualize the scholarship

reviewed in this section, which focuses broadly on the intersectional oppressions that Latinas in academia overcome and their use of funds of knowledge as a resource. My review of the academic environment for Latinas clarifies why Latina scholarship in community focuses on specific problems and experiences.

To bypass a defeatist description of the academic environment for Latinas, the core of which would typically be on the consistent invalidations and the barriers to our success in academia, I acknowledge the current environment for Latinas in academia to begin and then focus my discussion of research on the how Latinas succeed in academia and how they use their communities of women and funds of knowledge to do so. Many of the research studies written by and/or about Latinas in academia illuminate the environment as one that Latinas overcome, rather than as one that promotes Latinas' identities and work, including scholarship (Cuádras, 2005; Espinoza, 2010; Gándara, 1982; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Perez Huber & Cueva, 2012). A plethora of research studies examined the disadvantages and barriers Latinas face in the environment of academia (e.g. Ortega-Liston & Rodriguez Soto, 2014; Ramirez, 2014; Reyes & Rios, 2005). In essence, this literature demonstrates that there are three overarching ways in which academia assaults Latinas: via racism, sexism, and the marginalization and invalidation of our pedagogies and epistemologies (Perez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Gonzalez, 2006, 2007; Rodriguez, 2010).

At the undergraduate and graduate levels, Latina students face and overcome these assaults in order to persist and earn degrees (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Gonzalez, 2006, 2007; Perez Huber & Cueva, 2012; Rodriguez, 2010). In order to survive and thrive in academia, Latina academics and practitioners must overcome racism, sexism, marginalization, and invalidation from people in their academic environment (Espino et al., 2012; Espino et al., 2010; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001).

Granted, Latinas advocate for themselves and find mentors and advocates who support their journeys, which consistently restores their belief in and value for their place in academia. This consistent flow of restorative energy is, critical because it replenishes us from the corporal, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual distress we experience in academia. Nonetheless, sexism, racism, and the marginalization and invalidation of our pedagogies and epistemologies exists and persists. This environment must change. It *is* changing as Latinas in communities power each other to do the work of change. We have both refuge in these communities and draw spiritual and corporal strength, and energy from these communities in order to create change in our spheres of influence and beyond, therefore sustaining our communities and ourselves.

Legitimizing Latina funds of knowledge. Espino et al. (2012) examined *testimonio* (testimony) as a valid and legitimate narrative production, research methodology, and method. *Testimonio* is a “conceptual and methodological tool that transforms personal narrative into this type of resistance” for marginalized people (Espino et al., 2012, p. 444). Latina funds of knowledge are validated as a legitimate epistemological standpoint from which to conduct scholarship. Delgado Bernal (1998) and later Calderon et al. (2012) also created scholarship to legitimize Latina funds of knowledge and epistemological standpoint as they, for the first time, reviewed Chicana feminist theory/epistemology in the context of the field of education and set guidelines for what the application of Chicana feminist theory/epistemology in educational research entails. This work is indispensable as it provides a framework that upholds the rigor of Chicana feminist research in education. I use Delgado Bernal’s and Calderon et al.’s scholarship to explain Chicana feminist theory in the theoretical framework section of this chapter. Although Delgado Bernal and Calderon et al.’s scholarship focuses on Chicana funds of knowledge and experiences specifically, their groundbreaking work is commonly adapted to examine the experiences and identities of Latinas

more broadly (Castillo-Montoya & Torres-Guzman, 2012; Martinez-Roldan & Quiñonez, 2013). The common thread of Espino et al., Delgado Bernal, and Calderon et al.'s scholarship is that these Latina scholars focus on legitimizing Latina funds of knowledge, epistemological standpoints, and methodology. Even beyond that, they articulate frameworks and guidelines for the application of Chicana and Latina feminist perspectives when conducting research. These theoretical works by Latina scholars share something in common with the higher-education-practitioner based on the work of Villaseñor et al. (2013) in which they offer a *mujerista* mentorship model. All of these scholarly texts not only critically examine the experiences, ways of knowing, and identities of Latinas in academia and how those affect our journeys—but they also offer tangible recommendation for how scholarship and practice should change in academia to legitimize and honor our truths and funds of knowledge. These studies demonstrate that Latina scholars theorize and apply theory. This, of course, aligns with being a self-identified Chicana feminista, Latina feminista, or *mujerista* scholar, because the theoretical and epistemological perspectives that support these scholarly identities, Chicana feminist theory and/or *mujerismo*, are intertwined and rooted in living theory (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Nygreen et al., 2016).

Segura (2003) relied on the *testimonios* of four Chicana self-identified faculty members to examine: 1) the structural and interpersonal barriers against Chicanas' intellectual and political agendas, and 2) how Chicanas transform “Eurocentric, male normative ordering of work, productivity, and merit” to empower themselves and their scholarship (p. 29). She articulated the meaning of Chicanas' (and arguably Latinas') political positions in academia when they engage in work based on their funds of knowledge and disrupt patriarchy. Segura's (2003) argued that:

Chicanas' otherness is a socially constructed synthesis of their social and intellectual distance from the Eurocentric masculinist professorial center of their departments and the

marginality of their disciplinary discourse from the intellectual centers of the established canon. Chicana otherness is intensified in those instances when they are engaged in building an alternative institutional apparatus within the university hierarchy (e.g., Chicana/o studies, ethnic studies, women's studies, or cultural studies).

Thus, Latinas academics engaged in scholarship and practice grounded in our funds of knowledge and cultural histories and present are in a constant state of intrapersonal and institutional/structural *lucha* to transform epistemologies in academia.

Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonio (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001), *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002) (originally published in 1981), *This Bridge We Call Home* (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002), and *Fleshing the Spirit: Spirituality and Activism in Chicana, Latina, and Indigenous Women's Lives* (Facio & Lara, 2014) are examples of Chicana feminism and *mujerismo* as living theory. *Telling to Live* is a compilation of original writings by 18 Latina scholars from diverse disciplines, interdisciplinary fields, and regional locations. They come from different ethnic groups and immigrant generations. Their purpose is to articulate their *testimonios*, because “*testimonios* offer the language of Latina intellectuals as an alternative site of knowledge” (author, year, p. x). This is a necessary step in the transformation of academia from a place that feeds on the fruits of our corporal, spiritual, and intellectual labor into a home of our own. *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002) and *This Bridge We Call Home* (Anzaldúa & Keating, 2002/1981) are first and second volumes of Women of Color's *testimonios* in essay and poetic form, not solely Latinas. Theorizing by Black, Indigenous, Muslim, and Asian women are included in the two volumes. In these books, Women Scholars of Color united to contribute from their diverse ethnic backgrounds and immigrant generation. They were affiliated with diverse disciplines, interdisciplinary fields, and regional locations. Thirty-three and then 74

contributors came together in the first and second volumes, respectively. Researchers in these two books theorize about Latina funds of knowledge and lived experiences via artwork and poetry. *Fleshing the Spirit* maintains a spiritual focus by containing essays that critically articulate and analyze: 1) spiritual pedagogies, 2) spiritual methodologies, 3) the *testimonios* of Latina women and scholars about their spiritualities as the core of their epistemological standpoints, and 4) their *testimonios* about how their spiritualities grew and transformed inside of them over years, thus transforming them as whole beings—bodymindspirit. The essays are groundbreaking and transformative, because academic scholarship about Latinas' spiritual pedagogies and epistemologies in general, written by Latinas is very limited, and because legitimizing Latina spiritual epistemologies disrupts patriarchal notions of knowledge in academia. The essays by Figueroa (2014), Elenes (2014), and Sendejo (2014) in *Fleshing the Spirit* contribute to Latina spiritual pedagogies and epistemologies, which is what Delgado Bernal (1998) and Calderon et al. (2012) contributed to Chicana feminist epistemology through their scholarship.

The books share common qualities. First, they are all based on Latinas' first person *testimonios* of lived experience from their Latina funds of knowledge. Second, *testimonios* in all four books are rooted in and explicitly articulate and analyze corporal, intellectual, and spiritual experiences and ways of knowing. Third, this scholarship extends beyond and disrupts patriarchal standards of scholarship in academia that socialize us to accept that logical, rational, empirical knowledge is the richest, most rigorous, and consequently most valuable (Brown & Strega, 2005).

The Latina Feminist Group (2001) articulated the political purpose of their collective as:

the flesh and blood theory many of the narratives deploy marks the Latina feminist subject in process as a new type of intellectual whose knowledge of the political economy of cultural constructions serves to decenter what counts as theory and who can engage in

theorizing. (p. x)

In these books, Latina scholars come together through their *testimonios* and/or scholarship to create books that legitimize our funds of knowledge and all of our identities—scholars, mothers, political activists, *curanderas* (healers), *espiritistas* (spiritual healers), mothers, sisters, mujeres, and Latinas in the world. The community of women, knowledge, and written scholarship that these Latinas constructed into words is powerful. It is powerful, because, although these communities of Latina scholars and writers may have been at their most tangible and connected form during the creation of the books, the published pages keep the scholars alive in community forever. Even more, the works of Latinas in community provide a community of knowledge for Latinas who come after them, like me. As the Latina Feminist Group (2001) explained:

the nature of a collective...such as ours involves much more than compiling and editing individual writings...When we think of the work we have accomplished, we envision not only the product, but the human connection among us, the *cariño*, *respeto*, and commitment to each other. (p. xi)

Through the process of producing liberationist and self-legitimizing scholarship together, Latinas create bodymindspirit community. Latina scholars focus their research on topics relevant to their experiences, the experience of the Latina/o/x community, and/or our funds of knowledge. While the academic environment is often invalidating and hostile, our home becomes our scholarship—both individual and in community—and through our scholarship we change academia—both individually and in community with one another. Latina scholars' homes in academia are the spaces in which we can exist and write scholarship from our bodymindspirit spaces.

Cultivating Latinas' multiple intersecting identities. Espino, Muñoz, and Kiyama (2010), three Latina scholars, examined their experiences transitioning from doctoral students to

faculty members in academia. They relied on *testimonios* (testimonies) and *platicas* (dialogue/talks) to interrogate how their multiple intersecting identities (mother, social class, race, and scholar) affected their scholarship, educational, and career pathways. *Platicas* are “a collaborative process comprised of sharing stories, building community, and acknowledging multiple realities and vulnerabilities in an effort to enforce strong bonds among the members of that social network” (Espino et al., 2010, p. 805). By doing research together, Espino et al created a “sisterhood pedagogy that involves support, encouragement, and friendship as tools for resistance and agency in academia, which often relies on ‘notions of individualism and male supremacist ideas in spaces of learning’” (2010, p. 805). Since the purpose of *testimonios* and *platicas* is to be able to tell and document a marginalized individual’s or group’s reality, Espino et al.’s work showcases their funds of knowledge as they reflect about their doctoral study, their transitions to academia, and how their intersecting identities guide their political positions within academia and the work they produce. Espino et al. came into community to disrupt the racist and patriarchal nature of academia. Consequently, they contributed to changing the academic landscape, examined and cultivated Latinas’ multiple intersecting identities, and this legitimized the knowledge and scholarship born out of our epistemological standpoints.

Tijerina-Revilla’s (2009, 2010) two articles were based on a participatory action research and ethnographic study, which she conducted with Raza Womyn, a student organization at the University of California, Los Angeles. She used Chicana feminist theory and epistemology, critical race theory, and Chingón politics to guide the research process and data analysis. The purpose of the first study (2009) was to understand how Raza Womyn conceptualize “*muxerista*” and how they worked to rectify the patriarchy and heterosexism perpetuated by social movements and organizations. Tijerina-Revilla used the word “*muxerista*,” rather than “*mujerista*” as I do in my

study, because Raza Womyn labeled themselves that way, such that the “‘x’ ‘replaces the ‘j’ to signify a connection to indigenous ancestry and anti-colonial struggle, as well as the multiplicity/intersectionality of the women’s identities” (Tijerina-Revilla, 2010, p. 56). The purpose of the second study (2010) was to: 1) identify ways in which student activism fosters marginalized students’ critical consciousness, survival in higher education, and commitment to social change on and off campus, and 2) confront the sexism that plagues Latina/Chicana women doing social justice work in student organizations. The community of Latinas in Tijerina-Revilla’s ethnography consisted of a total of 101 Raza Womyn who participated virtually (via Raza Womyn listserv) and physically. Raza Womyn self-identified as Chicana, Latina, and Central American, and self-identified their sexuality in fluid ways.

Raza Womyn cultivated Latinas’ multiple intersecting identities in various ways. Firstly, Raza Womyn was a safe community in which Latinas did not have to prove how Latina, queer, revolutionary, *mujer*, or critically conscious they were. Latinas preferred Raza Womyn because it was not driven by “chingón politics”, which enforce pressure to prove Latina identity (Tijerina-Revilla, 2010, p. 42). Participants felt more comfortable in Raza Womyn, because the leaders of this organization conceptualized women’s intersecting identities as fluid and ever-evolving (Tijerina-Revilla, 2009; 2010). This frame of thought aligned better with their own identities, whereas the emphasis on proving their identities in other ethnic organizations conflicted with how they viewed themselves. The second function is related to the first. Latinas felt that, through their community in Raza Womyn, they recreated what revolution means. One student articulated this in detail saying that she and other Latinas created “our own movement toward ourselves and towards social justice, we are reconstructing revolution” (Tijerina-Revilla, 2010, p. 58). Raza Womyn was about changing what revolution looked like and meant in the larger Latina/o/x community based

on their authentic multiple and intersecting identities as Latinas. Thirdly, Raza Womyn provided multiple forms of support, which was critical because Latinas had multiple intersecting identities and life missions. For example, various participants described that Raza Womyn was a “feminist, intimate, ‘safe space’ (counterspace/countersite) where they could practice a multidimensional activist struggle, while also feeling safe to be their most authentic self” (Tijerina-Revilla, 2010, p. 52). Latinas were able to develop their activist struggle while simultaneously embracing and developing all the parts of their identities; they did not have to pick only identities that aligned with their activist projects in the eyes of others. They were able to do what was right for them. Fourthly, participants expressed that, because women in Raza Womyn practiced love, caring, and inclusivity among each other, the space was a true community. It was a multidimensional and authentic collective with a shared “vision of sisterhood, *familia*, *amor*, friendship, and loyalty” where they felt accepted and supported (Tijerina-Revilla, 2010, p. 53).

Ayala, Herrera, Jimenez, and Lara (2006) came together to collaborate with the National Latina Health Organization’s (NLHO) Intergenerational Latina Health Leadership Project (ILHLP). Ayala et al. joined the project to holistically engage their practitioner, scholar, and activist identities and advance the causes of their Latina community. First, by designing and teaching the course, “Redefining Latina Health: Body, Mind, and Spirit,” Ayala et al. created synergy between their intersecting identities as scholars in academia and Latina community activists. Second, by discussing health in terms of body, mind, and spirit, co-instructors’ pedagogical approach honored Latinas’ multiple intersecting identities. Lastly, instructors honored their own multiple intersecting identities by being transparent and intentional about the fact that the issues discussed in class were “intrinsically related” to the instructors’ lived experiences and identities as Latinas (Ayala et al., 2006, p. 267). Their pedagogical initiative was transformative

because it was taught by and for Latina students, contrasting with the norm of white instructors teaching about racially marginalized people. This structure crossed the borders of who has knowledge, expertise, and who can teach. Moreover, the course focused on Latina community health but was taught within a community of Latinas inside of academia. This structure and composition brought Latina ways of knowing and intersecting identities (body, mind, and spirit) into the classroom and prepared Latinas to foster their own holistic health and those of other Latinas beyond academia. Latina community and identities involve a commitment to holistic self-care and healing and holistic community care and healing.

Burciaga and Tavaréz (2006) recounted how they created sisterhood while in their master's program at an Ivy League institution. Their collaborative social justice project, an independent study in the form of an anthology documenting the experiences of racially marginalized students, developed and cultivated the sisterhood they continue to share. Burciaga and Tavaréz explained that their sisterhood developed via their "struggle to find common ground while embracing our differences...and tearing down assumptions about class and the perceived similarities of our Latina/o communities" (2006, p. 136-137). Burciaga is a second-generation Chicana of college-educated, activist parents, and Tavaréz is a first-generation Dominican of high school and grade school-educated, factory-working, and entrepreneurial parents. They demystified their differences to become "sisterallies, *colegas*, and stronger academics" (Burciaga & Tavaréz, 2006, p. 136). This meant that they re-educated themselves about what their Latina identities meant and reinterpret their background differences and similarities. Their experiences illustrated the salience of ethnicity and culture in Latina identities. This is a relevant consideration as I examine Latinas' experiences within communities of women.

Creating *mujerista* mentorship. *Mujerista* mentoring legitimizes Latina funds of

knowledge and cultivates Latinas' multiple, intersecting identities. Villaseñor et al. (2013) sought to reshape normative mentoring practices in higher education by proposing a *mujerista* mentoring model. Chicana feminist theory and epistemology, and their own experiences as Latinas in academia (as Latina researchers, mentor, mentees, and college students), guided their model's design. Additionally, the researchers drew from their positionalities—one assistant professor, one graduate student, and one undergraduate student—to create the model. Their standpoint and methods, along with their critique of inadequate traditional mentoring practices in academia, disrupted mentoring literature that ignores the relevance of intersecting identities. To combat the barriers that academia presents for Latinas, the researchers “argue for a model of *mujerista* mentoring, building on the work of Chicana/Latina feminist scholars especially in the field of education, and in particular, employing Anzaldúa's notion of *mestiza consciousness*” and “use the terms ‘*mujerista*’ and ‘*mujerismo*’ in order to co-center the racial, ethnic, cultural, and gendered aspects of Chicana/Latina feminism” (Villaseñor et al., 2013, p. 50).

To argue the need for *mujerista* mentoring, Villaseñor et al.'s (2013) based their model on Latinas' racial and cultural identities. Their *mujerista* mentoring model is strengths-based and culturally-centered; it guides mentors on how to build relationships with Latina college students in culturally and gender-relevant ways. Villaseñor et al. disrupted college student mentoring models and ideologies that rely on reforming minoritized students to better fit academia's white, patriarchal standards. The *mujerista* mentoring model represents one way in which Latina feminist epistemology can manifest itself tangibly in, and transform, academia.

While Villaseñor et al. (2013) theorized a *mujerista* mentoring model, Ek et al. (2010), Martinez-Roldán and Quiñonez (2016), and Tijerina-Revilla (2010) examined *mujerista* mentoring in practice. *Mujerista* mentoring has also been explored by Ek et al. (2010). At the student level,

Latinas in Raza Womyn offered and received mentorship at multiple levels. Mentorship encompassed advice about classes, professors, and sometimes “connecting with women from similar cultural backgrounds alone was enough to help the members of Raza Womyn feel that they had a place of the university; more importantly the process of growth and consciousness-raising that took place...was a source of strength” (Tijerina-Revilla, 2010, p. 57). Some Latinas described Raza Womyn as the space of critical support and Latina *mujerista* mentorship that influenced their persistence in university (e.g. Gloria, 1997).

Similarly, Ek et al.’s (2010) *mujerista* mentoring group contributed to their professional success and persistence in academia. Ek et al. used Tijerina-Revilla’s (2004) work to define “*mujerista* mentoring” as mentorship that embraces Latinas’ intersecting identities of race, gender, and class. As four Latina faculty members, Ek, Quijada Cerecer, Alanis, and Rodriguez engaged in the process of co-operative inquiry and dialogic epistemology to create counternarratives about the conflicts Latinas’ experience between their commitments to social justice and their tenure track trajectories. They came together in the form of an interdisciplinary research group called Research for the Educational Advancement of Latin@s (REAL) Collaborative at a Hispanic Serving Institution in Texas. Ek et al. examined how REAL became an “agency for transformative resistance within the academy” (2010, p. 539-540). The researchers had weekly meetings for six months in which they discussed “issues of tenure, challenges encountered in academia, and supportive mechanisms that helped to overcome those challenges” (Ek et al., 2010, p. 542). Developing their scholarship was part of *mujerista* mentoring as they supported each other’s journeys through the tenure process by coming together to explore research interests, identify common aspects between their research agendas, and help each other move their individual and collaborative scholarship towards publication. REAL was a space for *mujerista* mentoring as the

researchers offered each other advice, safe space, and support. Ek et al. created a community that fostered their belonging in academia and championed their continuous production of transformative and white-patriarchy-resistant research.

In examining their mentor-mentee relationship, Martinez-Roldán and Quiñonez (2016) found similar results to Ek et al. (2010). Martinez-Roldán and Quiñonez formed their mentor-mentee relationships via a Puerto Rican women scholar's group that convened at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting. They found that creating solidarity between Latinas in academia sustains our "existing and thriving in the academy" (Martinez-Roldán & Quiñonez, 2016, p. 162). Their experience is evidence that Latina solidarity cultivated through communities and relationships, specifically via what I analyze to be *mujerista* mentoring in the case of Martinez-Roldán and Quiñonez, can be part of a sustainable model for transformation of and Latinas thriving in academia.

REAL fostered the scholars' transformative resistance, because the community they formed validated the importance of and encouraged one another's social justice projects (Ek et al., 2010). The validation and encouragement they exchanged in community buffered the taxing effects of leading race and gender based social justice initiatives and change alone in the academy. The researchers' mutual engagement in *mujerista* mentoring involved: increasing their Latina cultural capital within an academic world that devalued it, collaborating on research and teaching, and providing each other with emotional support (Ek et al., 2010). *Mujerista* mentoring was a multidimensional, trustful relationship that supported Latina researchers and students through daily microaggressions, sexism, and invalidations (Ek et al., 2010; Martinez-Roldán & Quiñonez, 2016; Tijerina-Revilla, 2010). Raza Womyn, REAL, and Martinez-Roldán and Quiñonez's mentor-mentee relationship were similar spaces that provided similar functions. Latinas played

multiple roles to fostering one another's growth in academia—from providing consistent emotional refuge, publication process support, and support for their identities as Latinas within academia (Ek et al., 2010; Martinez-Roldán & Quiñonez, 2016; Tijerina-Revilla, 2010). Latinas provided each other with the support community needed to persist in their academic and professional journeys while embracing and cultivating the multiple, intersecting aspects of their identities. Latinas in academia who come together in communities of mutual support become many things for one other—friend, advisor, mentor, sister, colleague, collaborator, and even partners who prepare each other to face the many isms of patriarchal, white academy.

Summary of Latina communities within academia. Latina communities within academia serve multiple purposes. The studies I have reviewed, however, show that Latinas in community within academia take action towards the legitimization of their funds of knowledge by writing and publishing work about Latina ways of knowing and centralizing their own epistemological standpoints and those of other Latinas. Communities within academia are a space where Latinas can cultivate, embrace, and grow their own multiple, intersecting identities. Latinas in community have more support to resist assimilation into patriarchal standards of knowledge production and ways of being; in community they summon the power to be their authentic selves (The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Tijerina-Revilla, 2010). In community, Latina academics have reciprocal support to engage in work that is relevant to their intersecting identities. Mutual championship between Latinas in community validates their epistemological standpoints and encourages them to produce work that is rooted in their bodymindspirit experiences. Latina communities also support Latina academics' critical practice and activist initiatives. This function of Latina communities in academia is important, because such support is insufficient in most academic spaces. Latinas' mutual support and validation for the production of critical research and

critical practice is one characteristic of *mujerista* mentorship. Latina communities within academia enact *mujerista* mentorship by supporting each other's ways of knowing and multiple, intersecting identities along with the work and activism derived from those standpoints.

2.7 Chapter Summary

Mujerismo and Chicana feminism have an important distinction. Chicana feminism connotes the Chicana feminist movement and is rooted in the Chicana feminist movement. On the other hand, *mujerismo* is broader term connoting a Latina-oriented way of thinking and interpreting the world. *Mujerismo* is not specific to Mexican or Chicana cultural identities. Rather it is inclusive of the broader Latina identified population. Both theories however are living theories, referencing the epistemologies of Latinas and/or Chicanas. As such, I used theoretical concepts from both theories to frame my study.

Funds of knowledge is a central concept to both Chicana feminism and *mujerismo*. Latina funds of knowledge encompass the intellectual, corporal, emotional, and spiritual resources that Latinas embody and invoke to interpret the world. *Bodymindspirit* can be considered a fund of knowledge as it refers to a state of being in which body, mind, and spirit are united and greater than the some of their parts. *Bodymindspirit* being means being authentic and your body mind spirit self across social (personal and professional) contexts.

Research on communities of women among Latinas is extremely limited. Furthermore, research that investigates the relationships between and among Latinas or Women of Color either within or beyond academia does not use the term "communities of women." Existing studies do

not attempt to theorize about the relationships between Latinas or Women of Color in academic. Much less does existing literature attempt to conceptualize or define what communities of women mean or are for Latinas in academia. As such, my study informed this gap in the literature by illuminating and defining what communities of women look like for Latinas in academia from a feminista/mujerista perspective, grounded in bodymindspirit ways of knowing. In chapter three I explain how combining mujerista and Chicana feminist epistemologies with narrative inquiry methodology inform my practice as a researcher and guide my methods for data collection.

3.0 Chapter 3: Methodology

I designed this study from the perspective that Latina identity and Latina culture make the journey in academia possible and empowering. The purpose of this research study was to examine Latinas in academia's communities of women—the communities of women that they are part of and in which they cultivate knowledge, support, growth and empowerment—and how being part of a community of women influences the journeys of Latinas in academia. This research study hinged on three concepts: communities of women, bodymindspirit, and funds of knowledge. With this research study, I examined how being part of a community of women transforms the journeys of Latinas in academia. To examine this topic, I focused on the following research questions:

1. How do Latinas in academia make meaning of their communities of women?
2. What funds of knowledge are cultivated in Latinas' communities of women?
3. How is bodymindspirit cultivated in Latinas' communities of women?

In this chapter, I review the epistemological standpoints and methodology that guided this research study. I examine my positionality as a Latina and scholar. Lastly, I review the research design including the sampling criteria, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques.

3.1 Epistemological Assumptions

Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2013) argued, “Researchers must simultaneously consider their view about how knowledge is generated and the nature of reality” (p. 11). My epistemological

standpoint is a fusion of *mujerista* and Chicana feminist epistemologies. The study topic and research questions are shaped by these epistemologies. I examine these epistemological standpoints in relation to my personal beliefs about how reality is shaped. In this section, I provide an overview of *mujerista* and Chicana feminist epistemologies.

Mujerista and Chicana feminist epistemologies are complementary in multiple ways. Chicana feminism is grounded in the racial and ethnic politics of Latinas; similarly, *mujerismo* acknowledges the influences of ethnic and cultural politics (Anzaldúa, 2007; Isasi-Díaz, 1996). I drew from Chicana feminism and *mujerismo* as they provide critical guides to my research design, data collection, and data analysis processes. Chicana feminist scholarship has established theoretical concepts central to theorizing and understanding Latina epistemologies (Anzaldúa, 2002; 2007; Calderon et al., 2012; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006). Thus, Chicana feminism provided a critical lens and theoretical concepts to guide the study and data analysis. However, *mujerismo* is where the passion and spirit of the project lies; it is the perspective from which I approached the work, because it best aligns with my personal epistemology and lived experiences. I sought to understand Latinas' stories from a *mujerista* lens because I believe their narratives are their own. I do agree that Latinas' experiences are influenced by politics, race, ethnicity, and context as Chicana feminism and *mujerismo* argue (Calderon et al., 2012; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Simultaneously, I also understand Latinas' narratives and lived experiences to be more than a sum of these external conditions. A Latina's experiences and narratives are reflected upon and shared through her personal psyche and all its power, which goes beyond social contexts and influences (Isasi-Díaz, 1993). This perspective is *mujerismo*.

3.1.1 Mujerista Epistemology

Mujerista epistemology is *mujer* (woman) centered knowing. Mujerista epistemology stems from Isasi-Díaz's (1993) research as she theorized mujerista theology based on her work with "grassroots Latinas," defined as "common folk—grassroots people—at the parish level" (Isasi-Díaz in an interview with Isherwood, 2011, p. 8). From a theological perspective, Isasi-Díaz argues that mujerista epistemology, which is rooted in the everyday lived experiences of Latina women, must be the foundation of a new theological perspective for three reasons, all of which are related to transforming theology and validating Latinas' ways of knowing. Mujerista epistemology can best be understood by examining Isasi-Díaz's three central reasons for researching, documenting, and theorizing mujerista theology—an understanding of religion and spirituality based on Latinas' ways of knowing. Firstly, theology must be redefined based on mujerista epistemology, because it is the only way of "giving significance to and valuing our [Latina] experience...to comprehend better how religious understandings and practices impact our lives...we [Latinas] need to start from what we know—ourselves, our everyday surroundings and experiences" (Isasi-Díaz, 1993, p. 73). Secondly, creating mujerista theology based on Latinas' epistemological standpoints disrupts "traditional theology which is controlled by the dominant group" thereby creating a space for Latinas to be "self-defining, to give fresh answers, and, what is most important, to ask new questions" about religion and spirituality (Isasi-Díaz, 1993, p. 73). Thirdly, because mujerista theology is born from mujerista epistemology, it "concerns our [Latina] struggles and our sanity" (Isasi-Díaz, 1993, p. 74). Mujerista theology is critical for Latinas' sanity because of Latinas' disconnection with Jesus and the erasure of our spirituality "by the dominant culture, class, race, and gender" (Isasi-Díaz, 1993, p. 73). In response, Isasi-Díaz redefined

spirituality with Latinas by examining their everyday lived experiences and ways of knowing. Mujerista epistemology “validate[s] [Latinas’] world, our reality, our values” (Isasi-Díaz, 1993, p. 75).

Unlike Chicana feminism, *mujerismo* is not tied to a political movement or politics. Mujerista epistemology is “articulated on the church steps, the university cafeteria, and in the intimate spaces where *mujer-to-mujer* conversations are whispered” (Villenas et al., 2006, p. 3). Mujerista epistemology places knowing in the individual *mujer*—what she has lived through, learned, and taught in everyday life. Describing how Latinas understand themselves (Latina epistemology), Isasi-Díaz (1993) asserted that “Latinas are aware that their lives happen within a certain context, a given social reality constituted by a historical-political situation, economics, religious-cultural background, and personal decisions,” while they simultaneously “understand it [themselves] within the much broader scope of what constitutes the fiber of their moral being” (p. 125). While social contexts and constructed social identities influence Latinas’ ways of knowing, *mujerismo* underscores that Latinas’ epistemological standpoint encases something beyond social factors’ influences on their interpretations of life. Latinas’ interpretations about life are also based on their essence as Latina *mujeres*.

Due to her discipline of theology and research agenda, Isasi-Díaz (1993) described this essence as “moral being” (p. 125). I believe the essence may be described and understood in many ways, the most authentic way being the manner in which the individual Latina identifies her own essence and how that guides her understanding of the world. Nygreen et al. (2016) asserted, “mujerista epistemology recognizes how knowledge is produced in, and accessed through, bodies, emotions, spiritualities, relationships with others, and relationships with self” (p. 44). The amalgamation of Latinas’ multiple identities into the core of their beings comes from all parts of

them and all sources of their epistemological perspectives. In this research study, the purpose of the first interview, a life history, was to better understand the individual Latinas' essence or core as a *mujer*. *Mujerista* epistemology is critical in grounding the interpretation and analysis of bodymindspirit in this study.

3.1.2 Chicana Feminist Epistemology

According to Chicana activists' writings at the time of the Chicano movement, Chicanas' unmet needs and agendas included: opportunities for education, opportunities and fair conditions for employment, community managed childcare, health education, access to healthcare, the ability to hold political office within the movement without discrimination, and representation in every platform or committee of the movement (Anonymous, 1971). Since then, Chicana feminism has been used both as epistemology and/or a theoretical lens in educational research. As an epistemology in higher education research, Chicana feminism has been employed to capture the knowledge and experiences of Latinas through the entire research process (Calderon, Delgado Bernal, Perez Huber, Malagon, & Velez, 2012; Delgado Bernal, 1998; Perez Huber & Cueva, 2012).

Although there are others, three central concepts in Chicana feminist theory are: 1) *mestiza* identity, 2) new *mestiza* consciousness, and 3) borderlands. Anzaldúa (2007) defined *mestiza* identity as an identity that is the “product of the transfer of the cultural and spiritual values of one group to another” due to colonization (p. 100). Next, a level of consciousness develops in the person carrying *mestiza* identity. Anzaldúa (2007) explained, “from the racial, ideological, cultural, and biological crosspollination, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the making—a

new *mestiza* consciousness, una conciencia de mujer [a woman's consciousness]. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands" (p. 99). Borderlands are defined as geographical, political, cultural, racial, religious, and sexual borderlands of identity, living, and knowing (Anzaldúa, 2007). New *mestiza* consciousness means acknowledging the "crosspollination" and living with all parts of our (*mestiza*) identities such that "nothing is thrust out, the good the bad and the ugly, nothing rejected, nothing abandoned" (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 101). According to Anzaldúa (2007), "the work of mestiza consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality...to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended" (p. 102).

Embracing all parts of our identities is not only conceptually significant in defining Chicana feminist theory, but it also guides Chicana feminist epistemology and its application in research. In 1998, Delgado Bernal published the first research text outlining the application of Chicana feminist frameworks in educational research. Over a decade later, in 2012, Calderon et al. (2012) re-examined and extended theory about Chicana feminist epistemological frameworks into educational research. To do so, Calderon et al. examined studies published after Delgado Bernal's first article that used Chicana feminist epistemological frameworks. Calderon et al. asserted that work grounded in Chicana feminist epistemology must: 1) "be concerned with knowledge about Chicanas, about who generates an understanding of their experiences, and whether those experiences are legitimized or not" (2012, p. 560), 2) embrace dualities and multiple dimensions of identity, but challenge dichotomies that perpetuate oppression, 3) deconstruct racism, classism, nativism, sexism, and patriarchy, and recognize the roles these play in Chicanas' histories and lives, 4) center and be grounded in Chicana/Latina women's ways of knowing, and 5) employ cultural intuition to guide the research process. Cultural intuition is the process by which the researcher uses: (a) personal experiences and collective community experiences and memories,

(b) professional experiences, (c) existing literature, and (d) the analytic research process to shape her epistemological views and conceptualize her own positionality in the research process (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

3.2 Researcher Positionality

In Chicana feminist epistemology, the researcher inserts herself into the research holistically by using her cultural intuition (Anzaldúa, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 1998). Cultural intuition encompasses: 1) personal experiences and collective community experiences and memories, 2) professional experiences, 3) existing literature, and 4) the analytic research process. My cultural intuition shapes my epistemological and methodological views and influences who I am as a Cuban, second-generation immigrant, first-generation college student, Latina feminist researcher (Delgado Bernal, 1998). I think of myself as one with the participants. Not that we are all the same and that our experiences are generalizable to each other as Latina women, but there is a thread of bodymindspirit substance that connects us. Since participants in this research study are Latina women in academia like myself, I consider myself to be an indigenous insider—someone whom “people within the community [view] as a legitimate community member” (Banks, 2010, p. 46). As a Latina and doctoral student, I anticipated that my identity would help me to access, be open to, understand, and relate to participants’ stories and experiences (Banks, 2010). Conversely, I also acknowledge that participants’ stories and experiences may diverge from my own and from my beliefs as a woman and a scholar. I intentionally acknowledge this, because my experiences with my community of women have been extremely powerful and influential in my holistic

development.

My primary research objective in this study was to think, write, and be *mujerista*. This required consistent and continuous reteaching, rethinking, and reframing, because I live in both social and academic worlds that reinforce white, patriarchal ways of thinking and being—through continuous messages in everyday life and elitist scholarship standards. Embodying and acting on *mujerismo* means that I must continuously decolonize my own bodymindspirit—until non-normative and decolonized thinking and action become natural (Anzaldúa, 2002; Lara, 2002). Through this *lucha*, though, I became more immersed in the light of my own (Latina) ways of thinking and being, which is indispensable to becoming bodymindspirit illuminated and better at doing research that is critical and captures Latinas' authentic stories. Telling our authentic stories in our own ways is powerful because they are not told enough, and telling our truths is activist and revolutionary. Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1995), a psychologist and theorist, argued:

However, and truly, there has been little to describe the psychological lives and ways of gifted women, talented women, creative women. There is...much more writ about the weakness and foibles of humans in general and women in particular. But...we must be more interested in the thoughts, feelings, and endeavors which strengthen women, and adequately count the interior and cultural factors which weaken women. (p. 9)

This is my intention as a researcher in this study and all future research—to underscore the powerful epistemological standpoints of Latinas in light of white, patriarchal social oppressions. The purpose of this research approach is to change the destructive structure and cultivate a *mujerista* world.

3.2.1 My Spirituality

I was born a spiritual person because I come from a lengthy and strong ancestry of spiritual people from both my maternal and paternal ancestries, but with particular power on my paternal side. My spiritual ancestry is African, Taino, Yoruba; it remains alive in me and my immediate family's religious and spiritual identity/ies. My spiritual ancestry and beliefs guide my standpoint on the theoretical concept of bodymindspirit. Bodymindspirit is where I am rooted, my most salient identity, and therefore the place where from I conceptualize, conduct, and analyze. Bodymindspirit is not the purpose of the study but something more. It is the genesis, the heart, the spirit of it all. Bodymindspirit embodies where my heart is on this journey, how my heart feels, and how it thinks. Bodymindspirit is my positionality, as I am invested in bodymindspirit in getting to know the authentic experiences of Latinas and translating those as authentically as possible into substance of research findings. For me, bodymindspirit is the most peaceful and lucid form of earthly existence. Bodymindspirit is a state of being; it means understanding the power that comes from synchronizing my body, my mind, my spirit. Although bodymindspirit is a life journey, not a fixed state, the understanding of bodymindspirit is an optimal state of living and being. It is in itself liberating and extraordinary.

My spirituality is based on the understanding that the most meaningful and powerful journey of life is one on which I embark for the purpose of uniting nature with myself—synchronizing myself with nature, because nature is pure, powerful, and pervading (all-knowing and willing). This means I must attempt to synchronize myself in the process—to be in tune with my bodymindspirit state. However, synchronization is a journey. As my PhD journey approached and explored this moment—the production of the dissertation study—I simultaneously

contemplated and grew my spiritual identity through meditation, reflection, and action. My spiritual journey, which in some ways grew parallel (through time and space) to the second half of my PhD journey, led me through a physical and spiritual search for a deeper understanding of the ancestral spiritual powers from and in which I was born, raised, and live now and always. I am grateful for the path; the path shows me the answers.

3.2.2 My Community of Women

The most accurate way in which I can depict my community of women is as a blooming orchid flower whose roots, stem, and petals are in evolving bloom. The roots, stem, and petals are always evolving and changing, yet also always constant. The flower grows, but some of its components stay the same. Some of the flowers die and fall off—and then the stem bears new buds. The root and the stem remain. The orchid flower is always alive; even when flowers fall, the roots and stem are alive and strong, if nourished consistently. The beauty of it all is that the orchid flower represents life—its flowers bloom and die, new buds come in, the roots and stem stay constant and alive.

A part of my community of women is in evolution. A part of the community changes based on space and time. I meet new women who inspire me and support me and for whom I provide inspiration and support. However, the roots and stem remain. My roots and stem are my mother and sisters; it has always been this way. We are each other's lifeline. We practice reciprocal love, acceptance, truth, and honesty. Although our reciprocal relationships can be tumultuous and hectic at times, the chaos is necessary for our evolution, power, and independence. The path put us together and this is the way. There is an extraordinary liberation and power in living and

understanding our mutual bodymindspirit connections. In fact, through living and reflecting about our bodymindspirit connections, I can understand bodymindspirit in the flesh—I can understand it deeply—because, as a community, we physically embody some of the processes (journey) of individual bodymindspirit, which is internal and intangible. The roots and stem part of my community of women (orchid flower) are quite intangible, because the essence of it is a bodymindspirit connection, rather than a physical one. My mother and sister advance my spiritual and bodymindspirit growth through love and truth. My funds of knowledge blossom through interactions of love and truth with them.

The following is a description of the more tangible interactions my mother, sisters and I cultivate together. My mother has been the most influential woman—offering emotional support and challenging my goals and my ways of thinking since childhood. She has been an exemplar of strength and the value of making sacrifices and taking risks to achieve successes in all aspects of life. Next, I am the eldest of four sisters; our sister bonds have provided me unconditional solace throughout life—fostering my courage to take risks in and out of the academic setting. I have parented them and have been parented by them. My trajectory through undergraduate and graduate school as the first in our family to attend university has influenced their own educational journeys. We simultaneously exchange social capital while cultivating our cultural capital and using both as resources to navigate our educational and life journeys.

While my mother and sisters are the roots and stem of my community of women and the strongest feature of our bond is manifested in the reciprocal advancement of our bodymindspirit beings, the flowers part of my community of women (flower orchid) is much more tangible. The flowers are women who are my extended family members, academic and professional mentors, and intimate friends. These women advance my wisdom and growth through support and

challenge. These women have had both subtle and significant influences on my path as a woman and scholar. This is not to say that my bodymindspirit growth does not occur with these women, but this part of the community of women is not the primary source of my bodymindspirit growth. Rather, their influences on my bodymindspirit growth are indirect and sometimes delayed. Often, through lessons I learn from and with them over time, I eventually achieve continued bodymindspirit growth. This is a reflective process for me that occurs after certain interactions together; sometimes days pass and sometimes years pass, because lessons connect and make me reflect on the past. Lessons I did not learn then from my interactions with other friends and mentors, I may learn now or in the future through interactions with current friends and mentors, which lead me to reflect on the past. This is the process through which my funds of knowledge are built with women who are part of my community of women but not at the core of my community. The influence of the women who make up this part of my community of women mostly manifests in tangible ways through stories, advice, and physical journeys. The following is a representative description of this part of my community of women.

Within the postsecondary education setting, all of my mentors have been women. I worked in the research laboratories of female psychologists for two years as a college student. Even in those early stages in my postsecondary education, I learned and observed from them what socialization into academia looked like for women. During my master's program, I developed close relationships with both the director of my program and my practicum supervisor, an assistant dean of students. Both of these Women of Color fortified my sense of belonging in the field of higher education. They were successful professionals, and they cared about and encouraged my own professional and personal development. Beyond that, we bonded over our ethnically minoritized identities and our intellect and power as women. We trusted each other. They cared

about my holistic development, my family, and my personal and professional aspiration. They believe in me and we continue to cultivate our relationships.

For four years, the last half of my undergraduate career and through my master's degree program, I worked as an undergraduate work-study and then as a graduate student intern in the Office of the President at my institution. This experience was unique in that the university president and staff members were all women, and six of the seven were Women of Color. For four years I spent 20 to 30 hours per week surrounded by powerful women whom I related to and was holistically inspired by. They were professionally positioned at the highest administrative level. This meant something to me—it meant I was where I should be and it meant I had the power to manifest my dreams, because they had. The time I spent learning and being mentored and socialized by them led me to study higher education in graduate school and developed my sense of place and empowerment as a Latina in the field of higher education. Ultimately, they have influenced the topic of this study. I know that my experiences are unique and influence my positive bias about the relationships between women.

During my five years of doctoral study I also developed a strong community of Women of Color composed of my graduate peers within the school of education. This community was both a place where we mutually experienced friendship, fun, and joy—and a haven during the most challenging times. During times in which I doubted my place in my doctoral program—my ability to continue and flourish—they consistently encouraged me and reminded me of all I had accomplished to get to where I was. They reminded me of the proofs of why I did belong in academia and why I would succeed during times when I could not validate myself. They reminded me that feelings of defeat and failure were normal, but that my persistence and determination and intelligence would prevail through the end. They were right. They kept me going. They were

physically there for me. They called and texted. They brought me coffee and sent care packages—most importantly they brought words of wisdom and confidence and their own storied of trials and triumphs. If they had survived and succeeded, so could I. Every time I questioned my own intelligence and sense of place in the doctoral journey, their belief and certainty in me carried me through. My doctoral advisor was an anchor during my journey. As a Chicana, woke, tenure-track (now tenured) professor—she was living proof that I *belonged*—that I did not have to be *less* Latina to validate my place in academia. To the contrary, she taught me that being my authentic, family-loving, self-loving, Latina tradition-honoring, first generation college student, Latina, Cubana self is what made me belong. All those qualities are what made me, and all that I stand for in academia, revolutionary and special and invaluable and worthy and capable. It was a series of perfectly timed events and destiny that brought my Women of Color peers, my/our advisor, and I together at a predominantly white institution and program to create a brown female force/energy that nourished my bodymindspirit when I needed it most. I would not be here without them. I will cherish them forever as the women with whom I shared the reciprocal love and support needed for my personal, professional, and academic uplift. My greatest hope is that I affected them in the same ways.

My community of women has always been present in my life. It has only grown over time, becoming more powerful and meaningful. Some of its members change over time, while others remain constant. I acknowledge and am grateful that my own development as a Latina woman and scholar is a result of my community of women's nurturance, challenge, and spiritual wisdom. It is with these lived experiences and funds of knowledge that I immersed my bodymindspirit into the research process, approached the design of this study, navigated my interactions with participants, and performed the analysis.

Becoming a Mother

At the core of my bodymindspirit is a boy—his name is Leo. On November 9th, 2017 at 24 weeks pregnant I left Pittsburgh, my home for the past four years, and moved back to Miami, Florida where I had lived prior and where my family lived. Over the next eight and a half weeks—between November 17th, 2017 and January 9th, 2018—I moved, found new health care providers (midwives and gynecologist to deliver my baby in a new state), developed a birth plan, and I conducted nearly all of my research interviews. I had very structured data collection and analysis plans through March 4th, my pregnancy due date. Similarly, I had a very structured birth plan. Despite my structure and my plans, on January 20th, 2018 my son, Leo, was born. At that point I still had to conduct all three interviews with Tina and the final interview with Carmen. Those would not happen for another three months because motherhood happened like an ocean wave that hits you fast and carries you under before you have enough time to realize what happened. It hit me like an ocean wave that submerges you for seconds that feel like long slow minutes—isolating you from the precious air above. For those seconds you feel both panic and an isolated peace. You transform and grow a deeper love for life, earth, air, and yourself. Motherhood hit me quickly, suddenly, and slowly all at the same time as I spent four days in the hospital unexpectedly waiting for baby to come either within a few days or not for another two and a half months. There was no structure and no plan. I was seven months pregnant. My natural, birth center, homeopathic, meditation-led birth plan was extinguished and irrelevant. I never thought about it again after the dawn of January 16th when I entered the hospital. Four days later my breeched, 4 pound, 11 ounces, miracle baby son was born via cesarean section at 33 weeks. He spent eight days in the neonatal intensive care unit. It felt really like one long day during which I thought of nothing else except being by his side, holding him, caring for him, and providing the warmth and nutrients he

needed. For those eight days I lived through adrenaline and selflessness—only thinking about my baby and his health. After eight days of Leo progressing and passing all the benchmarks needed to go home, we went home by the grace of God.

We went home to an apartment I had only seen once before—because we thought we would have time to move in and make it home before our son’s birth. After all, we had until March; we had a plan. It was then, coming home to a strange place with a new baby and the pressure of completing my dissertation permeating my mind that I began to fight the hardest battle. The mental battle was hard because my doctoral program and dissertation had consumed me for the past four years, but now motherhood consumed me. My brain and heart were taken over with my new identity as a mother—learning, surviving, loving, worrying—while simultaneously my all-consuming doctoral/scholar identity persisted. My doctoral/scholar identity fought to keep its place in me; it robbed me of peace and sleep as I worried about how I would get it all done. I doubted myself; I told my family I could not finish. I was living in the moment and could not see anything beyond it. My emotions overwhelmed me. It was as if two people were trying to become one person bodymindspirit—my mother self and my scholar self. The battle for space in me between these two identities nearly destroyed me. I nearly destroyed myself. At least, it felt that way in my bones at the time. It was bodymindspirit painful. It was a process ridden with anxiety, and worry, and anguish. It was a time of transition and transformation. It was painful. For three months, there were many moments in which I felt like I was failing as a mother, but more so as a scholar. That sense of failure was very hard because I strived my whole life with consistent discipline and determination to succeed in the academic world. I worked very hard, made sacrifices, and it always paid off.

This was different. I forfeited my sleep and my sanity—not because of my baby—my baby

was good and peaceful. I did it to myself because I was not mothering or writing the way I wanted to—the way I envisioned—strongly—by my unrealistic standards. Because nursing my son was not easy, and it overwhelmed me with anxiety, and it wasn't supposed to be that way. After all, I had read books. I had a plan. It was supposed to feel and be natural—but it wasn't. And then, I was not writing because I could not think, because I was not a scholar anymore, because I was not smart anymore, because I had lost that Genesis—or so I thought. That was how it felt for three months—but I was wrong. I was still me—a mother and a scholar all at once. But, the transformation hurt and the transition took time. My heart and spirit had expanded so quickly with the birth of my son that my mind needed time to catch up—to understand. And no matter how much I wanted to hurry that time—time didn't care and motherhood took as long as it wanted to seep into my bones. My structure and my plan didn't matter. Motherhood broke me—and then I rose—the same me, but different and new all at once. Leo taught me unconditional, pure, primitive love—the sort of love I never imagined existed. Learning that love was beautiful, and painful, and all consuming. Now Leo is one year old and I would not change a thing about our journey into mother-son-hood—it was just the way it was meant to be. I learned so much—so much love.

Becoming a mother was not part of the flower in my metaphor. Rather, becoming a mother was the ray of light from the sun that I needed to flourish even more than I ever imagined. It was something that penetrated me and made me evolve. It enabled me to love more, work more, strive more, laugh more, have more purpose, live more authentically, feel more raw and real. Leo changed my life. Because of him I have a new identity that changed the core of me as a woman. I am a mother. I thought the doctoral journey was challenging—now I bow with respect to all mothers who have had the courage to submerge in motherhood bodymindspirit, to surface as a transformed woman—more expansive, stronger, and softer all at once. I learned that to be a mother

you have to let go. You have to flow. You have to grow in ways you had never grown before. You have to change. Change is transformation and transformation is beautiful. While the community of women that supported me most at the time of Leo's birth and newborn time consisted of my roots and stem—my mother and sisters (and also my mother-in-law who provided a constant supportive presence)—I had to do a lot of individual internal bodymindspirit growing during this period. Simultaneously, I had to give more than I ever have in my life. I am responsible for another human being's flourishing. I must sustain Leo and care for him, and arrange care for him. I could not do it all—my motherhood, my scholarship, and my practitioner work—without my tribe. My tribe includes a very important partner who is a man—my husband, Daniel. So, although my community of women is always critical in my life and my bodymindspirit growth, I acknowledge and am grateful for the support and mutual love between Daniel and I. I am thankful and grateful that we share the love, joys, anxieties, and duties of parenthood together.

3.3 Methodological Assumptions

While *mujerismo* and Chicana feminism are the two critical perspectives I used to conceptualize this study, I drew from narrative inquiry methods for my data collection strategies. Because my aim was to capture Latinas' stories, including those about their communities of women, I situated the study within the narrative inquiry methodological paradigm. Importantly, narrative inquiry lacks a critical approach to understanding people's stories, because it bypasses the influences of ethnicity, race, and gender in shaping people's stories and the research design. For this reason, *mujerismo* and Chicana feminism were critical theoretical lenses I used throughout

the entirety of the research process.

3.3.1 Narrative Inquiry

Narrative research is labeled differently in different sources (Chase, 2010; Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Polkinghorne, 1995; Reissman, 1993). Labels include narrative analysis, narrative research, and narrative inquiry. Although the differentiations between the meanings of each label can be quite ambiguous, for the purpose of this study narrative is discussed as narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006). I used narrative inquiry as a methodological approach defined by Connelly and Clandinin (2006) in the following manner:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experience in which humans, individually and socially, lead storied lives. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which his or her experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. (p. 477)

Accordingly, the phenomenon that narrative researchers attempt to understand is “the nature of experience” as captured and interpreted through participants’ narratives (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 598). Put simply, “narrative inquiry, the study of experience as a story, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 38).

Although narrative inquiry is the study of experience as presented through personal narratives, it does not exclude the influence of social interactions on those narratives. Narrative inquirers work within the bounds of the reflexive relationships and interactions shared between

participants and themselves (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Narrative inquiry thus aligns with a social constructivist theoretical perspective in which knowledge is held in the narrative, but the narrative is affected by interactions between people and social factors. This makes sense, because a narrative is something most often shared—spoken. The sharing of the narrative thus leads to multiple interpretations including the narrator’s (participant) and the receiver’s (researcher). The narrative itself is the phenomenon. It is the present interpretation through narrative creation and sharing that bears meaning rather than the actual experience, which occurred in the past. This is the reality that the narrative researcher seeks to understand with participants (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007).

Importantly, although the phenomena under study in narrative inquiry are the individuals’ experiences (narratives), the narrative inquirer recognizes that the cultural, social, spatial, and institutional contexts or narratives interact with individuals’ personal narratives (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). These relationships, which make narrative inquiry a relational methodology, are further addressed in the discussion of commonplaces below. However, narrative inquiry also proposes that the interactions between these narratives (individual narrative with institutional, social, cultural narratives, etc.) are unique for every individual and for every narrative. Because each personal narrative is different, “knowledge of human experience begins and must return to the stream of particular human lives” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 60). This aspect of narrative inquiry methodology is important, because it signifies that narrative inquiry data is not meant for generalization. In fact, it would be oppositional to the purpose of narrative inquiry to disband the narrative from the individual for the sake of generalizing findings. Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) asserted that when researchers claiming to use narrative inquiry methodology attempt to generalize data “the story is ripped from the personal history of the one living it and is treated as fixed data,

much as one might treat numerical data” (p. 61). As a result, the story is decontextualized, and the researcher uses her hierarchal power to separate the knowledge from the knower for the purpose of generalizing knowledge. Attempting to generalize findings that emerge from narrative inquiry is antithetical to the purpose of the methodology. For this reason, the purpose is to offer readers, especially Latinas and Women of Color, data—a story—that perhaps they can relate to and draw from to navigate their own every day lives. My intention is to offer Women of Color one way of looking at an experience—a lens that they can use in their lives or in their scholarship. I offer my epistemological lens, my interpretation of methodology, my application of methods, and analysis of data to researchers who may use these to inform their own methodologies or their own understandings of *mujerista* and Chicana feminist theory. Furthermore, my intention is not to generalize, but to use my epistemological standpoint and cultural intuition, armed with the wisdom of Chicana feminist and *mujerista* scholarship, to theorize about how Latinas is academic experience Communities of Women of Color. As Anzaldúa (2007) articulated,

And if going home is denied to me then I will have to stand and claim my space, making a new culture—*una cultura mestiza*—with my own lumber, my own bricks and mortar, and my own feminist architecture. (p. 44)

Thus, if there is no research like this—no studies investigating what Communities of Women of Color mean to Latinas in academia and how these women and these communities exist and work to transform academia into a more Latina place in every day life—than I make a path and use my own bodymindspirit ways of knowing to illuminate the way. Participants’ stories are the “bricks and mortar” from which I theorize (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 44). From their stories I theorize about the foundations and transformative experiences that breathe life into the Communities of Women of Color that Latinas in academia create and cultivate.

Ontology is “the study of being. It is concerned with ‘what is’, with the nature of existence, with the structure of reality” (Crotty, 1998, p. 10). In narrative inquiry methodology, experience is real and narrative is the expression of that reality. Narrative inquiry proposes that reality is fluid and personal yet influenced by the world around the individual. Reality is the interactions between individuals as well as between individuals and culture, time, places, and institutions (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Reality is what individuals experience and their interpretations of those experiences. People’s stories about their experiences are the reality. Consequently, stories of experiences are the phenomena under study in narrative inquiry research (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) asserted, “narratives are the form of representation that describes human experiences as it unfolds through time” (p. 40).

The three commonplaces of narrative inquiry methodology are: temporality, sociality, and place or sequence of places (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2006). The three commonplaces (temporality, sociality, and place) of narrative inquiry are what situate and bind narrative inquiry research. The narrative inquirer should always take these three dimensions into consideration during research (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). According to narrative inquiry, these three dimensions shape how people make sense of their experiences; therefore, these three dimensions determine ontology for narrative inquirers. While one or two of the three commonplaces of narrative inquiry may be explored in other forms of qualitative research, narrative inquiry research is always mindful and explorative of the three commonplaces (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). This is what distinguishes narrative inquiry from other forms of qualitative research that may explore temporality, sociality, or place.

According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006), temporality requires the narrative researcher to describe participants and experiences within the context of their past, present, and future.

Therefore, the analysis of narrative inquirers must incorporate the influence of time. Second, the commonplace of sociality means that the narrative inquirer must consider both the internal influences and external influences on narratives. Internal influences include “feelings, hopes, desires, aesthetic reactions, and moral dispositions” while external influences include “social conditions...[like] the environment, surrounding factors and forces, people and otherwise that form the individual’s context” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 408). Thirdly, the commonplace of “place or sequences of places” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 408) must be considered throughout narrative inquiry research projects. Place and sequence of places include the location of the interviews with participants as well as the different contexts related to the particular experiences/narrative shared. For example, in this study relevant physical places included the college campus, homes, community locations, and any other physical locations where interviews took place and/or that were relevant to participants’ experiences and narrative.

Reality is in the interactions between individuals as well as between individuals and culture, time, places, and institutions (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Narrative inquiry methodology aligned with my research study as I examined communities of women, the funds of knowledge and bodymindspirit that women cultivate within these communities, and the power that communities of women have on the journeys of Latinas in academia and beyond. I conceptualized that knowledge was nested in Latinas’ stories about these fluid, multidimensional, evolving relationships within communities of women. I acknowledged participants as knowers and understood that the stories they told were influenced by the time and place of our meetings as well as by our internal and external social qualities—our feelings, experiences, memories, beliefs, and the reciprocal influences of each.

3.4 Research Study Design

I engaged in research with Latinas about their communities of women. Importantly, although I contemplated using *testimonio* (testimony that is political in nature) and counternarrative (sets their story in juxtaposition with the majoritarian narrative), I decided against these methodological approaches. I did not claim to collect Latinas' *testimonios* or counternarratives. The methodological underpinnings of *mujerismo* interpret Latinas' epistemological standpoint as capable and worthy of standing on its own. *Mujerista* research does not seek to compare narratives—but to capture Latinas' narratives in their own right—to legitimize their power on their own and not to juxtapose Latinas' stories with those of individuals who identify with different sexes, racial, or ethnic backgrounds (Comas-Díaz, 2008; Isasi-Díaz, 1996; Nygreen et al., 2016). Therefore, I decided that it would not be epistemologically sound to call participants' experiences/narratives counterstories. Furthermore, I did not claim to collect *testimonios*, because this implies I was seeking to collect stories and experiences that the participants themselves identified as political. *Testimonio* is different from in-depth interviewing, because it specifically intends to illuminate a sociopolitical wrong. *Testimonio* is both an intentional and political message that calls for social action (Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012). I chose not to call participants' stories *testimonios* because: 1) I could not predict how study participants would interpret the power, value, or political significance of their communities of women or their roles in these communities, and 2) my research questions did not frame communities of women as or within a political phenomenon. After collecting and analyzing the data I interpreted that participants' experiences within the communities of women were at times political as they paved a way for themselves in academia and offered each other the academic,

professional, and emotional support needed to thrive. In the following sections I review my research sampling strategies, data collection methods, and approach to data analysis.

3.4.1 Sampling

Participants were recruited via emails sent by myself or gatekeepers at multiple research universities. Once the individual received the recruitment letter via email (see Appendix A), interested participants contacted me directly via the email address provided in the recruitment email (see Appendix A). Once a participant contacted me, I emailed her the link to the criterion and demographic surveys on Qualtrics (see Appendix B) and asked her to complete the surveys in order to ensure that she met the criteria and was an information-rich case. After I determined that she met the criteria, I scheduled the interviews via email communication as well.

I used purposeful sampling to identify information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). My study follows a narrative research approach to inquiry, which means I conducted an in-depth, rather than a broad, investigation of the topic. As such, information-rich cases align with the qualitative approach of my study. I used purposeful sampling because my aim was to recruit participants who had rich experiences and narratives about their communities of women and how those were related to their funds of knowledge and bodymindspirit cultivation.

In order to identify information-rich cases, the recruitment email listed six criteria. First, the participant had to self-identify as Latina. Second, the participant had to identify as female. Third, the participant had to identify as a current faculty member, practitioner, or graduate student at a university. Fourth, the participant had to identify having a community of women that was a meaningful part of her life and/or a contributing factor in her holistic development as a woman,

scholar, professional and/or any other identity that was salient to her (e.g. mother, daughter, activist, volunteer, leader, family/community member, immigrant, spiritual being). Fifth, the participant had to identify as being a spiritual person. Because my third research question sought to understand bodymindspirit, participants had to identify having connections with their spiritual identities. While it was challenging to gauge spirituality in my participant sample, Latinas in academia, I gauged spirituality in the criterion survey by asking participants which factors they relied on to make: 1) personal decisions and 2) professional decisions (see Appendix B). Participants were asked to mark the level of importance for the following resources: a) intuition; b) spiritual wisdom, c) bodymindspirit knowledge, d) research, e) community of women, or choose f) other if a source they relied on was not listed (see Appendix B). I provided the definitions of community of women and bodymindspirit in the survey as these may have been unfamiliar terms for participants (see Appendix B). If the participant selected “other”, the survey asked her to fill a comment box with the factor/s she relied on. Sixth, participants were required to understand and believe in the existence of multiple intersecting forms of oppression afflicting marginalized people. In order to make this criterion more tangible, participants had to identify being involved in equity work in some way, either via their higher education research and/or practice, community work, volunteer work, writing, activism, or any other activity they considered equivalent or related (see Appendix B). All participants interviewed met these criteria.

3.4.2 Participants

Eight women participated in this research study. These eight participants completed all three interviews and the artifact analysis. All women were Latinas. However, participants self-

identified using various labels (see Table 1). Five women were doctoral students. Two of those five women were also higher education practitioners at the time of the study. Two women were practitioners. One woman was professor emerita, but had also been a practitioner and activist throughout her career in higher education. One participant filled out the criterion survey and demographic questionnaire, but then was unresponsive to emails in which I attempted to schedule our interviews. I had no further communications with this potential participant.

Participants who were doctoral students were in the second year of doctoral study or beyond. During the course of this research study two of the participants graduated from their doctoral programs. Practitioners ranged from mid level with two years of experience to upper level administrators with over 20 years of experience. Amelia had a mid-level position and two years of experience. Carmen had a high level position and over two decades of experience in the field. Marlen had a high level position and over six years of experience in the field. Melissa had a mid-level position and over 10 years of experience in the field. Tina had over 40 years of experience in the field of higher education; she had held both practitioner and faculty roles. Participants' ethnic or national backgrounds varied. Participants also had diverse immigrant generation statuses. In the criterion survey each participant was asked: how important is your community of women was in your everyday life? Response options were: "very important", "important", "not important", and "I do not have a community of women." Each participant indicated "very important."

Table 1. Participant Ethnicity, Professional and/or Academic Roles, Academic Field, Institution Type, and Regional Location

Participant Pseudonym	Self-identified Ethnicity	Ethnic Background; Immigrant identity	Professional and/or Academic Role	Field of Study	Institution Type	Regional Location
Alma	Latina, Chicana, or Tejana	Mexican; first generation	Doctoral student (3rd year)	Urban education	Private research university	West Coast
Amelia	Latina/Mexican-American	Mexican; third generation	Doctoral student (4th year); practitioner	Higher education	Public research university; public research university	Midwest
Carmen	Hispanic	Chilean; first generation	Doctoral student (4th year); practitioner	Higher education	Private research university; Public research university	East Coast
Conchita	Mixed Latina	Mexican; first generation	Doctoral student (4th year)	Secondary Education	Public research university	Northeast
Lucero	Mexican-American	Mexican; second generation	Doctoral student (2nd year)	Higher education	Private research university	Midwest
Marlen	Hispanic	Cuban; second generation	Practitioner	Higher education	Public research university	Southeast
Melissa	Latina	Puerto Rican; third generation	Practitioner	Higher education	Community college district	Southeast
Tina	Latina	Mexican; second generation	Faculty (professor emerita)	Higher education		West Coast

3.4.3 Data Collection

This study was situated within the narrative research paradigm, because I sought to understand the influences of communities of women in Latinas' lives through their stories. While communities of women can be interpreted as a phenomenon that participants experience, participants each had different communities of women. I did not interview women who belonged to the same community of women. Therefore, I sought to learn about Latinas' individual lived experiences in their respective communities of women through the stories they shared with me. For these reasons, I situated this study within the narrative research paradigm. I used in-depth phenomenological interviewing and artifact collection as the methods for this study, because they facilitate an in-depth understanding for the individual participant (Seidman, 2013). The life history interview was important to this study, because narrative inquiry is "relational research" (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009, p. 599). While I disclosed my own positionality prior to the life history interview (see section "Rapport and Reciprocity" below), during the life history interview the participant shared her life story with me. The conversation prior to the first interview regarding my positionality (described in detail in the "Rapport and Reciprocity" section below) and the life history interview helped set the foundation of our relationship as researcher and participant—as Latinas with meaningful communities of women and as two Latinas in academia.

Second, in-depth phenomenological interviewing facilitated an in-depth understanding of a specific lived experience, which in this case was each participant's experience within her community of women. In the third and final interview, the participant and I had the opportunity to continue to reflect on the meaning of her community of women. In the third interview, the participants had the time and space to reflect on the first and second interviews and further analyze

their experiences regarding their communities of women). Because participants had time to reflect on the experiences and stories that they shared in the first and second interviews, the third interview was a time to cultivate a deeper understanding and manifest deeper meaning about participants' life stories, experiences, and communities of women. Additionally, during the third interview I asked clarifying and probing questions based on the first and second interview data. The artifact collection further facilitated in-depth understandings for participants' experiences as they were tangible symbols of bodymindspirit connections and experiences that participants described. Artifacts and participants' stories about the meaning behind them reinforced their descriptions and explanations regarding their communities of women in interviews one and two. Thus, artifacts were valuable in data triangulation and ensuring authentic representation of participants' stories and experiences.

In line with *mujerista* and Chicana feminist epistemologies, I emailed participants' my positionality statement and answered any questions they had at the beginning of the first interview, or I had a preliminary call with participants before the first interview. During that preliminary call, I shared my positionality including information about my community of women, my bodymindspirit evolution over the years, and my funds of knowledge. I also drew connections between my community of women and the cultivation of my bodymindspirit and funds of knowledge over the years. Providing this information as part of my in-depth introduction made sense because *mujerista* and Chicana feminist research require reciprocal interviewer and interviewee relationships. Being transparent and reciprocal also aligned with the relational nature of narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin & Murphy, 2009). Moreover, I asked participants to share in-depth information with me about themselves in this study; therefore I wanted to present myself authentically and in-depth to mirror what I was asking of participants.

In-depth phenomenological interviewing. I adapted Seidman's (2013) phenomenological interviewing method, which is composed of a set of three in-depth interviews. The first research interview in the set of three is a focused life history, the second interview focuses on the details of the experience being investigated in the study, and the third interview focuses on making further meaning of the stories shared in the first and second interviews. Seidman advised, "the open-ended, in-depth inquiry is best carried out in a structure that allows both the participant and the interviewer to maintain a sense of focus of each interview in the series" (2013, p. 23). Although all interview questions were open-ended and I adjusted some questions based on the participants' experience, I also made sure to stay focused on the purpose of each interview. The purpose of the interviews did not overlap. Furthermore, Seidman suggested that in-depth phenomenological interviews should not be designed to "test hypotheses...or corroborate opinions...[but to] ask participants to reconstruct their experience and to explore their meaning" (2013, p. 94). Because I was interested in the concepts of funds of knowledge and bodymindspirit and their relation to Latinas' experiences in their communities of women, my protocols included questions about these concepts specifically.

Fluidity depending on the participant's experience is important in the first interview as the participant shares her life history. The first interview was composed of five questions (Appendix E). I was interested in "exploring the meaning of people's experiences in the context of their lives" (Seidman, 2013, p. 20). As such, I sought to understand each participant's identity and life as they were related to the topic (her community of women) of the study in order to understand her story about her community of women. The purpose of the first interview was for the participant to share as much as possible about "herself in light of the topic up in the present time," which in this case is communities of women (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). As such, the first interview did not address the

study research questions directly but rather focused on the life history background necessary to understand the experiences the participant would share in the second interview, which focused on the study research questions (Seidman, 2013). The first interview began with a question regarding her current role at her university (see Appendix E). To understand how she came to be in her current position within academia, I asked about her educational background. Since this study focused on Latinas in academia specifically, the next three questions focused on how she made meaning of being a woman and her race and ethnicity (see Appendix E). Finally, the last question asked what *bodymindspirit* meant to her (see Appendix E). In cases where the participant did not identify with the term, *bodymindspirit*, I used the term, spirituality. Introducing *bodymindspirit* in the first interview was helpful, because most participants were unfamiliar with the term. However, once I provided a brief definition and theoretical background on the term, participants were able to understand, relate, and speak about how they conceptualized and experienced *bodymindspirit* in their own lives. Since *bodymindspirit* and spirituality are complex concepts that each participant experienced and defined in unique and personal ways, beginning a conversation about *bodymindspirit* in the first interview was valuable in the process of establishing trust and understanding. Developing trust and understanding around *bodymindspirit* and spirituality strengthened the process of interpreting and analyzing the data.

The second interview focused on the “details of the participants’ present lived experience in the topic area of the study,” which was communities of women (Seidman, 2013, p. 21). The second interview was composed of nine questions about Latinas’ communities of women, funds of knowledge, and *bodymindspirit*. The questions in the second interview were based on the research questions guiding this research study. I began the interview by asking the participant about the story behind her community of women; I asked her to describe what her community of

women meant to her (see Appendix F). To reach a deep understanding of her community of women, I asked each participant to describe at least three women in her community and why/how each was meaningful. Next, I asked the participant about how her community of women influences: her roles within and beyond academia, how she sees herself, her actions, and her bodymindspirit (see Appendix F). Then, I asked about knowledge and wisdom within her community of women. This question was meant to inform how and/or what funds of knowledge are cultivated in communities of women (see Appendix F). While this question asked about knowledge within communities directly, participants' responses to previous questions provided rich information regarding funds of knowledge within communities of women. Finally, I asked the participant to tell me the story behind the artifact she chose. In all cases, the response to this question reinforced and illustrated the meaning and relationships with women that participants described earlier in the interview.

The third and final interview was composed of five questions that focused on continued meaning-making regarding the participant's experiences within her community of women. In the third interview, participants reflected on the stories and experiences they shared in interviews one and two. By the time participants and I met for interview three, they had had time to think about and make sense of "how the factors in their lives interacted to bring them to their present situation" (Seidman, 2013, p. 22). At this point, participants shared their thoughts on how their communities of women had influenced their lives thus far as well as their visions for their personal and/or professional futures. Essentially, the purpose of the third interview questions was to use the participants' stories from the past to understand the present more deeply and to enlighten the future, aligning with temporality in narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). As such, in the third interview I asked the participant to discuss how relationships within her community had evolved

over time. I also asked what life would be like without her community of women as another way to prompt her to make meaning and reflect on the significance of her community (see Appendix G). All participants were asked to make continued meaning of their communities of women in the third interview (see Appendix G). However, the specific research questions and probes varied based on the unique stories the participant shared in her previous two interviews.

The length of interviews was unique depending on how far back in time the participant started her stories and the amount and quality of the details that she shared. The first interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 120 minutes in length. The second interviews ranged from 50 minutes to 90 minutes in length. Overall, the third interviews were the most concise, ranging from 21 minutes to 50 minutes in length. For each participant, all three interviews were conducted from one to three weeks apart. There was one exception due to unforeseen life circumstances in which the time that lapsed between interviews two and three was five months and one week. Interviews were conducted via Skype, FaceTime, voice phone call, and in-person depending on what was feasible based on location and most comfortable for the participant.

Both my personal experiences and educational research about Latinas support that Latina funds of knowledge are often created, exchanged, and preserved through “consejos, cuentos, and la experiencia” (advice, stories, and the experience) (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 675). Both my personal life experiences within my communities of women and *mujerista* and Chicana feminist research also indicate that oral traditions, *cuentos* (stories), which may also be referred to and take the forms of *testimonios* (testimonies), *platicas* (dialogues), or narratives—are a salient part of Latina epistemology and pedagogies (Espino et al., 2010; Espino et al., 2012; Galvan, 2001, 2006; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Saavedra & Perez, 2014; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). Thus, based on my personal experiences and existent literature, the three-series in-depth

phenomenological interviewing process was an appropriate method for exchanging information in a way that aligned with both my and the participants' ways of knowing.

Artifacts. Seidman (2013) proposed that the purpose of the third interview is for the participant to reflect on and discuss the “intellectual and emotional connections” in his or her story (p. 22). However, in this study participants made intellectual and emotional connections at the end of the second interview when they described their artifacts of choice.

At the end of the first interview I asked participants to identify an artifact to be discussed in the second and third interviews. Artifacts could be in the form of any object collected or produced by the participant. For example, drawings, figurines, photographs, instruments or any other object that represented how the participant's community of women, her bodymindspirit, and/or her funds of knowledge were considered, discussed, and analyzed as an artifact. I explained to participants that an artifact could also include a journal entry or a reflection written by the participants. However, no participant chose to write a reflection.

Importantly, I specifically asked each participant to identify an artifact that she already owned, because it represented her community of women, her bodymindspirit, and/or her funds of knowledge. I did not want the participant, for example, to go home to search for artifacts that she could connect to these aspects of herself for the first time solely because it was part of this study. Rather, the artifact had to already represent community of women, funds of knowledge, and/or bodymindspirit to her prior to her participation in the study. The only exception to this criterion was if the participant felt compelled to write a reflection instead, but none did. I also explained to participants that if she did not have or could not think of an artifact she already had, we could improvise another form of data collection that made sense to her and her experiences. However, this was not necessary, because all participants were able to identify an artifact that met the criteria.

Artifacts could represent funds of knowledge, bodymindspirit, any other meaningful aspect cultivated within this community of women or the community of women itself. The item could represent how her community of women influenced her own funds of knowledge or bodymindspirit. For example, my artifact was my small shrine to Saint Barbara in my home, which included the small honey pot next to the Virgin's statue. My mother passed down these items to me. They represent bodymindspirit as cultivated by my mother, sisters, and I. The shrine also represents my spiritual or bodymindspirit funds of knowledge, which have developed throughout my life as a result of my community of women (within my immediate family). The small shrine represents faith in myself, in the universe, in a higher being, and in a dimension much more powerful than the one we live in—a mystical and spiritual dimension. This reminds me that, despite my choices in life and in academia, despite my hardships, my challenges, my struggles, I always possess a deeper strength within me to continue on the path enlightened by my bodymindspirit. From a *mujerista* and Chicana feminist perspective, Latina participants' chosen artifacts were a critical point of data, because this data point and this method of data collection disrupt white, patriarchal norms and dualistic ideologies about epistemology and scholarship (what it means to be a scholar) for both the participant and myself. From a narrative inquiry perspective, the artifact visually represented the respective participant's story in a visceral way from which she could draw to extend her understanding and analysis of her community of women (Riessman, 2008). The purpose of the artifact was for participants to further explore and enrich their narratives by verbally sharing stories based on the artifacts. This is exactly what manifested as participants described their artifacts in connection to their communities of women, funds of knowledge, and bodymindspirit. As participants analyzed their artifact/s and described why they chose the item/s and what the item/s meant, they organically made connections between all three concepts

(communities of women, funds of knowledge, and bodymindspirit) and brought to life these connections and their lived experiences.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Spirit Work: The Spiritual Nature of My Analytic Process

As a preface to the subsequent sections, which describe *the steps I took* in analyzing data, here I describe the spiritual state that guided my analytic process. This section brings forth the spirit of *how* I analyzed data. I was primarily guided by my cultural intuition (Delgado Bernal, 1998), my immersion in my *lucha* (Isasi-Díaz, 1996), and my sense of purpose to illuminate participants' *experiencias y luchas*. While I engaged in methodical and systematic steps to make sense of long, rich, dense life stories—I also surrendered to undergo that process from a spiritual, fluid space of *feeling*. During the time of data analysis I was also giving birth to my identity as a mother and merged scholar-mother identity. Under the circumstances, it was the natural way. This was the only way—to *feel* through the data.

I went through iterations of profiles and as I reviewed, labeled, and coded passages in transcripts my spiritual connection with participants' stories deepened. The further into my analysis I went, the more I let myself be guided by my spiritual wisdom and the knowledge I gained by being present with each participant. I was present with each participant during the time of each of our three interviews. But, I had also been present with all but one participant in a physical sense and space. We had shared time and physical space together either before or during

interviews. I used the bodymindspirit knowledge I gained from being in the physical presence of each participant to interpret the stories they shared during our interviews. For example, Carmen has been my mentor since 2011. In 2011 she was my supervisor during my master's degree practicum, which was one year in length. After I earned my degree we continued a friendship and holistic mentor-mentee relationship. During our interviews in 2017 and 2018 I used the knowledge I have from sharing physical presence and space together to understand her narrative and interpret what her stories meant in defining Communities of Women of Color. Thus, I used the personal experiences and knowledge that Carmen and I co-created to make sense of data. It was in this bodymindspirit space, informed by the shared knowledge participants and I had co-created prior to interviews, that I took on making sense of data—labeling large excerpts of data using descriptive codes, developing themed codes, identifying reoccurring themes, and recognizing the broad themes that went beyond one participants' story, expanding across participants' narratives.

Though I did this with each participant, the depth of personal experience and knowledge that we co-created and shared between us differed with each participant. For example, Lucero and I never shared physical space together. However, we shared spiritual space. We connected over the painful experience and shared knowledge of losing a parent. Lucero was still raw with the loss of her mother at the time of our interviews. Even though 12 years had passed since the death of my father, a part of my soul is forever raw with the loss of his physical presence. In our preliminary call together, Lucero and I bonded over our pain, our loss, and the lessons that our parents' deaths taught us. I used this connection—the experiences and knowledge that Lucero and I co-created—to navigate her narrative during data analysis. My interpretations of her stories were bodymindspirit guided by our co-created experience and knowledge prior to the interviews. Thus, my choices about how to label data and interpret it were guided by the qualities and nuances of the

shared, co-created experiences and knowledge that participants and I engaged in prior to interviews.

Co-created experiences and knowledge between the participant and I was the foundation of my analytic choices. Moreover, my bodymindspirit state at the time of the data analysis also guided my analytic lens and approach. I entered data analysis as a mother; I was a new and different person. My mind, soul, and heart had acquired a new sensibility that I could never have imaged or described prior to becoming a mother. I struggled and wrestled to make sense of data, and I also struggled and wrestled to make sense of my mother-scholar identity. It was in those parallel *luchas* that I found myself, found the stories that participants told, and found the story I wanted to share via my findings chapters. I was in a raw bodymindspirit space that led me to be both very methodical about my analytic approach, but also completely surrendered in my bodymindspirit as I worked through data. I had to be spiritually and bodymindspirit immersed. Nothing else could have gotten me through the process of those parallel and simultaneous *luchas* with grace, while honoring the experiences, stories and *luchas* of each participant and my own.

3.5.2 Memoing and Transcriptions

In narrative research the “interpretive process begins during conversation” (Riessman, 2008, p. 26). Thus, I began taking handwritten notes during the first interview with each participant. In notes during the interviews, I primarily recorded significant events and themes in participants’ stories as well as the chronology of salient events and experiences for my own reference. These memos documented major or salient events or themes in participants’ stories, my immediate thoughts, initial interpretations, and any connections I made between the participant’s

narrative and theoretical concepts. I then created handwritten memos immediately after conducting interviews. I followed my cultural intuition when writing these initial memos (Delgado Bernal, 1998). I noted down the most meaningful part of participants' experiences—the parts in which their bodymindspirit identities were alive and salient. As they spoke the words, I understood the spirit of their stories. I also understood stories to be in the past, the present (their professional or academic stories), or the future (what they envisioned for themselves and the women in their communities—whom they loved and respected). As recommended by Saldaña (2016), I continued to write memos after each of the three interviews with each participant as well as while I conducted the initial read through of each transcript and verified for accuracy against the audio data.

As participants completed each interview, audio files were transcribed professionally. As transcriptions were completed, I verified the transcripts by reading them in full to ensure that written transcripts matched the data in the audio files. Saldaña (2016) asserted that “coding and analytic memo writing are concurrent qualitative data analytic activities” (p. 44); therefore, I memoed as I moved through the multiple levels of coding. In my memos, I recorded the connections I made between participants' narratives and *mujerista* and Chicana feminist theoretical concepts. I made note of common experiences across participants' stories. I also documented “turning points” in participants' narratives, which were points in which their stories diverged from or extended findings in existent literature and/or the conceptualization of theoretical concepts (Creswell, 2018, p. 73). Moreover, reflecting on how I personally relate to participants and/or the data is critical in qualitative research (Saldaña, 2016). As part of the reflexive process, I made note of how my personal life narratives converged or diverged from the data. Keeping track of my biases and points of convergence or contradiction was valuable as I moved forward with data analysis and continued communication with participants. However, because I came into the study

expecting divergences and acknowledging that my experiences within my community of women may be very different from the experiences of others, when there were differences I embraced them and interpreted them as rich points of data that helped create a more holistic picture of Latinas' ways of knowing and being. Importantly, I also made note of experiential and spiritual connections between participants' lived experiences and my own. This does not mean I made note of experiences we had in common. Rather, I made note of when the spirit of experiences were in sisterhood—when an experience elicited a feeling or resulted in intellectual illumination, or deeper sense of wisdom, that I could relate to because I had gone through an experience that resulted in similar bodymindspirit growth. So, the experience that had led to that wisdom for me may have been very different in nature—but our (participant and myself) interpretations or resulting wisdom, feeling, and illumination about our identity and place in the world was similar.

3.5.3 Participant Profiles

Seidman (2013) proposed participant profiles as one method through which to analyze and present the data (presented in chapter 4). In the first part of my data analysis, I developed a profile of each participant. The purpose of creating the narrative profiles was to maintain the integrity and authenticity of each participant's lived experiences while presenting what communities of women meant to them. The profiles provide a holistic picture of participants' lived experiences related to the three major concepts of the study while also situating participants' experiences in the contexts of time, place, and internal and external influencers. Thus, the goal of crafting profiles was to honor and present the voices and stories of participants in an authentic and holistic manner. Profiles were based off of multiple points of data: three in-depth interviews and artifact/artifacts identified

and discussed by participants, which represented their communities of women, funds of knowledge, and/or bodymindspirit.

I adapted Seidman's (2013) guidelines for how to craft participant profiles. First, as I read the full transcript (including all three interviews), I labeled passages of interest based on their richness in representing the participant's story, experiences, and conceptualizations. I also based my choices at this point on whether or not passages captured the spirit of the story. I marked passages where participants' bodymindspirit growth or sense of being was demonstrated. I did this because I knew that the most authentic, honest, and heartfelt aspects of their lives were nested in these bodymindspirit heavy passages. I knew this through my personal experiences and cultural intuition as a Latina—a *mujer* that was in graduate study, a mother, the daughter of immigrants, a woman who, like the participants, had been the first to do many things in her family that both honored and transgressed cultural traditions, and so forth. I employed both descriptive and protocol coding at this point. Labels were either the subject of the passage or words within the passage that described it. Essentially, labels were broad descriptive codes. Simultaneously, I also did protocol coding, which meant that I coded the "qualitative data according to a pre-established...system," which in this case was the interview protocol itself (Saldaña, 2016, p. 175). I used protocol coding to organize the large chunks of data in preparation for crafting profiles. Protocol codes also helped me develop the headings for participant profiles. Importantly, although I crafted participant profiles before writing the thematic analysis findings chapters, the processes of thematic analysis and profile construction did overlap. There was overlap, because, as I went through iterations of analyzing and coding passages to craft participant profiles, initial descriptive codes evolved into themed codes that captured meaning and interpretation (Saldaña, 2016). Essentially, profiles also helped shape the thematic analysis in that in their first and second iterations when profiles were

over 20-40 pages in length, profiles helped me to identify the most salient parts of participants' stories based on the three theoretical concepts guiding the study. Profiles were critical to the process of data reduction through which I analyzed my way down to the densest passages that captured multiple facets of communities of women, funds of knowledge, or bodymindspirit. Thus, the process of profile crafting was a critical part of data analysis—as parts of narratives that did not make it to the first iteration of profiles most often were not part of thematic analysis because those parts of stories were not representative of the three theoretical concepts.

Second, I cut and pasted labeled passages into a new Word document in sequential order. The passages compiled together consisted of one-third or up to half of the length of the full transcript (Seidman, 2013). Third, I read the new document composed of all the labeled passages that I extracted from the original transcript and once more marked the “most compelling” passages and eliminated others (Seidman, 2013, p. 123). I also shortened passages to eliminate redundancy. In shortening passages and eliminating redundancy, the richest parts of passages were underscored and became even more lucid. Fourth, I wrote profiles in first-person voice using the participant's words. Fifth, profiles were constructed primarily in chronological order reflecting the in the order in which the participant shared information. However, there were moments in which I transposed information from the same interview or from narratives from the third interview that referred to stories shared in the first and second interviews. I transposed information only to make profiles clearer and more elaborate.

Each profile went through at least three iterations. In the first iteration profiles consisted of compelling excerpts about one-third or half the length of the entire transcript (all three interviews) without headings. The second iteration included headings and shortened passages underneath each heading. To shorten passages, I eliminated parts of the passages that were not necessary to create

a lucid picture of the participant's story or experience. I also eliminated passages or parts of passages that were redundant, passages and stories that were captured in other sections of the profile, and passages and stories that I anticipated would be captured in more depth in the thematic analysis chapter. In the third and final iteration, I further shortened profiles by eliminating passages that reinforced information already captured about participants' experiences and ideas. In other words, I made passages as concise as possible while maintaining the meaning that participants made of their experiences. The following describes important characteristics of the profiles and decisions I made when crafting each profile:

First-Person: Seidman (2013) proposed that "by crafting a profile in the participants' own words, the interviewer allows those words to reflect the person's consciousness" (p. 122). Thus, I decided to present profiles in first-person voice to ensure that participants maintained a significant level of control even as I crafted the profiles and included and omitted certain parts of stories. Furthermore, using the participant's own words in first person affords readers an active role in interpreting stories as they read the profiles. While this may make the researcher more vulnerable, it helps to preserve the authenticity of participants' experiences and stories.

Insertions: I use [brackets] to indicate when words are mine and not participants'. I use my own words to streamline participants' stories while still making sure to present the most important parts of their experiences. Primarily, I use my own words to create transitions within the narrative profiles. Secondly, I use my own words to consolidate information that the participant herself provided but in a more detailed manner. Thirdly, I use my own words at times to present information in a more vague manner as a means to preserve participants' anonymity. When needed, I use (parenthesis) to clarify what the participants meant when using a pronoun in their speech. I use {braces} to provide an English translation of a Spanish word.

Forms of speech: To stay true to participants' expressions, I decided to keep contractions in speech. This choice affords the reader insight into the more relaxed and informal nature of the interviews. However, I deleted "certain characteristics of oral speech that a participant would not use in writing" such as "uhhs" "umms" and "other such idiosyncrasies that do not do the participants justice" (Seidman, 2013, p. 124). I deleted these forms of speech, because, rather than enhance stories, they would distract the reader and ultimately cloud the meaning of participants' experiences and stories.

Order: Following Seidman's (2013) model, I, for the most part, "present material in the order in which it came in the interviews" (p. 124). However, in the instances where I did transpose any material, I made sure that it did not change the meaning of what the participant was attempting to convey. Before transposing any material, I asked myself whether in doing so the narrative stayed "fair to the meaning of the larger interview" (Seidman, 2013, p.124).

Confidentiality: All participants selected their own pseudonyms. In order to conceal participants' identities, I selected pseudonyms for all of the institutions and people to whom participants referred. To ensure confidentiality, I do not reveal the states where participants worked or studied at the time of the interviews. I also limit details concerning participants' doctoral programs and professional positions to keep their identities private.

Artifacts: Each participant was asked to identify an artifact that represented communities of women, funds of knowledge, and/or bodymindspirit to her. I incorporated the artifact either into the introduction or body of the narrative for each participant profile. For six of the eight participants, artifacts reinforced the importance of a specific community of women. In addition to the amount of detail and time participants spent sharing stories about certain communities of women, the artifacts that the participants chose indicated to me which communities were most

important and salient. Thus, artifacts helped guide which communities of women were featured in the participants' narrative profiles. Two women did not identify artifacts that solely or directly symbolized a community of women. Conchita's artifact, a tattoo, represented bodymindspirit and her identities as a Mexican woman and scholar. Additionally, the tattoo illustrated the importance of Mexican women who want and deserve to be in academia making a difference but are not due to social barriers. Tina's artifact, her mother's journal, represented funds of knowledge more than it did a community of women.

Constructing participant profiles is an effective way to “find and display coherence in the constitutive events of a participant's experiences, to share the coherence that participant has expressed, and to link the individual's experiences to the social and organization context within which he or she operates” (Seidman, 2013, p. 123). Data analysis in the form of profiles aligned with *mujerista* and Chicana feminist epistemologies, because profile crafting gave me the opportunity to braid the participant's experiences and stories together rather than rely solely on decontextualized parts of each participant's stories to build common themes. By creating a profile based on the participant's stories, I was able to present the essence of her lived experience, which is difficult to achieve when data is analyzed by themes extracted from the common elements of participants' stories. Presenting data in a holistic form also aligned with the principles of narrative inquiry methodology (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Furthermore, in order to ensure trustworthiness, full transcripts and first drafts of profiles were sent to each respective participant to review. All participants had the opportunity to review their profiles. Two of the eight participants suggested minor changes, which I incorporated into the final profiles in order to more accurately capture their lived experiences in the profiles.

3.5.4 Thematic Analysis

In addition to data analysis via participant profiles, I conducted thematic analysis. During thematic analysis I used both deductive and inductive approaches. I adapted Creswell (2018) and Riessman's (2008) recommendations for narrative research thematic data analysis. I also drew from Saldaña's (2016) recommendations for creating and organizing codes and developing deeper levels of qualitative analysis by theming the data.

First, I created and managed data files. I audio recorded interviews, and, as interviews were completed, I sent audio recordings to a professional transcription company (Landmark Associates, Inc.) to be transcribed. For data management and organization purposes, I created an electronic folder in my computer named "Data Collection." Within that folder, I created four folders that housed the following items: criterion surveys, demographic surveys, interview audio files, and transcriptions. Within the transcriptions folder, each participant had a folder with all three interview transcripts. I also created an electronic folder labeled "Data Analysis" where I kept three files. The first file where I kept all the transcribed and coded interviews was labeled "coding." The second file where I kept all typed memos that I composed during transcript verifications and thematic coding was labeled "memos." The third file where I kept all drafts of the participants' profiles was labeled "profiles." I also kept an Excel sheet in the "Data Analysis" folder where I organized themes that emerged from the data and excerpts representing those themes labeled "Table of Themes."

Importantly, passages that were labeled and coded from the profile crafting process were also the richest sections of data analyzed as I went through the thematic analysis. During the thematic analysis, I went back to both the first iterations of participant profiles, which provided

much more extended representation of participants' stories—particularly relating to the three theoretical concepts guiding the story—and I revisited the interview transcripts. I went back and forth between first iteration extended profiles and interview transcripts as I went through the four levels of coding described below. While the four levels of coding described below are systematic and were indeed part of the thematic analysis process, the manner in which I engaged in this process was fully governed by my cultural intuition and my epistemological standpoint as a Latina, a (then brand new) mother, a first generation college student, a daughter of immigrants, the eldest of four sisters, a co-parent after my father died suddenly when I was 16 and a junior in high school, a dreamer, a spiritual being, and a committed writer, and believer in *lo que esta para ti nadie to lo quita* [was is meant for you, no one can take from you]. The way that I interpreted and coded data was shaped entirely by all of the life experiences that I believed made me the person I was at the time of the data collection and analysis. I carried with me all of these experiences, identities, and beliefs. Thus, I closed my eyes and *felt* my way through the data so that I could authentically sense the points of salience and bodymindspirit abundance and connection in the data. Through that process guided by cultural intuition and bodymindspirit being, I reduced profiles to their most concise and final versions, and identified and marked data through the four steps of thematic analysis. Some of this analytic process invokes *huna*, a traditional and spiritual Hawaiian concept meaning that “not all knowledge is to be shared, some knowledge is sacred. It’s not made for everybody” (N. Cristobal personal communication, February 21, 2019). Thus, if when you read Isasi-Díaz (1996) and Anzaldúa (2007) you are not bodymindspirit awakened and connected, it would be difficult to carry out a study in the spirit of this one. If *mujerismo*, Chicana feminism, and a strong spiritual identity are not part of your bodymindspirit identity, carrying out a *mujerista* and Chicana feminist study with spiritual purpose and clarity would be impossible.

In the first level of analysis during thematic analysis, I verified transcripts and memoed my emergent ideas (Creswell, 2018). It is important to note that the first and second levels of coding (initial, descriptive, and protocol coding) also were how passages for profiles were identified. Thus, the first and second level coding that I explain in this section also illustrate how I identified profile passages. As I verified transcripts, I wrote short memos using a Microsoft Word document for each participant. Simultaneously, I developed initial codes. Initial codes were primarily descriptive codes and emerged both inductively and deductively. For example, the first level of codes were based on the theoretical concept guiding each research question: communities of women, funds of knowledge, bodymindspirit, and spirituality, family as community, peers as community, colleagues as community, etc. I made sure codes distinguished between bodymindspirit and spirituality. The first level of codes also included demographic data such as: gender identity, education, educational path, ethnic identity, professional path, current professional roles, etc. While some initial codes were deductive based on theory, I also noted inductive codes that emerged from the data and not theory. For example, descriptive codes that emerged inductively included codes such as, activist community, results of hunger strike, shared challenges, trust in each other, and shared values matter more than shared race, shared values matter, validation and affirmation, etc.

My initial codes were descriptive and conceptual in nature and therefore “too broad to provide any analytic utility” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 231). In order to make meaning of the initial codes, in the second level of analysis I themed the initial descriptive codes by “add[ing] the verbs ‘is’ and ‘means’ after the phenomenon under investigation” or other fitting verbs (Saldaña, 2016, p. 231). A theme extended the meaning of the initial code based on a deeper analysis of the data under that initial code. Examples of initial codes analyzed into themes were: “bodymindspirit means being

a leader,” “bodymindspirit means paying it forward,” “community of women is a source of validation,” “community of women means a space to be emotional,” “community of women is building trust,” “hunger strike fortified community,” “shared challenges inspired trust.” Themes created in the second level of analysis included value codes that captured “a participant’s integrated value, attitude, and belief system at work” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 124). For example, codes such as “community of women is ability to be bodymindspirit self,” “bodymindspirit connection means health,” “funds of knowledge are seeing and disrupting inequity,” and “community of women is sisterhood” captured participants’ values and attitudes regarding what constituted a community of women, the meaning of bodymindspirit, and which funds of knowledge were valued. At this stage of coding codes were created not only based on data but on my interpretation of the data.

I also relied on my interpretations of data in the third level of coding. In the third level of coding, I engaged in focused coding to uncover which themed codes were most salient and frequent in participants’ stories. For example, most of the themed codes about the meaning of bodymindspirit revolved around maintaining holistic health, meaning keeping a balance between the body, the mind, and the spirit. The focused codes became, for example, “bodymindspirit - keeping balance,” “communities of women validate bodymindspirit wellness,” “communities of women share bodymindspirit knowledge,” and “mutual bodymindspirit accountability.” Thus, focused codes were grounded in the story the data told and my interpretation of the story. Themed codes fell under these focused codes. Once focused codes were established, I went back to my research questions and asked myself what these codes told me about the three major concepts grounding my study: communities of women, bodymindspirit, and funds of knowledge. It became evident that bodymindspirit and funds of knowledge were nested within communities of women. This affirmed that communities of women was the core central concept in the study and that

bodymindspirit and funds of knowledge were concepts that helped illuminate the foundations of communities of women as well as the transformative experiences that participants had within their communities.

Lastly, through my interpretation of how themed codes and focused codes informed the three major concepts of this study, I developed the broad themes that persisted across participants' stories. I created three tables in Microsoft Excel—one for each major concept guiding the study (see Appendix H). The first Excel sheet/table was labeled “Meaning of Communities of Women.” The second Excel sheet/table was labeled “Funds of Knowledge.” The third Excel sheet/table was labeled “Bodymindspirit.” On the top row of each table, I wrote the research question associated with the concept (i.e. How do Latinas in academia make meaning of their communities of women?) followed by each participant's pseudonym. On the first column of each table, I wrote each theme. I then filled in the sheet with coded excerpts from each participant that represented that theme. I then identified and categorized whether themes for all three concepts either informed the “Foundational Components of Communities of Women of Color” or the “Transformative Experiences in Communities of Women of Color,” which culminated in my two thematic analysis findings chapters.

Creating these three tables of coded data not only organized the data even further but also facilitated more inclusive analysis by allowing me to visualize a holistic picture of each participant's narrative and of the commonalties across narratives. This final step helped me to “interpret the larger meaning of the [individual participant's] story” and how stories' meanings informed the theoretical concepts I was examining (Creswell, 2018, p. 199). Researchers conducting narrative analysis “keep a story ‘intact’ by theorizing from the case rather than from component themes (categories) across cases” (Riessman, 2008, p. 53). However, by putting themes

across concepts side-by-side, I was able to see convergences and divergences in experiences more clearly while doing my best to maintain the connections in participants' stories.

3.5.5 Credibility/Trustworthiness

Cultural intuition requires researchers to “learn from their borderland experiences as Chicana scholars and teachers in order to construct knowledge,” which provides guidance for their research process (Calderon et al., 2012, p. 520). The use of cultural intuition is what makes Chicana feminism genuine; it honors the authenticity of its endarkened feminist and community-based origins. Through the process and state of cultural intuition, Latina researchers' personal and professional experiences become invaluable to conducting Chicana/Latina feminist research. The validation of the researchers' personal and professional lived experiences is a critical part of Chicana/Latina feminism, because it affords the researcher the same validity it proposes researchers afford the epistemological views of participants. Consequently, the acknowledgement and application of cultural intuition in Chicana/Latina feminist epistemology “is one means of resisting traditional paradigms that often distort or omit the experiences and knowledge” of Latina women (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p. 555).

With this in mind, I shared my positionality, including details about my community of women, spirituality, and funds of knowledge, via email through a document with my written positionality or via a call before the first interview. Throughout the interview communications, I shared relevant experiences and ways of knowing in order to co-construct reciprocal and trusting relationships. Reciprocal relationships are imperative in critical feminist, narrative, and qualitative research studies (Calderon et al., 2012; Connelly & Murphy, 2009; Lincoln, 1995). Lincoln (1995)

asserted that in high-quality, qualitative studies reciprocity occurred when “the research effort and their [research and participant] relationships were marked by a deep sense of trust, caring, and mutuality” (p. 284). Because of the continuity and depth of communication between participants and myself, in-depth phenomenological interviews facilitated the development of mutuality and trust. Self-disclosure about my positionality set a tone for the level of care with which I came to the research study and with which I initiated and/or continued to cultivate relationships with participants. Artifacts as an additional form of data collection was a means to both triangulate data and facilitate the depth of expression and understanding of participants’ narratives.

To strengthen credibility, narrative inquiry studies corroborate evidence by triangulating multiple forms of data (Connolly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2018). For this reason, I used artifacts to triangulate data and support participants as they shared holistic narratives of their lived experiences. Artifacts provided an alternative to oral stories through in-depth phenomenological interviews. Moreover, the third in-depth interview reflected on the stories shared in interviews one and two; thus, participants and I had the opportunity to revisit the meaning of participants’ lived experiences. Finally, as part of the member checking process, I shared the profiles with participants and made changes according to their suggestions to ensure the authenticity of the data and the accuracy of my interpretations (Saldaña, 2016).

3.5.6 Rapport and Reciprocity

Throughout the research process and even after the completion of interviews and member checking, I intentionally shared my personal connections to the purpose of the study and my personal understandings of bodymindspirit based on my lived experiences with participants.

Participants and I shared our sex, ethnicity, and connections to academia/higher education that we had in common. These commonalities brought us together and helped us build trust and mutual understanding for our experiences within our families, academia, and communities of women regardless of whether our experiences diverged or converged. These commonalities, combined with the quantity and depth of contact and communication in in-depth interviewing, and in some cases the level of relationships that participants and I shared prior to interviews, fostered rapport between us.

To ensure strong rapport and increase the quality of the relationships between participants and myself, I purposefully recruited participants with whom I shared communications or with whom I had a level of contact or relationship (within the setting of academia or related to our educational trajectories, including attending the same high school or university, for example) prior to the design and data collection of this study. Familiarity between participants and myself facilitated trustworthiness, which increased the quality of the data. Four of the participants and myself have remained or continue to be in contact—offering each other professional and personal support as we continue on our journeys as practitioners, scholars, mothers, and *mujeres*. I described the relationship between the participants and myself, including how we met and the nature of our relationship, in the introduction of each participant profile in chapter four.

To continue to build rapport and have extended engagement with the participants, I gave each participant the option of having a phone or Skype call with me to talk about my positionality. For each participant, this meeting took place after she completed the criterion and demographic surveys and before the first of three formal interviews. Two participants were not able to attend a preliminary call. In those cases, I emailed them my positionality statement and we discussed it briefly at the beginning of the first interview. The purpose for this preliminary step before

beginning the interviews was to: 1) be transparent about myself with participants, 2) share with participants my motivation for this study topic based on my personal lived experiences with my community of women, and 3) help both participants and myself feel more comfortable as we prepared to begin the interviews. This initial conversation was an opportunity to share the genesis, purpose, and the intended contributions to research and practice of the study with each participant. This step was rooted in reciprocity, as my intention was to give participants a clear idea of where I came from and who I was as a *mujer* and scholar, especially since I asked participants questions about who they were and about their communities of women. Since the information I shared with participants was personal and intimate to me, I asked each participant to keep the information I shared with them in this initial conversation confidential. Lastly, each participant received monetary compensation in the amount of \$45 after completing the third and final interview.

3.5.7 Study Limitations

Participants were Latinas in academia, which is a broad sample. One limitation of the broad sample, for example, was that Tina initially felt like an outlier. She was 24 years older than the second oldest participant and was professor emerita. She described herself as “nearing the end of life” as she reflected on friends who had passed away. Tina shared that she was making financial arrangements to ensure she could sustain herself through “the end of life.” Because Tina was at a much more self actualized stage of life and because she had nearly two more decades of experience in higher education than the other participants, her narrative was much more reflective. All other participants were pursuing their doctoral degrees or in their early to mid careers. Thus, at first glance it seemed difficult to find common themes between Tina’s and other participants’ narratives

and experiences. However, Tina's reflective narrative and broad views about the meaning of community in her life (she mentioned men as being part of her community) provided rich data. Her narrative underscored the significance of self-actualization, stage of life and career, and life experiences on the meaning of community and Community of Women of Color.

Narrowing the participant sample to one single group, such as Latina doctoral students, in future research could result in a deeper understanding of the meaning of Communities of Women of Color for that subgroup. Focusing on a specific sample can also result in understanding the foundational components and transformational experiences for that specific group at a deeper level. Narrowing the sample of participants may further illuminate the common experiences that women in communities share as well as their converging and diverging points of meaning making regarding communities of women.

Similarly, narrowing the definition of community of women to specifically focus on academic and professional communities may yield more knowledge about what communities of women mean to Latinas within the academic and professional contexts. Such research may focus on professional networks as spaces where Latinas form community. Research with this focus may also extend knowledge on the bodymindspirit resources that academic and professional networks may provide Latinas. Research on the bodymindspirit resources that academic and professional Communities of Women of Color cultivate would inform this current research gap in the higher education literature.

Furthermore, because I interviewed Latinas in academia in graduate student, practitioner, and faculty positions my findings may more accurately reflect the foundations and transformative experiences of Communities of Women of Color in academia, rather than the experiences of Latinas beyond the context of academia. In order to contribute more intentionally and significantly

to Communities of Women of Color beyond academia, Latinas outside of the academic setting should be interviewed. Such research could further inform the difference and similarities of Communities of Women of Color based on the settings in which they are formed and cultivated.

3.6 Chapter Summary

This research study was grounded in and guided by *mujerista* and Chicana feminist epistemologies. *Mujerista* epistemology is centered on the grassroots everyday lives of Latina women and how we interpret the world via our cultural Latina ways of knowing. *Mujerismo*, although grounded in theology, is not linked to any political movement or ethnic group of women. Similarly, Chicana feminist epistemology is grounded in Latinas' everyday lives and ways of knowing. However, Chicana feminist epistemology is linked to race and ethnicity politics as it stems from the Chicana/o political movement. Chicana feminist theoretical concepts such as *mestiza* identity and *mestiza* consciousness helped shape the design of this study and my own consciousness as a Latina researcher in graduate school and academia. Thus, both epistemologies informed the research process and the data analysis. *Mujerista* and Chicana feminist epistemology are especially important in my study because narrative inquiry methodology does not underscore the influences of race, gender, ethnicity, or immigration experience through critical perspectives. Nonetheless, I utilized narrative inquiry methodology to conceptualize the nature of reality in my research study—as I witnessed and examined experiences shared through stories—lived experiences as stories. I used narrative inquiry methods to help guide my choices of data collection methods.

In order to develop and further nurture existing rapport and trust with study participants I conducted interviews using a three-series in-depth phenomenological interviewing method (Seidman, 2013). Furthermore, I collected participants' artifacts in order to affirm the meaning of participants' stories through tangible items that embodied meaning and memories in participants' minds and hearts. Narrative inquiry methodology asserts that research is relational. Thus, I kept memos from the start of data collection to track my biases and points at which data converged and/or diverged from my own experiences. I analyzed data through the process of crafting first person narrative profiles. I presented narrative profiles as part of the qualitative findings in order to maintain the integrity and wholeness of participants' stories and lived experiences. I then drew from Creswell (2018) and Riessman's (2008) recommendations for narrative research to conduct thematic data analysis. I also drew from Saldaña's (2016) recommendations for creating and organizing codes and developing deeper levels of qualitative analysis by theming the data. Thematic analysis was an integrative process in which I used coding and analysis from narrative profiles to continue coding and analysis thematically. To ensure reciprocity and rapport, I shared my life experiences, personal connection, and sense of purpose related to the topic of the study with each participant. Depending on the participant's preference, I either: 1) provided participants my detailed positionality statement and discussed any questions they had about it prior to interviews or 2) discussed my positionality verbally prior to interviews.

4.0 Chapter 4: Participant Profiles

Through a series of three in-depth interviews and the collection of artifacts, I sought to understand how Latinas in academia defined and made meaning of their communities of women. I also examined what funds of knowledge women exchanged within these communities and how communities influenced participants' bodymindspirit. The purpose of creating the narrative profiles was to maintain the integrity and authenticity of each participant's lived experiences, while presenting what communities of women meant to them. Each participant profile is a cohesive, yet comprehensive, narrative that conveys: 1) the participant's educational background and academic and/or professional roles, 2) how the participant defined her social identities (culture, ethnicity, race, and gender), 3) how the participant defined community of women, 4) how those communities were meaningful, 5) the influences of communities of women on participants' lives both within and outside of academia, 6) the funds of knowledge that women cultivated in their communities, and 7) how communities influenced participants' bodymindspirit.

I introduce each profile by describing the rapport that existed between the participant and me. Then, I provide a brief introduction to her most salient community/ies of women and the artifact she chose. To be clear, while profiles are written in the first-person voice using participants' words, my own decisions regarding which parts of their stories to omit and which to include means that profiles present a combined reality—the one experienced by participants, which they conveyed through their interviews, and the one shaped by my choices as I crafted profiles.

4.1 Amelia

Amelia and I met at a national conference in 2014 when we were both first-year PhD students. Since then, we stayed connected through social media and consistently had a meal or coffee together at annual conferences. Our mutual research interests on Latinas' professional and educational experiences and common experiences as Latina first-generation college students pursuing the PhD kept us connected over the years. At the time of our interviews Amelia had moved from the East Coast, where she completed her master's degree and was in the final stages of her PhD, to the Midwest, where she was completing her dissertation and working full-time in a mid-level administrative role at a university. As I was writing the findings for my dissertation study, Amelia completed her PhD.

Since Amelia was a PhD candidate and higher education practitioner, it was not surprising that her community of women was composed primarily of women in academia. When asked about the most meaningful communities of women in her life, she said "My *cousters* (cousin/sisters) and particularly my [East Coast] Women of Color peers are particularly central to my life and my success at this point in time." Her artifact was a GroupMe text messaging thread that she shared with these Women of Color doctoral students from the university on the East Coast. They shared this virtual space since before Amelia moved to the Midwest. This virtual space was a place where Amelia and her community of women could "share our woes...our successes," vent, and even stay accountable with one another in regard to their PhD journeys. Amelia spent the most time talking about her doctoral student peers from the East Coast. For this reason, Amelia's profile focuses mostly on her *cousters* and doctoral peers.

4.1.1 Education and Career: From low-income to McNair and then the PhD

I'm a PhD candidate at a University [on the East Coast]. I'm currently working on my dissertation as a full-time student and work full-time at a university in the Midwest. I manage a program meant to support low-income and underrepresented minority students. I am looking at how my practices can support [underrepresented students'] career readiness [and] retention, which is a nice blending, because overall my [research] interests revolve around underrepresented populations.

My parents did not have the opportunity to go to a four-year university. This high value for education was always instilled in me; that no matter what it takes, I needed to pursue my college education, particularly at a university. My mom barely finished high school. My dad, he's a Vietnam veteran. After returning back from the war he did go to a community college and pursued his associate's degree through the GI Bill. Because he went to community college, [he strongly believed] that in order to be successful, I needed to go to a university. It was without question that I would go straight for my bachelor's degree. He did not want me to apply to any school that did not have the word university in it. I knew I was going to go to college.

I would say my actual inspiration to pursue a PhD began in my undergraduate experience. I did not know what graduate education was. Through the help of mentors, I decided I wanted to pursue a career in higher education. One of my mentors actually encouraged me to apply for the McNair Scholars program. I was accepted to be in the McNair program. That's really what exposed me to the PhD and the opportunities that it can provide. Seeing and being around other students of color [through the McNair Program] from different colleges and universities was very inspiring and empowering for me. I knew I'd get the PhD at some point. I wasn't sure when.

Growing up low income, I never had the opportunity to get on a plane or travel or anything like that. McNair afforded me the opportunity to present at a research conference [away from my home state] my senior year in undergrad. So not only did it foster this idea of getting a PhD, but it really helped me to see that I could leave home and that there were some financial benefits to leaving home to pursue my PhD as well, which I would have never gotten otherwise.

4.1.2 Latina Identity: From Not Bilingual to Community Uplift

I'm third generation, technically. All my grandparents were born in Mexico, but they came as children. They basically lived their whole lives here. I always grew up knowing that I was Latina. Like this interconnected family [that I have]—it's cultural. I didn't really grow up learning necessarily different elements of my culture, but I knew that I was Mexican-American.

I did not grow up being bilingual; I grew up feeling guilty for that. I had to understand that I'm not bilingual because of the discrimination my mother experienced when she was in school speaking Spanish. Just because I'm not fully bilingual that doesn't make me less Latina. I will say at certain points, it definitely did make me feel that way [less Latina].

It wasn't really until I got to my undergraduate institution—a Hispanic-Serving Institution [in my home state]—that I got to connect more with others with similar backgrounds [Latinas and Latinos]. I also got to learn more about Mexican culture and cultures from other Latin-American countries. It wasn't until college that I was like, “Wow, there's 40 percent first-generation students, and there's 30 percent Latino students.” This is such an experience to see so many students who were collegebound, because I didn't see that as much in high school. That was great for me and for my own identity as a Latina.

Growing up where I did there should have been much more [cultural education]. It wasn't until much later, until I was working [in college] that I learned about the school segregation that happened within the Mexican and the white schools, and the Mendez case. I joined a Latino student forum [in college]. Through that student organization [I learned] more about the history of different events like, *Dia De Los Muertos* [and] *Posadas*. It was this organization and just connecting with peers and hearing their stories that exposed me to learn more about different cultural elements. Then in my doctoral studies, reading more about Chicana feminism really led me to learn more about the Chicano movement.

Currently [my Latina identity] means a sense of responsibility to give back and to advocate, at least in terms of education, on behalf of Latinos. [It means] understanding what the current [educational] trends are and what needs to be done in order to increase our educational attainment. The biggest shift is that this (Latina) identity has really built my activist orientation in trying to think about how the different types of professional jobs or research that I engage in support the educational completion of Latino and underrepresented students, because being Latina for me is also about growing up low income. [The low income identity] is very much part of my daily experiences. For many Latinos, I know it's often intertwined, but those two identities, are something for sure I really feel strongly. As a Latina, it [brings me satisfaction] to have more of us in different spaces and to support those that are coming behind us.

4.1.3 Gender: It's About Breaking Norms

I will say outside of pay equity, or pay inequity, I don't really think about being a woman necessarily as much as I do about being Latina, because I have experienced more inequities

because of being Latina than necessarily being a woman. [My mother] engrained in me that I need to learn to take care of myself and learn to advocate for myself—things that she didn't necessarily do for herself but recommend that I needed to. [For example,] I know being Latina and moving away from the family is not always looked at the most highly. My husband relocated to join me on the East Coast, and that's not usually the case. Usually it's quote-unquote the woman following the man. [However,] I viewed it more as an opportunity for [my] younger cousins to see that although it looks atypical, it's good. It's important to pursue your goals, even if our family doesn't quite understand [them or if you're breaking gender norms].

4.1.4 Personal Understanding of Bodymindspirit

To be honest, it (bodymindspirit) is not a term I have really ever heard until my doctoral studies and reading different Chicana feminist works. It's not something I've really been exposed to. I did grow up Catholic; I guess you could say [I am Catholic] by birth or affiliation, [although I now don't practice Catholicism].

When I hear the term [bodymindspirit] now, I think of this interconnectedness between the way in which I move in the world or the way in which I interact with others. Because I am one that does believe that everything happens for a reason, even if we don't know what that is, but that there is something greater than us that guides us, whether that is God or other spiritual beings. I haven't quite decided yet. I've wanted to explore my spirituality for years. It's on this list of things [I want to do] once I'm done with my PhD. I will say and that I've also thought more about bodymindspirit because of my husband's medical education. [Because of what I have learned through him, I now believe that] if your emotional state is hurt, [or] your mind—that can lead to

physical pain or other pain in your life. In order to be truly a healthy person, all of these different processes [body, mind and spirit] need to be in alignment.

4.1.5 Communities of Women: Meaning and Influences

The description you read [from the study's criterion survey] really captures a lot of the key elements that I think of [when I think of community of women]. I never necessarily thought of the term as community of women, but I would just say they're my support. I think of the women in my life, particularly Women of Color, who have provided emotional and personal support.

Being able to help talk through professional challenges. [For example,] I have professional aspirations, but I'm not always sure how to get there or how to best make a decision. Others who are in academia provide the support [and knowledge] that my parents cannot, simply because my parents did not go to a university. This community fills that gap, even in knowledge and emotional support as it relates to my graduate education. Also, when I think of a community of women, I think of my family providing that unconditional support. To me, to have a community means that you're in mutual support with one another.

In terms of what [my community of women] means within academia—it's like a persistence tool or a counterspace for some of the microaggressions that we experience in a classroom environment or just uncertainties and confusion about how to navigate this doctoral process. I haven't necessarily gone to any of them for work or that aspect of professional support. More so, it's always academic. I think everyone needs and really benefits from having some type of support, whether it's women or not. Mine just happens to be women. It is important to have a space to process all of that (PhD journey experiences) and to be affirmed and to know [the negative

experiences we go through in the PhD process] are not just in our head. I get that affirmation and a reminder that the work that I'm doing matters, even if it may be difficult to write some days, but that it's important. I matter and my perspective matters. I think it's just been getting that validation of things I already know from a perspective that I trust and that I know cares for me, and I care for them. [My community of women] offers a space to talk about our home life and families that impacts us in our pursuit of this degree.

Within my community of women, my cousins are the ones who influence my sense of purpose. I desire to continue to do the good work in hopes to be a role model for them, to give back to them. I think the biggest thing [that my community of women has taught me] is this notion that we need to use our voice in every sense of the word in different spaces—in home and work and school—and that our voice matters. I think that belief really influences the way that we all operate because we've gotten that affirmation from each other to speak up against something inequitable or to speak our mind in [difficult situations we encounter].

As for my peers and for my *cousters*—I can't even imagine what it (life) would look like to not have them, considering that this [PhD] education process is very isolating. I couldn't imagine not having these text messages where I could vent about [for example] how I ended up taking a nap for two hours and now I'm significantly behind and having an overflow of replies saying, "It's okay. Tomorrow is a new day" or "The day is still early. You can try to crank out an hour, or you can do it." [These women] provide perspective [and encouragement that keeps me going.] Knowing that I'm a resource and that others view me as a role model pushes me to keep moving, to make sure that I get it (PhD) done.

I have connected with Women of Color because we share common experiences like often being first-generation to attend college or coming from a low-income background. These identities

are salient to me every day. [My connections with white women] just haven't been the same because of some instances in class where white privilege would show up. Even when it's called out, it's perpetuated or dismissed.

4.1.6 Meaningful Communities of Women

Sorority sisters. My undergraduate institution was a Hispanic Serving Institution, and I ended up joining a sorority. It was not historically Latinas, but a majority of women were [Latinas]. Many of them pushed me to pursue leadership opportunities. I could reach out still to any one of them [my sorority sisters], and they would be there for me. They would listen [and] be a support. Five of them were bridesmaids [in my wedding, which happened years after college, while I was already in my doctoral program]. While the doctorate has taken me away from [them], I know they always will support [me].

Graduate school peers. Stella and I were the full-time [PhD] students. She's a Black female, and we connected pretty instantly over shared interests and wanting to serve first-generation populations. We had some commonalities to really bind us, [and it just] started to happen organically. Stella has been the number one support person for me during my PhD. In the first year, I was the only Latina in my PhD program. In my second year, one more [Latina] came, and then, in my third year, another Latina came. [In the first year of the doctoral program] Stella, our friend from the higher education doctoral program [named] Gina, and I joined together very quickly. During my first year, my connection with Stella was particularly critical because [I had just gotten engaged and was in a long-distance relationship], so having this connection with Stella made that transition [away from home and my fiancé and into the doctoral program] much easier.

There's no way that one can go through the [PhD] journey alone. Although, [Stella's and my] dissertation timelines are no longer at the same pace, [continuing] to be that support for one another has been critical, because there's things we know we can share in confidence with one another about our curriculum or about feedback we've received. Although, we have larger group chats with [the other Women of Color in the doctoral program], we (Stella and I) have our own one-on one-side chat. Because we went through the coursework together, being able to go on that journey with one another is completely critical. I think it's really those words of affirmation and encouragement that make it especially meaningful for me. [When I say words of affirmation and encouragement] I mean supporting me academically [and beyond]. [For example,] helping to practice a presentation with me or setting aside time to study with one another because we knew that we needed that accountability. In times where I hadn't reached my targeted deadline for a particular piece of my dissertation, [Stella would remind me] to continue to move at my own pace and that as long as I keep moving forward, that's all that matters.

I will also say, though, that not only academic but [Stella has given me] life-related support, too. [For the past two years I have been] coping with flare-ups of tendinitis and carpal tunnel in my hands, which has made typing and completing this dissertation very difficult. Particularly, at the peak of my tendinitis, she helped me by carrying books or driving me home. [She knew when I needed help], because we had a solid friendship. I'm not one to ask for help, but she's the same way. We know this about one another, so she would know when to step in. I think that's something that you don't always find with friendships, just that level of comfort to say, "Hey, I need help" and to be able to reach out and to uplift one another. She also helped me move and was my road trip partner moving from the East Coast to the Midwest. [Stella] sat with me in the car for like nine

hours, and [we had] conversations and reflections. You won't always find that type of support, someone to go on this long road trip and see you off.

[In my second PhD] year, we had three more individuals to add into our circle of support. The emotional support and words of encouragement have been really critical to get through this very difficult [PhD] process. When our imposter syndrome is rising, we can call it out very quickly to one another and be affirming. When I was living on the East Coast, we'd have study groups together on Saturdays but also make sure to have fun. [We would] schedule socials or happy hours to keep us rejuvenated. [Although I have moved away, the doctoral students from my program and I] remain in constant contact. [For example, we] spend time together at [national conferences] and have an annual reunion.

Having these friendships was amazing, particularly with the Women of Color who were PhD students, was critical. I connected a lot with the master's students who were Latina as well. There were three [Latina masters students] when I started as a PhD student. I found that they often looked to me for advice or support, venting, [and] encouragement. I felt truly privileged to be able to provide that to them. It also gave me a sense of purpose and a reminder that although I'm the only one [Latina] this [first] year as a PhD student, there's three that are master's students, and I'm here for them.

Graduate school peers' influence on bodymindspirit. Stella and Gina are strong Christian women. They strongly believe that God will handle all of this—our dissertations and things like that. [Through them I have learned about] how spirituality and faith can help to keep us balanced. For them, it's really more about spirituality and faith.

[Within the] PhD Women of Color [group] we had...conversations about needing to take care of all aspects of ourselves. We would realize we're working too hard, and sometimes people

would start to get colds and get sick. Eventually, it would hit us all. We'd realize, if we'd taken time to rejuvenate our spirit or the emotional aspect of our wellbeing, [we'd be healthier]. We often could point out how we need all of these different aspects [body, mind, and spirit] to really be in alignment with one another [in order to] truly be well and to be healthy and to really push and put our best foot forward. We often talk about how we neglect our physical selves. We all talk about that.

Cousters: Bonding with Anna about education. [Anna] is my youngest *couster*. I've always had a very close connection with her. She looks to me as an older sister; she's the only one (*couster*) that did go on to college and aspires to get a master's degree. Knowing that she looks to me as a role model, as someone [to provide] advice and support, that's pushed me to continue to do well because [earning this PhD is] not just for myself. It's for her as well. It's for my family. We have this special bond in a different way than the others [cousin-sisters], because she knows the higher education environment [and aspires to earn a higher education]. I would just mention her as the third motivation [as I pursue my degree].

4.2 Alma

Alma and I met at a national conference in the fall of 2017 when I was recruiting participants for my study; she was a third-year PhD student in education. I told her about my research and she was immediately interested. We shared common research interests in Latina and Latino students and race and equity issues. We also shared common experiences as Latina PhD students and first-generation college students. Alma and I both came from working-class families;

she had two younger sisters, and I had three younger sisters. In our introductory phone call, I told her the purpose of my study and shared my own personal background with her and why this topic was meaningful to me. We also talked what we shared in common both academically and personally, which helped us establish rapport for the subsequent interviews. Currently, we still connect over social media and text messages.

4.2.1 Education: “Border Town Bubble” to the PhD

I'm in my third year in the education policy PhD program at Oak University on the West Coast. My concentration is higher education. I'm a research assistant at an education center focusing on underrepresented students. My research is very heavy on facilitation and consulting elements. I'm getting a really good sense of what it's like, not only to be a faculty member, but an administrator.

I grew up along the [U.S./Mexico] border. I always went to public school. When I was in school, even though it was a public school and even though it wasn't the best school, I was oblivious to all of that. I was sheltered [when I was young. I only knew my border community, nothing beyond it]. I did really well in elementary and middle school. I'm the oldest of three girls [so I had] a lot of pressure on me to be their role model. I had to get really good grades for my parents. They instilled that in me. When I started middle school, my dad forced me to be in a magnet program that was focused on math and science. I also did the high school version of that math and science program. Being in that community of people focused on college, engineering, and medicine is ultimately what I attribute to me going away to college.

When I finally left the border town bubble and went [to college], it was difficult because I went to a [private college that was] predominantly white and religiously affiliated. It was a big culture shock. Even though it was the same religion [that I grew up with], it (the college) held different values. When I got there, I didn't fit in because I wasn't blond. I didn't drive a Mercedes.

[Mostly] everyone that I went to school with came from really affluent backgrounds. My family was working class. My dad was a mechanic and my mom was a receptionist. The reason I went to that school other than the religious affiliation was that it had a good premedical program. [Eventually,] I realized that I didn't really want to do that (study medicine). I didn't like the school and I didn't feel like that was how my college experience should be, so I just decided to leave.

I went back home and enrolled at the University of Willow, a Hispanic Serving Institution. I grew up going to University of Willow events because my dad was a student when I was growing up. I felt really at home there. When I went to University of Willow, I felt like I regained my strength, and I was able to figure out what I wanted to study. I was writing a paper in my photojournalism class on the border wall and interviewed an anthropology professor for the paper. All he studied was the border and borderlands. From there, I decided to major in anthropology. [After getting that] exposure and rejuvenation at University of Willow, I transferred again. [I transferred because] I was the first person in my family to go away to college [and felt] pressure to be successful away.

Once I found my strength again I transferred to Sequoia University. [I decided to go there because it was in my home state], so it still felt like home. I double majored in anthropology and creative writing. I got paid a stipend to do research in my senior year. That was my first [time] getting access to faculty mentors and conferences. My research was on Chicano literature. [After graduating,] I became a sixth-grade AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) teacher.

The school was 98 percent Latino and mostly free and reduced lunch. It was very similar to the school that I went to, mostly Latino. That's how I started becoming interested in college access for marginalized and minoritized students.

So, I got my master's degree in educational leadership and policy studies with a concentration in higher education administration. I had two graduate assistantship positions while I was in my master's. One was at the McNair Scholars Office. I [once more] got that exposure working with students that were first generation college students—students that I saw myself in. Through my [second] research assistantship, which was in my department, I got to work with [two well-known and established Latina scholars in the field of higher education] and that's how I got the PhD bug. They helped me figure out the PhD application process and reach out to faculty. At the same time, I used strategies [for applying to graduate school] that I learned through my assistantship with the McNair Scholars Office.

4.2.2 Latina Identity: Home is still in my Borderland Community

Growing up on the border, I never had to think about being a Latina. I never had to think about being Mexican. Everyone else was like that (Mexican). It (our Latino culture and ethnicity) was a part of everything. Speaking Spanish at school was common. Speaking Spanish, English, and Spanglish at home was common. I never questioned it because it was just everywhere.

I would go to church with my grandparents, and it was in Spanish. Then, we would go to the *mercado* {market} or go visit some *tios* {uncles and aunts}. It (our Latino culture and ethnicity) wasn't ever anything that I felt ashamed of. I knew all along that I was Latina, that I was Mexican. Well, I'm American, my family is Mexican, but I consider myself Mexican. Even though I wasn't

born in Mexico—that's how we would define ourselves (Mexican). Also, there weren't many other Latinos, because we were on the border with Mexico. We didn't have any other countries represented. It was mostly just Mexican. I think it wasn't until I went away to college that I realized not every place was like [my hometown]. That contributed to part of that struggle [in college]. I felt that I was so different; I took for granted all the time that I was like everybody else.

[At the private, predominantly white college I attended] I was the only person with dark brown hair and brown eyes in my classes. Even though I'm pretty fair, I was still very different from everybody, and they could tell that I was different. Even my education was different. The way that I spoke was different. I didn't feel good for the first time being in a classroom. Whereas, the rest of my life I was always a top [student]. I'm glad that I did [attend that institution], because it jump-started my realization that the world is not like [my hometown, in terms of being majority Latinos and Mexicans], but it was hard to [realize that]. [In order to gain sense of belonging,] I got into *baile folklórico* {folkloric dance}—a [traditional Latin American] dance company—at the college. What I loved about it is we would go to our rehearsals and just escape [and most of the other students in the dance company were also from my home state]. Everyone would speak Spanish or Spanglish. I ended up enjoying that much more than my classes.

[My Latina identity is] always evolving, but more recently, at this phase that I'm in, being close to starting a family, I find myself wanting to go back home. In my [educational] journey, I always intended to leave so that I could come back to make my city better, to make my community better, and help the people that are in my community. It was always this form of social justice [that motivated me]. Even though I didn't always articulate it in that way, that was always my intent. I've missed out on family for so long, since I was 18, which is 12 years. I want to come back, and I want to just enjoy it for me [and build my own family there]. [Lastly, when I was younger, being

Latina] was something I didn't think about, because it was everywhere [in my community and family]. Now I don't live in a [predominantly Latino community,] but if you come into our home, it (Latino culture) is here.

4.2.3 Gender Identity: Between *Virgencita* and Badass

[My gender identity is] always evolving. When I was younger, I was very girly. I was very protected. The men in my family would see us [girls] as little angels or little princesses that couldn't be messed with, so I was very sheltered. Then, I went away [to college] and I got to see that I could still be Latina and not be an image of that perfect *virgencita* {sacred virgin/saint}. I can still be a little bit hard and badass. It has taken years to find a way to keep that pure image of what I was always told a woman was like [growing up, while still being myself]. [I realize that] in Mexican culture, even though there is a lot of machismo, the families are always centered around a matriarch. My grandmothers were badass [family matriarchs]. They would call you on your shit and put people in their place. I'm starting to see that even though I was told to be quiet, obedient, and angelic-like, my grandmothers were the opposite of what I was told. I'm finding a middle [ground] somewhere. I want to be that person that's going to call you out and be intimidating [at times], because I don't want to be that nice sweet person that gets walked all over.

4.2.4 Personal Understanding of Bodymindspirit

The concept [of bodymindspirit] was new to me, but I think I've always been very intuitive and very in tune with my feelings and my intuition. [For example, when] I was considering doing

science as a career, I knew that I wasn't going to really enjoy my life if I did that, and I wanted to do something that was going to bring me joy and make me happy. If it meant not making as much money I was fine with that, because for me it's more about being happy. [My current conflict is that] after I get my degree I want to start a family—that's what's in my heart. Then, my mind is telling me faculty job. It's hard because those things aren't totally aligned. If I can find a way to make them align, that would be great.

Also, we (PhD students) are always told to pay attention to work-life balance. When you're always thinking about doing work, taking care of yourself gets left off. I've tried to be very aware of this balance between my mind, my body, my health, and also spirituality. [My spirituality now] is more non-secular. I try meditating and do things that typically the church that I grew up in would see as witchcraft or *brujeria* {witchcraft}. I guess this [bodymindspirit] goes back to *brujeria* {witchcraft}. I always felt like there's been some kind of spiritual guide that's helped me make those decisions when it comes to my intuition, [and] part of my culture is to recognize that after people pass, they guide us.

4.2.5 Community of Women: Meaning and Influences

The way that I think of community of women is a group of women that are supportive of one another, are empowering, will advocate for each other, and a space where you can be your authentic self. That's what I thought when you first asked me if I wanted to participate. Something that I've been thinking about is that I wouldn't be in this PhD program anymore if I didn't have this community of women that has helped me and supported me through this journey. If it felt like it was just me, on my own, I don't know what I would do. It wasn't until this PhD program that I

started connecting with other women – mostly Women of Color. I started connecting with women, because we realized by being in this environment that there are so few of us, and we had to come together.

[Beyond just survival,] I would definitely say empowered [is how my community of women makes me feel]. We have tried to empower and lift each other up. It's made me see that I need to do that more for other Latinas that I interact with. It's made me conscious of that kind of paying it forward. The validation that I've gotten in this program has come from my peers [especially my community of women]. [The sense of validation I get has] reminded me of why I'm here, and that I deserve to be here. Within my community I feel a confidence boost—like I deserve to be here, because I've worked hard to be here. When I started [the PhD] in 2015, we were already having conversations about how students of color, historically, have left the program. Maybe that's also why I articulate the impact of this community [as] me deserving to be here and me feeling like I can stay here, because there's so much language around how students of color are leaving [the program].

[Forming a community with women of color in the PhD program came naturally to me, because] I grew up with mostly women. I feel safe in that community. I feel protected. There's a lot of guidance that takes place [between women in my family]. Since I grew up in that environment of having my needs met by other women who knew what I was going through and who could guide me in the ways that their mothers and sisters guided them, it made sense that when I got to graduate school that I was going to rely on another community of women. It's just where I feel most comfortable.

4.2.6 Meaningful Community of Women: PhD Peers

When my cohort started in 2015, there were four women of color: three Latinas, myself included, and one Black woman. In the fifth week of school, one of the Latinas left the program. That moment was when we started realizing that we were more than just women in classes together. We had to be this support for each other. Then it became the three of us: me, my friend, Noelia, she's a Latina, and Mercy, who is Black and Asian. After that, I think the three of us, we realized no one's going to look out for us, so we have to have each other's backs. We were intentional about it, but through that, we also developed a real friendship.

We started off by just splitting and outline the readings. I would outline [readings] and share them with the other two women. When we would have to participate in class, I would try to participate on the readings that I did very closely. It gave each of us an opportunity to show our skills when we would talk in class.

All the students of color in my cohort would want to lead [class discussion] on the weeks that were on issues about race, or intersectionality. [However,] we wouldn't spend a lot of time on these topics when I'd bring them up. What I got out of the reading wasn't validated [by my classmates or professors]. [Instead,] it was like, "Yeah, that's fine, but let's talk about what this white guy mentioned earlier." Because we (Noelia, Mercy, and I) were going through that together, we started advocating for each other. We started a group message. So, while the class was unfolding we would be having conversations in the group message on our laptops [either about the issues in the readings that we cared about or we'd validate the points we tried to make in class.] We weren't trying to be bad students. It was that I would say something and it would just get

dismissed, so they would type and say, “That was great, Alma. I'm so glad you brought that up.” We would validate each other in the computer space.

[Eventually, we started advocating for each other verbally in class discussions.] They would advocate for me and bring it [back into the verbal class discussion] again, later. They would say, “Before we move on to this article, can we go back to Alma’s question from earlier?” It became a performance; we would need to perform by telling [or showing] the rest of the class how great we were, so that they could realize it too. It gave me more courage to participate in a way that I didn't really feel empowered to [until we started validating each others’ points of view.] Some days, we made our voices known more than others, and some days, we were just like “I don't feel like doing this.” Through everything, we were able to advocate for each other, validate one another, and create a space for ourselves that said, “We belong here, too.” Now, we support each other as PhD students and women of color in PhD programs, but we also definitely have a friendship that goes beyond it. We consider each other more like sisters. We call each other scholar sisters. Sometimes, we call each other *chingonas*. This [our community of women] is the only space where we can be ourselves.

[These women know me, beyond just my academic self. For example,] my whole life, people [close to me] called me Ali. When I got to grad school, I never told people to call me Ali, so it just stayed Alma. I almost feel like I have these two different identities. I have Ali, who is me, but then I have Alma, who is academic. My community of women in the program, they know that I'm Ali, because they've met my family and they've heard my family call me Ali. They've met my husband and he calls me Ali. With the women of color in my program that I have this community with, they know all of me. They know me as a student. They know me as a wife. They know me as a sister. They know me as a daughter, because they've seen me interact in all of these

spaces. That alone is meaningful, because I don't have to try. I don't have to sugarcoat anything. If I'm having a bad day, I'm going to say, "This is what's going on in my life." It's refreshing in this academic space, where I'm always performing what a student or researcher is like. It's so nice to have this other pocket, where I can literally just be me. It's meaningful, in that sense, because I don't have to put on this mask. It's also meaningful because we support each other, and we encourage each other.

With everybody else [who is in academia but not part of my community] I have this separate identity. I didn't do that on purpose, but it just happened that way because I never had interactions that led to personal connections with anybody outside of that community. It was just always academic, so it just stayed academic. Maybe it's a defense mechanism. Also, outside [of this community of women], where I'm more academic, I'm very guarded. I will not show emotion, because I don't feel comfortable being vulnerable in that space. I won't tell jokes. I won't be silly. In this other space [within my community], I have that freedom to be vulnerable, to be goofy, to say things that I wouldn't say in academic spaces. It's still taking place on campus. It's just a little bubble away from all the other shit.

[Within our community] we're all trying to help each other graduate. I want to succeed, so that they can succeed and vice versa. One thing that we do a lot of [to cheer each other on] is celebrate each other's birthdays and celebrate the milestones [we meet in the program.] We go over to each other's houses to work and after we make time to do fun things as a reward. We'll watch a movie, go out for drinks, or go to a concert.

[We also share the knowledge we gain from Women of Color mentors with each other.] It's kind of been happening all along. [For example,] each of us has sought out professors that are Women of Color to mentor us. By doing that, we have gotten nuggets of information and really

good mentoring strategies from these women. We've shared [this information] with each other. We get mentoring from these other women, and then we share it with each other. That's been really helpful. We need to seek out mentorship from these women, because at Oak University there aren't that many women of color in our community, especially professors. Even though I know it's an additional labor on Women of Color, Women of Color professors have told me that it's part of their pedagogy [to provide mentorship]. It's not compartmentalized, so they're going to mentor graduate students. I'm just taking it (mentorship) in, and then, sharing whatever resources I'm given [with my community of women].

Community of women's influence on sense of purpose. [Due to my community of women's influence,] I'm more aware of and more intentional about what I'm doing to mentor other Latinas. I feel like that has become part of the purpose of why I'm here [earning my PhD]. It's not just to graduate. I deserve to be here, but [actually] we all deserve to be here. I realize the importance of making space for other Latinas, and for other Women of Color. I'm just very aware that that's necessary to get us to these next positions [post PhD]. The PhD is like hazing. It's hard. It's all these things that we don't like, and people say you just got to play the game. I hate that, because to me, playing the game means you have to act white. For me, it [the PhD] also means creating this community where we can empower each other. That's how we also bring in other people and start to really change what the academy is like. I don't want to play the game. I want to change the game. I also know that in order to do that, we do have to survive, [and I do survive because I have the support of my community of women.]

Race and class matter. [Our race and class unite us, which helps us survive and thrive in academia.] [As I mentioned, in my PhD cohort] there were four women of color, and there was one white woman. One of the women of color dropped out. The white woman [in our cohort]

would play the [academic] game. She knew academia. She knew how to do it well. She had the cultural capital, and she had the language, and she had the whole package. It felt like she would overperform in class at the expense of making us look bad. [So] I couldn't connect with her on any level, beyond academic, because I was just so violated by the way that she would perform academia and how it was so individualistic. It (her over performance) would pin her against the other women. [She overperformed] to make herself look good. She would tell us that she went to private school schools and college-prep schools. [Because of her educational background] she knows how to perform in academic spaces. She was not working-class. But the three of us had that in common; we were working-class. Because we (Noelia, Mercy and I) were all conscious of that—[not only were] we all women of color, but there's also the class element—we were aware of the need to really lift each other up, because we didn't want another woman of color to leave the program.

Validation and support. [The reality is that] I don't think I would stick around in academia if there was not a community of women that I could go to or rely on. Although there are plenty of women, especially in education—a lot of them just play the game. Academia is like a boys' club. Everything that we do in academic spaces—our publication process, qualifying exams, and our dissertation process—those processes all benefit white men and the way that they've been conditioned to perform their whole lives. [For me,] it's counterintuitive. It's not conducive to the way that I know how to act or perform as a Woman of Color. The women that do that might as well just be men, because they operate in that way that's perpetuating the status quo of academia being white and male.

There are those of us that don't know how to do that, don't have the cultural or social capital to do that or don't want to do that. I don't want to play the game. If I didn't have my specific community of women, or women like the ones that are in my community to go to, I would

definitely not feel like this space was for me. I don't see how it could be sustainable emotionally or mental-health-wise. I wouldn't be able to sustain that for a long period of time, because I wouldn't ever feel like anyone understood me.

[However, my community of women makes me feel like I do belong here.] [For example,] we have a group where we meet once a week. We're all preparing for our qualifying exam. Every week that we meet, we bounce ideas off of each other, like, "This is what I was thinking for my dissertation. What are your thoughts?" That's been really great, because I'm doing reading on my own. But, it's not enough for me to just take notes and outline. It's nice to have people checking in. Because even though my best friends from home or my family know that I'm stressed because it's finals time, they don't know how to support me. They (family members) can call me and they can gossip about something from back home, but my community of women in the PhD program, they can ask me questions about how I'm doing, how my finals are going. They ask questions in ways that show that they know what it's like [going through qualifying exams.] There's also the personal element regarding the future. We're able to have those conversations, like, "Here's where I'm at. I don't know if I want to be a professor. I don't know if I want this lifestyle forever. I want to start having kids."

Community of women's influence on bodymindspirit. [Additionally,] my community of women in this program has always talked about self-care and how you need to take care of yourself and take care of your body. My community of women has created an awareness that I didn't have before just by emphasizing how important it is to really think about health in a holistic way. [Noelia and Mercy] take care of their minds by taking care of their bodies. They make a date to work out, and they stick to it. I used to say, "Oh, maybe I'll go work out today," and then I would

get too tired and I wouldn't do it. Seeing that they can commit and do it so naturally has definitely been a motivation for me.

To be honest, I don't know if I thought about bodymindspirit before I moved to the West Coast. People talk a lot about self-care [here in the West Coast]; that's a buzzword these days. Prior to coming here, I never really thought about it. Everyone [here] meditates, everyone does yoga, and everyone goes to therapy. I never grew up hearing those words. Now that I'm here [in the West Coast], and it's encouraged, it's made me aware of this need to take care of myself, holistically.

4.3 Conchita

Conchita and I met through mutual friends and had known each other for three years at the time of this study. Throughout the years, we often bonded over our graduate school experiences, supported each other, and grew a friendship. Conchita had moved to the United States from Mexico to begin her PhD program. Upon moving to the U.S., she immediately became aware, through her own experiences, that her racial identity was perceived differently in the U.S. than in Mexico. Conchita spent a lot of time learning the meaning of her racial identity within the U.S. context as a light-skinned Latina. Throughout her interviews, she discussed how much it meant to her to maintain a balance between her Mexican identity and her identity as a researcher in the United States. Her PhD peers and female family members, specifically her mother and two godmothers, composed her most meaningful communities of women.

Conchita's artifact, a tattoo of a traditional Mexican rag doll, symbolized her commitment to stay true to her identities. Conchita explained the meaning of her artifact, saying:

The tattoo is a Mexican doll that represents my origins as a Mexican woman. The Maria doll is representative of an indigenous woman who tends to be really submissive. The idea was to take that image and repurpose it to express that...I'm a Mexican fighter. I chose the symbol of her not having a mouth because my spirit shall speak for my race. Who I am and my race is part of my spirit. My spirit will speak for who I am—for who my people are. I'm always reminded that I'm not only myself—I'm an ambassador here [in the U.S.] of my people [in Mexico]. The flowers and leaves around [the doll] represent how if you keep true to yourself, and let my spirit speak, good things will come out of it—things will grow. In a more abstract or spiritual sense, [the tattoo is about] carrying Mexican women who didn't get to do what they wanted with me. This artifact represents the person I want to be spiritually, what I want to embody as a researcher, the kind of mom I want to be for my kids, for my daughters, if I have daughters. It gives me peace; it's a reminder, every day of life, of the person I want to be.

The tattoo exemplifies all three concepts: community of women, funds of knowledge, and bodymindspirit. First, it is grounded in the Mexican cultural knowledge and tradition that the Maria doll represents, but simultaneously “repurposes” tradition to capture what being a Mexican women means for Conchita. Second, it embodies the broader community of Mexican women that inspire Conchita's purpose as a mixed-race Latina researcher to positively influence the educational journeys of Women of Color in the sciences. Third, the tattoo illustrates Conchita's bodymindspirit sense—who she is and wants to be spiritually. The tattoo shows how Conchita's spirituality and purpose as a researcher are connected.

4.3.1 Education: Teaching, Science, and Sexism

I'm a fourth year PhD student in learning sciences and graduate student researcher at Peony University. [I ended up here in a PhD, because in Mexico] I majored in engineering. [During college,] I did chemistry research for about three years intensely. I didn't like the environment, and I got really disappointed with how it worked, so I decided not to pursue a graduate degree in chemistry. [Instead,] I taught in a Catholic all-girls school for a year. [My students were 14 and 15 years old.] While I was teaching, I realized a lot of my students felt they were not smart enough to do science. So, I focused my teaching on raising their self-efficacy and confidence to make them believe that they can be whatever they want. While this was happening, I realized that education was the thing I wanted to research, rather than chemistry.

[My own educational experiences also motivated me to get a PhD in education.] In college I went through a lot of harassment and discrimination. The men in my classes wouldn't take me seriously. If I wore makeup, that meant that I was not smart enough. My chemistry advisor sexually harassed me. In the end, it was just a really bad environment. It just so happened that my boyfriend at the time came to Dewy City, so I came to Dewy City [and started my PhD.]

4.3.2 Latina Identity: Understanding the Meaning of my Race

[Arriving in Dewy City made me see my race and ethnicity differently.] I grew up in Mexico, so I knew I was Mexican. That was my country and my identity, but I don't know if I associated with an ethnicity or with being Latina. I didn't think we were part of a bigger thing. The other [Latin American] countries were different countries. I didn't feel like there was kinship.

[When I lived in Mexico,] I would just say I was Mexican. [Now,] I identify as a mixed-race Latina.

[In Mexico,] I guess you're aware that you have lighter skin than other people, but the awareness of me being white didn't exist. I was white, so I didn't have to realize it; I was the privileged one. I never thought of myself as having a race. With my nationality, when I was little, I felt like people were either Black or white, even brown people were white. For me, the world was either you were Black, or you were not Black. It was a binary. As I grew up, American stuff started to arrive faster [because of a commerce trade agreement in the '90s.] If you had American stuff, that gave you status, especially in private school, [which I attended]. Having Americanized behavior was supposed to be better. Then on top of that, part of my family comes from France, but my grandfather never taught my parents French, so I always felt disconnected. I felt lost. I went through this whole confusing phase where I didn't know what I was. It's been really confusing my whole life, between being Americanized is better or being European is better.

When I was back home I went to private school, I was super privileged. I had a car. My dad paid for everything. The only thing I needed to do was study. I would say the first time I realized there was some privilege was when I went to public college [in Mexico]. That is when I realized there were people who didn't have something to eat. People tended to be brown, people came from different backgrounds, and there I realized there was a class divide.

So, when I arrived here (Dewy City), I started feeling people look at me differently. They didn't count me as one of them. I became, you know like, "She's a Mexican girl. She's a Latina." It became my descriptor; I was different. That led me to question myself and my beliefs [about race]. I started reading a lot and speaking with a lot of people, and I eventually I realized, "Yes, I

count as a person of color here, because I open my mouth and I lose my privilege because I have an accent. Things work really differently here.”

I appreciated my culture [even more] since I moved here. I became way stricter about cooking Mexican food and celebrating on *Dia de los Muertos*. Every time there’s a potluck we (my husband and I) cook Mexican food. [Now, I understood that] no matter how white you are, if you have an accent, you become racialized. Being Latina is like a race, rather than a country thing, or a cultural thing. That is how it’s all been changing. The more privilege I lose, the more I realize [what race means]. It took moving here to understand myself as a part of a bigger thing.

4.3.3 Gender: “My reaction was to be the total opposite.”

[While my light skin gave me privilege in Mexico that was never the case for my gender.] For me, being female has always been associated with certain behaviors that were expected from my [Mexican] culture. But, I always had non-feminine traits. [For example,] I did engineering, I didn’t wear makeup, I was too talkative, or I spoke too loud. I was not demur. I feel like it (female gender) always was associated with expectations that I didn’t fit.

[In academia] I took it as, “Oh, I’m not expected to wear makeup because I’m in academia. I’m not expected to be pretty. I’m not expected to dress nice. So, I’m going to show you that you can do it, I’m going to wear makeup.” The opposite was expected of me, so then I re-appropriated the things. When I was in Catholic school [gender] expectations were super feminine, [so] my reaction was to be the total opposite. I just like messing with the world. Right now, being a woman just means destroying the patterns. It means fighting every single day to change stuff for me and for others—to just smash patriarchy.

4.3.4 Personal Understanding of Bodymindspirit

For me, intuition is super connected to that (bodymindspirit). I used to consider myself a person with really good intuition, and I feel like my gut reactions always turned out to be justified. When I'm doing exercise there's this thing that happens where my mind relaxes, and my spirit relaxes. I feel not only my body's healing, but I'm literally detoxing my spirit when I'm exercising. I believe there is some bodymindspirit thing going on inside of me. I just don't know how to explain it.

I still consider myself Catholic, but the more I speak with Latinas on Twitter who are into the *brujeria* {witchcraft} spiritual community, the more it makes sense to me. It's funny because one of them told me, "Oh, I don't see it as against Catholicism, it's just another way of communicating. It's just that we were taught that it was not okay to feel this magic. So, we would be shamed." I haven't gotten to the point where I know how to explain it. It's just one of those things that I've been exploring over the last couple of months, but I'm still not sure where I'm at.

4.3.5 Defining Communities of Women

I feel like community sounds like every little arch group that relates to each other. If I were to name women who are meaningful to me, some of them don't know each other. It's like in pairs almost. It's hard to think of it as a community when I'm the one engaging with parts of them. It isn't a whole group together. Maybe it's a network of women. My network is [composed of] different women that I found. Each person in the network has been a woman or a couple women

that speak to a specific part of me but not to all of me. I reach out to each of them in different moments depending on what I need or depending on the situation.

4.3.6 Communities of Women: Meaning and Influences

Mexican women: Mother and godmothers. The first ones are my mom and my two aunts, from my mom's side. They (aunts) are both my godmothers. One is from my baptism. The other is from my communion. They're the closest women that I have in my family. They're overbearing. I want to kill them most of the time. In the end [though], they love me unconditionally. [I think my aunts love me unconditionally], because I was the first girl who was born in the family. In Latina family [culture], women want to have women [daughters], because it's how you pass on stuff. Even though stereotypically speaking we're not the ones who control the money or have the jobs, in Latina culture women are the strongest. We're expected to be strong. So, you want to be able to provide the girls with that base—that love—so she can be strong for her family. We get that message more than boys do. I think that is part of the reason they love me unconditionally. It's part of this tradition of passing on how important family is and how I am supposed to do the same thing. That kind of love is really hard to find anywhere else.

[I know they love me unconditionally, because] the three of them planned my wedding. They went to the markets. They did all the appointments. My relationship with them is complicated, [because] they see me as the rebellious one. [For example,] I lived in sin (with my husband before getting married); I'm getting a tattoo; I have a nose piercing.

[Our relationships have evolved though.] I'm now my mom's confidant. It's really weird [for me], because for a long time I felt that I was not what I thought she wanted me to be. She says

that I'm really different from her—that I'm really brave. [She says] I changed her perspective. I showed her that having a tattoo or a piercing is not bad. I don't think she totally approves, but she is at peace knowing that those were the right decisions for me.

[My mother has taught me what I don't want.] [For example,] service [to others] is my mom's calling. She loves serving people. She volunteers at the community hospital. She stays with my grandmother. She has this super selfless life. Watching her has shown me that I don't want to be that person. It's not that I don't want to serve others. I don't want to be the person that *only* serves others.

Most of my life I've struggled with the three of them (mom and godmothers), because they're not like me. I've always been rebellious for a Latina. I was not a little [proper] woman. I didn't behave correctly. The three of them are really poised and religious. They are all devotees of the Virgin Mary. The Virgin Mary's supposed to be an example of how to be a woman, and that never fit with who I was. As I grew up, I tried to escape where I came from. When I came here [to Dewy City], I think our relationships got better.

I met my confirmation godmother in a youth group. She was about 16 when I met her. To me, she was as adult because I was around 12. We clicked immediately, because we were both super nerdy. We read books. We were super intellectual. We didn't fit in. She became a mentor figure. When I was younger, knowing that she was like me made me feel like it was okay to be myself. Always having her with me has made me feel like it's okay to be myself. As I grew older, we became super good friends. When I do something wrong, I call her *Pa que me regañe* {so she can reprimand me}, because sometimes you need to hear it from somebody you trust and loves you unconditionally. I do that a lot. She sometimes calls me for the same thing. I was really lonely but having her made me feel like it was okay to be myself—that there was nothing wrong with me.

Community of women's influences within and beyond academia. People back home have become my biggest cheerleaders. Every time I post something [on social media] about what I do, they're the first ones to like it. All the people I just mentioned, they're the first ones to write that I'm amazing and that I'm brave. It feels weird and great at the same time. It's this constant feeling that I'm going to disappoint them.

[Back home,] they have the highest idea of me. Maybe they even know, more than I do, what I can accomplish in life. Every time I feel like I'm faltering or falling, they are like, "You're crazy. You're not. You're doing us proud." At the same time, it's super hard, because, even though they're my biggest cheerleaders, [I feel like] "What if I fail? What if Mexico smart is not the same as American smart?" There's this idea back home that only brilliant people get to leave the country, because you were meant to do great things. But, most of the time I don't feel that way. It's really hard. They keep me grounded, but at the same time, making them proud is the biggest burden on my shoulders. I don't know how to balance the expectations most of the time, [even though] they don't understand what I'm doing [in my PhD] half of the time. Knowing that many women back home don't get to do what I do, it feels like it's a disservice to them if I don't succeed. I'm doing it for all of them. I'm putting this [burden] on myself.

Community of women's influence on bodymindspirit. My family definitely influenced me spiritually—[specifically] my grandmother, my mom, and my aunts. I've always been super spiritual. That is something that is deeply important to me. My confirmation godmother allowed me to first believe in my inner magic. She understood what it was like to be bullied, not have friends, and be so lonely. For her, it was about making me realize I had inner magic. [The church youth group we were in] would do a leadership retreat every year. They took me [to the retreat]

when I was 11. She (my godmother) told me that I had a natural gift for that (leadership); it was part of that inner magic.

Bodymindspirit has to do with the paying it forward. I feel like it is this inner harmonic energy balance that I have to give to the universe. Today [for example], we had [a graduate student] panel with administration and my job was to represent the voices of the people of the school. I feel like I had to ask the hard questions that they were afraid to ask. That has to do a lot with my feeling of being good with the universe, being good with God, being good with the people who have loved me. I think it always goes back to that—to my bodymindspirit sense—that inner magic. I've always been told that I should be in service to others [through leadership and being a voice for those who may not be able to advocate for themselves].

Graduate school peers. [I have two PhD communities of women. One is through my program cohort. The other I sought out myself. It's a research team led by a Latina professor, Dr. Lopez, with students of color.] [Within my cohort,] Cora and I are inseparable. We're together all the time. If something happens, people are like, "What, are you texting Conchita about what's just happened?" We're partners in crime. I know I can call her whenever I need. She knows when I need a break and when I need to relax. She forces me to leave the house even when I don't want to leave. We've gone to the theater. We've gone to L.A. We've gone exercising. I think I'm sane because of her. The only reason I haven't gone crazy is because of her. She's always there. She's like three doors away from me [in the office]. When something bad happens, I can just go to her office and close the door and yell. I feel like you need somebody like that in grad school. [My two other women cohort members] are really good to me, but I would say Cora is the main one. [At a personal level,] Cora's wisdom is in her actions, which remind me that all of my life here (Dewy

City) doesn't have to be with Eric (husband) only. She has made sure that I have a life [as] an independent woman, and that keeps me happy.

Even though Cora's great, I feel like the closest thing I have to a community is with Dr. Lopez [and the research team]. It feels like more of a community because we're Latinas. I just know that was lacking in my life. When I started going to the [research] meetings, I felt like I was finally complete in Dewy City. The dynamic I feel with Dr. Lopez and [the other women of color on the research team] is more like a family type of community. It's something that I hadn't had since back home [in Mexico]. I think it has to do with the culture; Americans are not like that (so family-oriented).

Even though I sometimes feel like I'm jumping between the white and the non-white side. Being mixed and being white presenting makes me feel like I'm just toeing the line between both things all the time. I would be lying if I said I didn't fit in white spaces. When I'm surrounded by [white] people that actually support me for who I am and are not racist, it's just like I'm one of them. The only thing distinguishing me is an accent. I don't have a skin color that reminds them [that I'm a Woman of Color].

What these women mean to me within and beyond academia. The women I'm friends with [in Dewy City] are all in academia. [In my cohort] I'm seen as the most successful, academically speaking. I'm the one who has more papers, more connections, [and] a better CV. [More so than providing academic support,] the role [Phd peers] have is mostly about understanding [what I'm going through in the PhD and] telling me I'm not crazy when I'm mad about something. Seeing them going through the same pain as me [in the PhD] is useful. I'm like, "Okay. At least it's a collective suffering."

[In addition to that support,] I purposefully looked for the community with [Dr. Lopez and her research team] to make me more critical about race [and] to [help me] understand my experiences with race. I sought them out purposefully, because I was really confused. I didn't know if I could call myself a Woman of Color. I didn't know what it meant. I didn't understand race. [In that community,] I feel like the clueless one [oftentimes], because since I was born outside of the U.S., I know less about [critical racial perspectives]. [At first, the relationships with Dr. Lopez and her research team were] only about research; now it's more about friendships. After spending time with Dr. Lopez and her research team, I started being more open about my racial beliefs back [with my white cohort members]. I was surprised that they were so accepting. [Over time,] I've gotten braver about talking with them about race. They've (my white cohort members) been allies in that sense.

[Both of] these communities have been important for me to learn about what other people have experienced here [in the U.S.] Even in my (cohort) community, which is super white, Cora is a first-generation student. [So I have learned about] the different levels of privilege they have, because of how their families are structured.

I just feel honored that I get to learn from them (cohort and Women of Color research communities), be their friend, love them, and take care of them. I'm blessed to have them in my life. You receive a lot in a community of Women of Color. An important part of a community of Women of Color is to pay it forward to someone else. They (Dr. Lopez and the Women of Color on the research team) took care of me. Now I feel like it's my turn to pay it forward to People of Color entering PhD programs [in my school]. We need to pay back the blessings we've gotten from other women. I think that is the only way we're going to finally change the dynamics and the demographics of this place (academia). I think that's the only way we're going to make it as

Women of Color, as Latinas, in academia. Women [of Color] in Dewy City have all taught me to fight the system in different ways—that it's okay to stand up for what you believe in. They've taught me that it needs to be done for others, not [just] for me. It's not because I want to keep my moral high ground, it's because others need it. That is a piece of wisdom I have taken from people here, that sometimes it's your job to do that (stand up) for others.

Without a community you would go crazy in academia. I feel like there is no way you can finish a Ph.D. with your mind intact if you're isolated. You need people to bounce your ideas off of. You need people that are there when you're crying, so you can survive. I would have less peace of mind. I don't know if I would be a functional human being right now; I'd be depressed.

I sometimes feel like it (grad school) should be harder. Most of the time, I don't feel like it's as hard as I think it should be. I happen to have the right combination of people around me. Some people talk about grad school as the worst years of their life. For me, it's some of the best years of my life. It has made me the best version of myself that I have ever been in my life. The only reason I can say that I love grad school is, because I have these people around me that just make it look easy when it's probably not. We're just pulling ourselves together through this mess.

Having specifically a community of women, I feel like they get other stuff that you wouldn't get from a mixed group. You feel freer to talk about certain things, like if a professor is being an asshole to you, because you're a woman or how difficult it is to say something as a woman. It's just safer to talk about it with women. It just feels safer, so I think that is real important. Without my Women of Color research community, I would be really colorblind in my way of thinking.

4.3.7 Community of Women's Influence on Sense of Purpose

[In terms of my sense of purpose,] mostly the women back home [in Mexico inspired me to research why women are underrepresented in the sciences]. The women here [in Dewy City] have motivated me to look at intersectional aspects, but the original drive came from back home.

I've gotten so much from every single woman I've met that what I get from them is motivation—the fire to be the best person I can be. I feel the only way to pay back so much love is with love. Love can be meaningful in many ways, not only hugs and kisses. Love is sometimes about being a good researcher. It's about taking that love that people gave you and producing something from it. What I've learned from women is that you pay it forward. You don't do stuff hoping that same woman does something for you. [Instead, I learned that] they did that for you so you can help another woman in the future. That is a philosophy I've learned in grad school. Every kindness I've gotten, I just pay it forward.

It was a blessing from God that I got the right combination of [Mexican] women around me. I was able to climb [barriers] even though they weren't able to do it. I feel like that is what drives me. That is why I do what I do. I feel like I could [support and pay it forward] to my kids or for a couple of people, but through my research I'm hoping to do it (pay it forward) for more people. Especially, for the ones (women) who don't have that magic combination that I just happened to have by sheer luck.

4.4 Marlen

Marlen and I met in 2010 when I was beginning my master's degree and she was working towards her doctoral degree. We have maintained a relationship ever since. Marlen was one of the women I consulted with when I was deciding whether to begin a doctoral program. She was critical in my decision to move from my home state to pursue the PhD. Although I moved away from Florida, we stayed in communication while I earned my doctorate. We met in person several times while I was pursuing my doctorate. She was a friend whom I kept updated on my journey and drew inspiration from over the years, especially due to her own accomplishments in academia as a fellow Latina.

At the time of our interviews Marlen was the Assistant Vice President for Faculty Education at Flora University. Flora University is a public Hispanic Serving Institution in the Southeast. Marlen had been working at Flora University for nearly seven years. She had begun as an assistant director in the office. As a result of grant funding and an increase in the university's faculty development initiatives, the office had grown from two to 11 people and Marlen's position evolved from a directorship to assistant vice president. Marlen led the hiring process to expand the team and was largely invested in her work. It was not surprising that, when asked about her community of women, Marlen focused on her work colleagues.

Marlen's artifact was a collection of trinkets that her community of women colleagues had given her. She kept these items on a shelf in her office. They reminded her of the caring and holistic relationships she shared with the women with whom she worked. In describing the meaning of the items, Marlen said,

[The trinkets are a daily reminder that] we've taken the time to connect on the human level and that they [my community of women] have thought of me at a personal level. [These more personal connections are] reflected in the kinds of gifts that they give me. Nothing is a fancy or expensive, but those are my symbols of them, which I have very deliberately placed [in my office] because I want to be reminded of them—even though they're down the hall [from me].

4.4.1 Education and Career: Academically and Professionally Ambitious

I oversee teaching and learning, writing across the curriculum, and academic integrity. [Since] I oversee teaching and learning, I like to think of myself as the chief faculty developer. I support faculty so that they can continue to grow in all things teaching, because most faculty have no formal training in teaching. Part of my role is overseeing the Center for Teaching [where we] offer faculty the ongoing professional development in teaching that they didn't get during formal graduate study. Because I'm within the Office of the Provost in this new, higher role, my responsibility is also to serve as a Flora University ambassador. I travel, and I go to national conferences to represent Flora University. I also oversee a leadership program with my boss now. It's the educational leadership enhancement program that we have here at Flora University for women and minorities. [In terms of research and scholarship], I have a couple of pieces coming out in peer-reviewed journals of educational development.

I was born and raised in [a large metropolitan city with a large Latina/o/x population] and had very, very strong elementary, K-8 schooling in a small, mostly Catholic, mostly Cuban private institution. I had very, very strong foundations in math and writing. I was at the top of my class,

so I felt very confident academically. [School] was a very nurturing, warm, and loving [environment]. I felt supported like I was with my family the whole time. It was a blessing. I was mostly surrounded by Latinos, so I didn't know otherwise [that I was a minoritized person]. I was very, very academically ambitious, and so I wanted [to attend] a high school that would prepare me and connect me to a selective post-secondary institution.

I had a scholarship, so I went to a private, largely Jewish high school where I didn't feel supported, or loved, or cared for. I felt like a pawn. I took all AP classes [and] had very, very high levels of stress and anxiety. I did not have a lot of friends, but a couple of close ones that are still my good friends. I did reap the intended outcome [of attending that private and selective high school], because I did get admitted to [Tulip University, a highly-selective private institution ranked among the top ten nationally]. It was really [financially] distressing for my family in a way that I didn't witness at the time, but I have come to learn.

[Growing up I had college-educated role models.] My dad had gone away [to college], so he has a degree. My grandmother, his mother, had two [terminal degrees]—a [doctoral degree in] education and a law degree, so the emphasis on education has a strong lineage [in my family]. [My mother has a high school education.]

[I completed] my master's [degree] in English literature [at Rose University, a private university in the Southeast]. As a teaching assistant, I got to teach writing, and then that was it. That was love. Writing was love at first sight. I love teaching writing. They hired me on the spot to teach writing full-time [at Rose University]. I started taking higher education classes [at Rose University], because who wouldn't want to study higher education when we work in higher education? Then, I accumulated so many credits that when they opened the doctoral program I talked to my family, left my job [because I was required to be full-time enrolled], and I started

doing the doctoral program. When I was almost done with my doctoral work [in higher education leadership] at Rose University, I got a job at Flora University as assistant director for the Center for Teaching.

4.4.2 My Latinidad: From White to Brown depending on the Context

[My Latina identity] wasn't even on my radar until I left [my home city]. [In my home city] felt like I was part of a dominant group and that there was not a lot of reflection done about my Latinidad. When I got to college [where the majority of students were white] my friend, Jason who's Black, he says to me, "Marlen, you think you're white. Oh, my God." Very quickly, then, not only was I Latina, but I wasn't white. That's the moment I realized that I am brown and that is how I think of myself now. He did that for me. He flipped the switch from white to brown, and I'm grateful to him for that. We're still very good friends.

[Thinking back, while I was in college] my mother stood out as this uber mom. Nobody could believe that anybody could have a mother like mine. She would come and take care of us, and cook for us, and was so warm and loving, and so [while] I didn't label that as something that is distinctively Latino [at the time], there was something there [that represented Latino culture].

[Growing up] I think our culture and ethnicity was very Cuban-centric. [We were] the special immigrants, the Cubans. [We] were the special Latinos, because we have higher educational attainment. We came to this country, and look at everything we did [in terms of building strong community and businesses]. It was the stereotypical "Cuban as exemplar" [discourse growing up] that I think [led me to develop] skepticism very early. [Then], I started developing a critical consciousness through advanced study, readings, and conversations. I became

interested in issues of equity, and inclusion, and bias. [The idea that I was better because I was Cuban] just didn't make sense to me.

I see myself as Latina, [and I know] that when I leave [my home city] people don't distinguish [Latinos by nationality]. They don't see me as Cuban. [They see] I'm brown; I'm Latina. I do think leaving [my home city] and being seen as brown helped [me understand my race and ethnicity in more critical ways]. [Because Flora is a Hispanic Serving Institution] this place, certainly, is where I've done more of that thinking [regarding the meaning of my race and ethnicity] than ever. [For instance,] my boss is the vice president for academic careers, and she's Latina. I see those examples of Latinas in power and that is really validating. The good part is I have so much confidence, good work, and credentials to work against microaggressions. I feel really lucky, because, otherwise, those things [microaggressions] could really chip away at you.

4.4.3 Gender: "A Little Girl who was Already Feminist"

My grandmother, the lawyer with a PhD in education who got married at 34 and then had five kids, she lived two houses down [from my family and I] and she raised me. I was in that household where the woman was in charge. My grandfather was my very best friend, and she [my grandmother] was kind of scary, but it was very clear that a woman was in charge. She was educated, and she was calling the shots. [She had a major influence on how I see my gender and the role of a woman.]

My parents have a very balanced marriage where everybody shares responsibility. Everybody worked. I felt really lucky. I had really strong role models. I remember in the '90s hearing something that was even remotely gender biased and thinking, "Are you crazy? This is the

‘90s.” [I was] a little girl who was already feminist. I’ve been a feminist since as long as I can remember. Anything that would even remotely suggest that women are lesser, or weaker, or could do less never made any sense to me. That was not a part of the consciousness, or the discourse in my house, or anywhere that I went— so that [sexism] was just absurd to me.

4.4.4 Personal Understanding of Bodymindspirit

Well, it [bodymindspirit] didn’t mean anything to me because I didn’t know about it. When I was reading about it [in the criterion survey and prior to these interviews], I was thinking about the fact that I tend to make most decisions, especially professionally, very analytically, very data-based, but I have had many experiences in my life where [I] feel...a sixth sense is heightened. That instinct has always been something that I always listen for. I think it’s like another data source. Even though the data is pointing in this direction, I have a hole or gap, so being intuitive, and going inward...I think is a key part of how I operate...even more in personal decisions than in professional decisions. I think in the interpersonal sphere is where my body-spirit [connection] is more salient for me.

[My mother and daughter are more aligned with a bodymindspirit way of being. They have] so much wisdom that I admire. They both highlight for me the importance of not only relying on data, analytics, and information, because they seem more connected with humanity and the world. They seem in sync with the world—so I think that [bodymindspirit way of being and awareness] does come with having this three-dimensional way to go through the world. I see it as a more evolved state.

4.4.5 Community of Women: Meaning and Influences

My thoughts align pretty well with what you're describing. When I hear "community," I think of a physical proximity or frequency to differentiate it from friendships or just loose ties. I picture people who I see on a regular basis. I think about my current community of women. I'm [also] thinking about how at other junctures of my life, it would have been very different groups of people with very different relationships to me. [For example, back in college] living in a dorm my roommates would have been my community of women.

Now I think of my immediate colleagues, my team [within the Center for Teaching], is comprised mostly of women, and part of why working is so pleasant and gratifying is that I get to work with such talented, motivated, dedicated people, [who are also] good humans. [These six women] care about me. [We care about] each other and are abreast of each other's lives whether about work-related issues, or non-work-related [such as] family and kids. We really do offer each other valuable support and friendship. I picture that [when I think of my community of women].

They are of varying ages of varying racial and ethnic backgrounds. The only real things that we have in common would be our dedication to students, to learning, and to teaching. [Some of them report directly to me and some do not], but our relationships tend not to be focused on any of the structure or hierarchy. I think that we approach each other as three-dimensional humans. Part of what makes the job so gratifying for each of us is that we know that we are coming into this community [that we have with each other] and that we have a support and people who are looking out for us day in and day out on all matters.

We're a very tightknit group. I think they might be an even stronger community of women without me in it [because of the power differential]; I hired them. I don't want to pretend that [my

leadership] position [within the Center] doesn't [potentially] interfere with the strength of the community. None of them wanted to report to each other, because they didn't want to jeopardize that community that they had built, which is part of why I took on that [leadership] role. I think that's an important distinction just that they are a really strong community of women for each other. I feel really lucky that I'm able to have this relationship with them, and I can call them my community of women in spite of the power differential that's implicit in the roles, but that doesn't change my answer that they play that [community] role for me.

We realize how much time we spend together and how much we shape each other's existence. We collaborate a lot. We also spend a lot of time talking about our own lives, our spouses, and our children. Our children come to the office. [We know each other's] kids and husbands. We haven't put up any of those work-life boundaries, because we think that there's an artificiality to that and realize how important it is to come into a community and to know that you are safe and supported all day. [I always try to] kind of push away the hierarchy because that community is just so important to me...personally and professionally. I think that the role that I aim play is member, member of the community. [I want these women to look at me and see,] "woman I can count on, mother I can talk to, wife I can talk to" [about the experiences we may share in these personal roles]. I think that's the role that we play for each other as friends.

I have a deep sense of purpose and social justice. [However,] when I get stuck in the mundane, they'll remind me about the students, students' voices, and injustice. They refuel and relight that [sense of purpose] in me. They're intense, and I really count on their intensity to keep me going and remind me to work past challenging moments. So [they] absolutely do [influence my sense of purpose].

Professional influences of community. [My community of women influence my professional life in multiple ways.] [Firstly,] I have very, very, high standards and very high expectations for myself and for the unit. Because they are so dedicated and so competent and they work at such a high level, we get a lot done. I am able to meet those very high goals that I set for our unit, so they make my job possible.

[Secondly,] when a project is in [one of these women's] hands, I don't feel like I need to micromanage or worry about where they go in the university to represent us. Professionally, they are everything, because what I can do as one person is limited. [In fact,] I don't make a lot of professional decisions without reaching out to them, getting everybody's input, and then using it to make a better decision than the one that I would have made.

[To illustrate the level of unity and support that we provide each other, for example,] we worked on a high-profile project for over one year. One of us was the point person, and she had invested countless of her hours at home and at work. She was losing sleep to get it done. Then, due to a political battle, [the project] was taken away from us, and it was very demoralizing for her [the point person]. So, we rallied around her and made sure that she realized that this wasn't her fault. We helped her celebrate everything that she had accomplished despite the outcome.

[Lastly, they influence how I see myself professionally in the sense that] they see things in my future that I haven't articulated for myself, or they'll ask me about my next career steps. [They will say things like,] "We know you won't be here forever. We know that there are bigger things for you." They dream for me and they dream with me. Emma was there when I applied for this job, and she was my champion at every corner, at every turn. They are my champions.

Personal influences of community. On a personal level, I bring my whole self to work every day, and sometimes I'm stressed like today. Sometimes bad things happen. [For example,]

if somebody has a political vendetta against me, and [I need to be] vulnerable and sad, they have cheered for me. They have cried with me. They have watched my children so I can go get stuff done. They have celebrated my birthdays. So, on a personal level, they're my people. I can let my guard down. I can divulge my vulnerabilities. I know that [with them] I am safe and supported. [Knowing that I am supported by them on a personal level] is just as valuable as the professional competencies and abilities [they bring to the table].

[To illustrate the level of friendship and support we offer one another, I will tell you that] we call [the Center] our happy bubble. Everything that happens at the university is outside of our bubble. We make our happy bubble, and we do have influence over what our space is like, so if there is ever any negativity, and there has been, we address it. We work through it. We always have to go back to that space of, "this is our safe and happy place." We can't afford for it not to be a safe and supportive space.

4.4.6 Common Values Matter More than Our Race

[When it comes to my community of women, although most of them are Women of Color,] I think that there are other common denominators such as [shared] values and guiding principles that can be just as powerful as race or ethnicity. [My community of women and I share common values like] the conviction that teaching matters and that teaching is a calling. It is a way to serve, and it is a way to advance really noble goals. We are helping people [faculty] shape people [students]. We all want to [inspire faculty to be] empathic, kind, and tolerant. At work we are brought together with a deep sense of social justice. We want to be warriors for equity. Everybody has a keen sense of family and the centrality of family for each other. I think that for each of us

the work that we do is the way to advance the kind of life that we want to lead. [We embody what our work stands for.] [Our work] isn't separate from fulfilling our life visions. [Rather, our work] is how we are fulfilling our life visions.

4.4.7 Community of Women's Influence on Bodymindspirit

There really isn't a part of my being that they haven't infiltrated and enhanced through their interactions and their love. My work experiences prior to being a part of this team were very solitary. With this larger group of women, I spend a lot of time with them, and we don't have a lot of boundaries. [We] are able to be vulnerable. They talk about all of the aspects of their lives from cheating husbands, to kids having issues at school, to weight gain. This very freed environment [allows me to] recognize that we're all three dimensional. [As a result, it has felt] very natural to be [my whole self with these women]. [Our community] is not very guarded so we feel safe enough to talk about all aspects of our selves. [I believe that people in our line of work] have to be reflective and have done that internal work, because otherwise you [can't do this job]. What we ask [faculty] to do is what we are modeling. We are all very reflective, which allows us to display this openness that makes it possible for us to be a community and to support each other in that [bodymindspirit] way.

4.5 Lucero

Lucero and I met through a mutual friend, a Latino PhD candidate at the time, whom I told about my study and the criteria for participants. He passed on my recruitment email to several of his PhD colleagues, and Lucero responded within a few days. Although Lucero and I did not previously know each other, we shared some commonalities that helped create an atmosphere of comfort and understanding throughout the interviews. In our introductory phone call, we talked about some of these commonalities. Lucero and I both grew up in Chicago in immigrant/Latino neighborhoods, our parents were first-generation immigrants in Chicago, we were both familiar with the neighborhoods in which we grew up, respectively, and we had both experienced the death of a parent, which influenced our understandings of bodymindspirit.

Lucero did talk about women in her family as her “original community” of women. However, Lucero made the most meaning of three communities of women: 1) Latina friends from college, 2) two women in her PhD cohort, and 3) mothers she had met through her children’s school. The funds of knowledge that she cultivated within these communities revolved around her sense of purpose, which she described as balancing motherhood and family life with her academic life. Lucero’s artifact was a collection of hard copy photos of herself with the women in her communities. Lucero’s artifact represented communities of women, but most importantly it reinforced her sense of purpose:

I put together a collage of different groups of women...I feel like it’s all of these pictures of me surrounded by all of these women who give me strength and who give me perspective and who help me understand my purpose and the way that I can be my best self as a mom, as a student, as a wife, as a friend, as a sister, as a daughter.

4.5.1 Education and Career: From Ivy League to the PhD

I'm currently a full-time, second-year graduate student in the PhD program in higher education. I am also a research assistant as part of my fellowships. I went to a high school [in Chicago] that was created [as a result of] community activism to get a local high school, because there was none in our neighborhood. We didn't have great graduation rates or great college-going rates. I did the best I could, because I was scared out of my mind of my mother. She really had a strong work ethic and forced us to work really hard. Both of my parents had maybe fourth or fifth grade educations. My mom would routinely say, "I have no idea what it is you're doing or what you need to do to get to the next step, but you have to figure that out, and you have to do it regardless of how much work it is."

We (my sister and I) did. We figured out what we could, and we did what we could. Given what the outcomes were for my high school and my community, I was fortunate. My older sister and I went to Ivy League colleges on the East Coast. We struggled a lot in those schools, but we felt very thankful that we had those opportunities. It was really tough to navigate the system. We just felt really out of place.

I went into higher education right out of college, because I had such a hard time navigating college and figuring things out academically, personally, and socially. I did admissions work. [Then,] I got a master's [degree] in higher education. I thought, "That's it. I'm done. I'm going to work in higher education for the rest of my life and be very, very happy doing that." I was happy, but I had kids along the way. They changed the way that I viewed the world and myself. I didn't think it (having kids) would change my professional goals in any way. I was a little taken off guard when they (my kids) did.

[When my kids started school,] I was working at a non-profit college access program. I was there for four years on a part-time, flexible schedule so I could be home when my kids got home. That was fulfilling, but it wasn't what I had wanted to do. I worked with a lot of recently graduated college students who were interested in education professions. I really enjoyed that (working with these college graduates). That was what gave me the idea of going back to school. I think teaching in a master's program for student affairs professionals would be really rewarding. I would really enjoy that. That was how I ended up in a PhD program.

4.5.2 Latina Identity: Mexican Culture and Passing It Down to My Kids

My parents met in Mexico. I was born very soon after my mother arrived in the United States, within a year. Both of my parents and my older sister were undocumented. Fortunately, this was in the 70s when the Reagan administration passed an amnesty bill that gave millions of undocumented Mexicans amnesty and the ability to go through a documentation process. Then, by the 80s, my very extended family had come over.

I grew up in Chicago in a traditionally Mexican immigrant neighborhood. Within a few years, my parents bought a building [in the neighborhood]. They rented out to family as they arrived in the states. They brought them in, gave them a place to live, found them a job through their connections and networks. Then eventually they all moved out and bought homes of their own, apartment rental units [in the same neighborhood]. They would live in one section [of the apartment building], and they brought over family in the same way. It was an anchoring system that was started. We grew up in an apartment where I was surrounded by aunts and uncles and cousins all around me. Even if I crossed the street the people who lived in those buildings were, if

not first cousins or aunts and uncles, distant relatives. They were upstairs, downstairs, across the street. I went to school with them.

Growing up, we only spoke Spanish at home. We didn't learn English until we went to school. Our church down the street was completely in Spanish. We grew up with traditional Mexican values and cultural rituals. I remember when we were really little we used to do *Posadas*. We didn't do Christmas trees. We didn't do Santa. We didn't do any of it [until later on] in elementary school [when we asked our parents if we could.]

I didn't really think about being Latina until I went to college. I don't think I realized how important it (being Latina) was or how different I was until I went to college, because I went to [a mostly Latino, mostly Mexican high school]. In my high school, we spoke English in the classroom, and we spoke Spanish or Spanglish outside. When I got to college, I could no longer transition from one language to another and be understood. In my first year, in college it was hard to relate to other students, because it was so different from the way that my family related to each other and interact[ed] with people. It was hard because it was a predominantly white college.

[Being married and having children with a man who is not Latino has also influenced how I value my culture.] Being with somebody who isn't Latino, does highlight the differences [in our cultures] more. I think more about why we do things and why they're important to me. I [struggle] every time we've had to make compromises, because I think, "This is what ties me to my parents, to my sisters, to my grandparents, to my great-grandparents. This is a thread that is important for me to continue with my own children, and that I hope will be important for them." My husband is biracial, so I feel it's just as important for me that our kids take pride in their Mexican heritage, as it is for him that they take pride in their African American, German, and Italian heritages. I try to

keep Mexican traditions or rituals alive, because this is the way that we connect back to people that are important to us.

[For example,] around Christmas we'll gather with two of my sisters and my kids and their kids will help us make tamales. We'll play every Spanish Christmas song we can think of. We do *Posadas*. The kids love it. They really think it's not Christmas if we're not making tamales. Around Day of the Dead, we'll go to the museum in the neighborhood where I grew up. We'll put together an *ofrenda* {offering}. It's really important to me that my kids understand death in a Mexican traditional way versus an American way. I'm very intentional about [teaching them about] the world of the living and the world of the dead. [I explain] that they're parallel worlds, and they coexist. You can feel the energy of people who have passed if you look for it.

4.5.3 Gender: Cultural Norms and Mother's Influence

[I started thinking about the meaning of my own gender] when I went to college. I don't think I questioned a lot about my life before then because everything played out in the way that I expected it to based on my cultural values and traditions. When I went to college, I took a class on Women of Color and culture. We talked about feminism for Women of Color. I remember starting to question the accepted patriarchal notions of my culture. I was more and more convinced that patriarchy might be the defining characteristic of our culture, to not just outsiders, but to me. [For example,] I remember coming back from college and watching my female cousins who were my age serve their brothers. They served them, *then* they ate. Whereas my sisters and I all sat at the table with my male cousins. I remember looking up and thinking they're all serving their brothers right now. I am not. Nobody is questioning this. Nobody is considering how this changes outcomes

for girls. That was one of those moments that really affected my view of myself as a woman and also started to shape my feminism.

[Eventually though,] I began to understand the different types of power that my mother and my grandmothers had in the family. In particular, my mother was the one that outlined the path for us to go to college. She was the one who protected us in our time to be academic people. She defended us against the men in the family when they questioned the rationale for educating girls. She was the one that did all that. It wasn't my dad.

4.5.4 Personal Understanding of Bodymindspirit

I grew up Catholic, [and my kids] were baptized. Within the last five or six years [though] church is not a big part of our life. We don't go to church. I am more likely to pray to *La Virgen de Guadalupe* or to a family member that has passed on. I don't even know if it's prayer as much as it is conversation. I'm expressing probably a need for forgiveness or to better understand what path I need or should take. I might need guidance in figuring that out. I don't need the trappings of a Catholic church—the crossing, and kneeling, and all of that. I don't feel connected with my spirituality in church. That was why I stopped going. It is more important for me to meditate and to feel a sense of peace with who I am, a sense of understanding not just my physical body, but my emotional state of being, and to connect as much as possible with spirits.

[This sense of spirituality beyond the church] was always there. It was always present. [Especially because] my grandmother would always talk about death and the parallel worlds of the living and the dead. When my mom passed away ten years ago, that changed my perception of it (my spirituality). I really have felt that the worlds [of the living and the dead] are parallel. I think

if you look for an understanding and for a sensation of the world of the dead, you can feel it. I feel it all the time. It does require, I think, introspection and meditation. I feel my mom in my house all the time.

[After my mom died,] I had a very hard time stilling my mind and my body, so I started going to yoga. I just felt like I needed a peaceful place to reflect, not just about her passing, but about what it meant in terms of my feelings about my professional goals and how maybe they'd gone a little awry. I spent a lot of time doing yoga, thinking about those things, and thinking about what I wanted. I really had to find peace with the things that I have decided and also peace with whether or not, in making those decisions, I had disappointed my mom. That really called for a different spiritual approach for invoking my mom in a different way. I feel like when I started doing yoga, that was a turning point in the way that I saw my spirituality.

[When it comes to my communities of women affecting my bodymindspirit growth,] I think that's tougher, because you have to find somebody that thinks similarly to you about your spiritual conceptualization. [Since my mom's passing has affected my bodymindspirit growth the most profoundly,] it's usually the women who have lost somebody who is really close to them. When two of my friends from college lost their moms, I was able to have conversations with them in a different way about spirituality than I had before they lost their moms.

4.5.5 Communities of Women: Meaning and Influences

[Overall,] they (my communities) are the women who I feel support me and are sounding boards for anything and everything that I do in my life. The way that I think of the communities in my life, I have different communities that I go to for different things. I think that, with most of

the groups of women, there's always a transactional piece. [For example,] the moms who can help me pick up my kids [from school]. With the women in my cohort, the transactional piece is that we work together. Then, there is also an emotional piece.

[In regard to the transactional piece,] it's a lot about support and just having them be cheerleaders—like, “You can do this. You can accomplish this goal.” More specifically, it's been hard to come to an understanding of what academia looks like from the inside. I think I had a romanticized vision of it before I was in it. I have a friend who's a Woman of Color and teaches in the Latino Studies program [at the Ivy League I attended for undergrad.] Her and my friend Maria (also in academia) and my sister [who has a PhD], we talk about what it means to not just work as a mom but to enter a doc program as a Woman of Color and how you navigate that and then what it means to then be seen as legitimate enough to be in a tenure track position. I also have [this conversation] with my cohort members, Doris and Mila. I think they understand that there is an added barrier especially for Women of Color with the way that academia currently functions. It preferences men, it preferences white men, and it preferences their research. I'm not 100 percent sure what I'd do [without these women]. Being able to discuss this with women who understand it and women who can be supportive regardless of what my decision is [in terms of going tenure track or not,] has been really important in navigating this [PhD] process. If I didn't have these women, I would feel crazy.

[Emotionally,] I think we have—like any friendship, you may start a friendship or a relationship with somebody based on a specific set of factors that are based on a particular context or a particular time, but, over time, they change. There's a lot of other things that bind us together. A lot of times, for me, it ends up being around parenting, mothering our children, trying to understand who they are and how to help them. I think, a lot of times, a lot of my connections end

up revolving around that particular issue, aside from my professional work. The support that I get from them—especially in times of hardship—makes those relationships stronger. We've had so many difficulties and issues that we've encountered together or as a group. Regardless of where we are in life, I love them, and I know that, most of them, I could call, and they would be there for me, and they could call me, and I would be there for them.

Most of them are Women of Color. Even if they're not Women of Color, they have a more nuanced understanding of race and racism. I can have conversations with them. My cohort [members] are white, but I can have those conversations [about race and racism] with them. [However,] the moms whose kids go to school with my kids—the majority of them are white, and I struggle the most interacting with them. Those are tough relationships for me. They're all very liberal, but they don't always get how racism works in systemic ways. They just don't get it; it's because they're white.

Encouragement and support to begin and persist in the PhD. The overarching perception that they've given me of myself is that I can do whatever I set my mind to do. This is true of all of the communities of women. [They give me the affirmation that] if I want something, I can go after it, and I can accomplish it. I think that's why they're so valuable, right, is that they give me that sense that I can do anything, no matter what the obstacle is. They have helped me in a lot of ways, but especially, most recently in pursuing the PhD.

Starting the PhD was intimidating for me. I waited so long for a number of reasons, [one being] my kids and the role that I wanted to play in their lives and who I wanted to be as a parent. I felt conflicted about doing it with my kids at the age that they were. The women who are mothers, especially, influenced me to pursue the PhD even though I felt conflicted and even though I felt

like I didn't have enough time. They really gave me the sense that there was never going to be the right time; it was never going to be perfect.

[All of my communities of women played a role in] influencing me to pursue the PhD, but I think in particular the women who are mothers helped in terms of influencing me to pursue the PhD as a mom. Most of the women I identified [in my communities of women] are moms. I think those women that had kids really were just like, "Stop worrying about this. They're going to see it as motivating to see you go through this." I think that really helped me to move forward with the PhD, in particular, as a mom. [These women assured me that] my kids would remember it differently than I did. This would give my kids a different sense of who I am as a mother. They [assured me that] it would be just as important for my kids to see me doing this (the PhD), as it is for me to do this.

[Now that I'm actually a PhD student, my communities of women are critical because] academia is set up as a gendered process that preferences men, like any other industry. When I talk to my advisor, who is a man, about my plans after graduate school and why I don't want to go the faculty route, he just doesn't get it. He does not understand the balance I need as a woman, the balance I need as a mom. The things that are important to me in academia versus to him are different. The things that are important to him, that he likes and enjoys, are valued by academia and those things I do not like or enjoy. I could just [go into the faculty job market] if I wanted to, so clearly if I'm not doing it, it's because I don't want to. He doesn't get it.

I don't have to explain myself [in my communities of women.] I don't think I would be here [without them]. I would feel crazy, because any time that you feel any kind of oppression or subjugation that nobody else acknowledges—they see it and they can name it. [My communities of women are important because] if nobody else sees it, then I'm going to internalize this and say,

“I’m the problem. I just can’t do it.” There are days when I feel like if I don’t want to go the faculty route, it’s because of me. I am the problem. [I tell myself] I have an issue with the amount of writing, the amount of research required, whatever it is. I’m the one that has that problem. It’s not the system. It’s me.

Then you get to a point where you’re up for tenure and you didn’t publish enough, you didn’t publish in the right places. That’s the part that I have the hardest time with. If I didn’t have women to talk to who are either like, “I saw it and I walked away from it for these reasons,” or, “I saw it and I walked into it for these reasons,” I would have a hard time. Those women allow me to decide what the best path for me is. In a lot of ways, they make me feel less crazy. They make me feel like I can make a decision that is congruent with my values and who I am and who I want to be and what’s important to me.

Sense of purpose and priorities. [Beyond the decision to begin the PhD, these women influence my sense of purpose. For me,] it’s more about how I fit it all together; how I parent, what kind of student I am, what kind of friend I am, what kind of sister I am, what kind of wife I am. I draw my sense of purpose from the entire picture. One of my good friends from college said to me one day, in terms of sense of purpose,

Stop beating yourself up about how clean your house looks or whether or not you do X with your child every day. Put those things aside and focus on being present. Look at what matters in each of those things and prioritize. So what if your house is a mess? So what if you didn’t make dinner?”

I think it helped me think about my whole life and what my priorities are.

[The way my communities of women pass on wisdom and influence how I see the world] has a lot to do with the way that I see purpose and priorities. If I’m beating myself up about

something that happened with one of my kids. If [I'm stressed because] I've been physically there but absent from my family, barely having conversations with my husband, or [beating myself up about a paper I'm writing.] They will say, "Tomorrow, we'll have a great day. This is just a bump in the road. It'll be fine." A lot of times, it ends up being that they give me perspective on the priorities—what is important right now and what is important in the long run.

4.5.6 Meaningful Communities of Women

School moms. There is a group of moms who I'm friends with whose kids go to school with my kids. The kids don't necessarily have strong connections or bonds, but I do to the moms. I don't talk to them about the specifics of my academic work but, for me, that community is really important in understanding how to balance work and motherhood. [For example,] they are women who I can go to about a change in career and how to navigate that and how to do that with kids and their school responsibilities and that's sort of thing. It's (this community) important to my academic work as well but not in terms of the specifics of it but more in terms of me trying to figure out how to balance all of it.

They help me navigate how to balance work and motherhood. I think that's a really tough process. We rely on each other a lot to actually physically help with each other's kids but also just make sense of what our kids are going through and how to talk to them. I think what is really missing, for me, with this group, is that most of them are white. As my kids get older, and we talk about how you impart to them the role of racism in their lives, I have to find that [support] in different ways.

Friends from college. My college friends are a group of all Latina women. I can't believe we have known each other for over 20 years. We have tried to get together very often for the past 20 plus years. Last summer, they all came to Chicago where two of us live, and we spent Memorial Day weekend together this past summer 2017.

These women supported me and helped me through one of the toughest times in my life in getting through college. They were like sisters to me. Some of them were two years ahead of me and some are my class. We formed this really amazing bond, because when I started college these women had been part of a movement to get more Latino faculty and administrators on campus [because there had been a lot of Latino student attrition].

When my class arrived, these women took us under their wing. We understood very early on that we needed that help, and we sought that help. We would work together. There were lots of nights when just you felt drained from working, and you'd call them, and you'd say, "Hey, I'm writing this paper. I'm trying to finish it. Can I come finish it in your room? I just need you to be in the same room with me while I finish this paper."

In our sophomore year, two Latino faculty members were brought on as adjunct faculty to teach a couple of classes. [However, the college did not want to hire them as full-time faculty, and they did not want to create a Latino Studies program]. We wanted to know why they had decided not to hire them as full-time faculty [so] we decided to go on another hunger strike. Close to 40 people were on strike, mostly from the Latino organization. We were together pretty much 24/7 for the four days that we were on the hunger strike. We really only had each other to lean on, and it really cemented our relationship. One of the best things that (hunger strike) came from that was that students became a part of the hiring process after that. They hire Latino faculty and administrators. They [also] did create a Latino Studies Department eventually.

We all came together when they had the tenth-year anniversary of the Latino Studies program. I was the co-chair of the Latino alumni network and organized it. I don't think it ever occurred to us not to keep in touch after having that kind of experience together. Whenever any of us think about the ways in which communities are marginalized and oppressed, and when it happens in our lives or in the lives of our children, we think of each other, and we think of the support and the strength that we had to move forward with our agenda. I don't even know how we had the strength to act on it and follow through with it. [Beyond] social issues, we were always supportive of each other in terms of just navigating life. For example, [we talk about] raising our children and a few of us have lost our mothers in the recent years.

PhD cohort members. I have two women in my cohort who are my lifesavers. They're both white, so, with them, it's more about the academic work. It's about navigating a doctoral program in academia. I think the reason that the three of us were immediately drawn together is because we're the three oldest in the group. Two of us have kids and that really changes the dynamic for us. The other woman doesn't have kids, but she is married and works full-time. So, she has to balance a lot as well. We drew on our similarities—the fact that we were balancing all these things. The woman who does not have kids is questioning whether/when to have kids. I think that's one of the other reasons why she's become part of the group. We probably text about five to 25 times a day.

There's a transactional and there's an emotional piece [to our relationship]. With them, the transactional piece is that we work together. We make sure that we all know, "Hey, do you know that this is due next week? Hey, did you get the syllabus?" All of us are likely to have something fall through the cracks. The one that has kids, she has two kids; one is a newborn and the other

one's a toddler. The other one, who's considering having kids, works full-time in a very demanding job. I think that's the transactional part.

Then the emotional part is that we are in constant communication with each other of like, "Oh, my god, I can't do this. I cannot continue to balance everything I balance and make it through. I'm falling apart. I need somebody to pick me the hell up and tell me that I can do this." That's what we do for each other. We will also bounce ideas off each other and have a full understanding, [because we are in the program together]. They might not understand what it's like to have a 10 and 12-year-old kid like the moms that I rely on for school pick up and things like that, but they can understand all of the other parts that I'm struggling with in school.

[For example,] Mila had a baby in September. We got three weeks into the school year, and her anxiety level was so high about how she was going to manage finishing the semester after the birth of the baby. Right before she delivered, she was just like, "I'm going to quit. I don't even know what I'm thinking." She had a very negative exchange with a faculty member who essentially told her she should not have registered for classes the semester she was due. In that moment, after class, we told her,

Right now, there's no papers due. You have nothing to do. Just go home and rest and deliver this baby this week, and then we'll think about the rest later. Don't quit. Just do one week at a time, one day at a time. You tell us what you need. We will be there for you. If you need helping getting through readings, if you need notes, we'll get them to you. Whatever it is that you need, we will help you with.

We've done that for each other.

Doris' husband had surgery recently, and she was like, "I don't know how I'm going to get through this week." We told her, "Just tell us what you need, and we will help you get whatever it

is done.” Sometimes it’s, again, transactional things, and sometimes it’s, “I just don’t feel like I can do it.” It’s somebody there that says, “Yes, you can.” I feel like we do that a lot for each other.

4.6 Carmen

Carmen became my mentor in 2011 when I was earning my master’s degree. I sought her guidance when applying to PhD programs and continue to reach out to for academic and professional mentorship. In addition, our relationship has a personal dimension. I seek her advice on personal life matters, and she’s been part of important life events, such as my wedding. At the time of our interviews, Carmen was a full-time administrator and had completed her doctoral dissertation but was waiting for a defense date. By the time we had our third and final interview, she had already defended her dissertation and graduated. Carmen referred to the women in her family as her “personal community of women” and “first group of support,” because she’s had them since she was a child. However, Carmen spent the most time in the interviews discussing the communities of women she built while in her master’s and doctoral degree programs as well as the women she worked with at her current institution, the University of Holly.

When asked to identify an artifact, Carmen chose a globe with the inscription “To my mentor and friend” that a graduate assistant gifted her when she was an assistant dean. Since then, that graduate assistant had transitioned into Carmen’s previous job as assistant dean at the university. Reflecting on the meaning of the globe and their mutual relationship, Carmen said:

It [the gift and inscription] meant a lot to me, because I was able to be that person (mentor) for her. As we get older, I realize that we're that person (mentor) for each other. Every time

I see that globe when I'm stressed out [I remember that] she totally understands [what I'm feeling], because we're kind of the same person. It's a relationship that never dies. It's a relationship that continues to grow, because it's a back-and-forth relationship. I might have been a mentor at the time, but now we're mentoring each other.

Carmen focused on the trust and reciprocity that characterized her relationships with women within her communities of women. She described trust as the foundation of those meaningful and long-lasting relationships. Carmen sustained her community of women from her master's degree for over 20 years. Her Women of Color doctoral peer community persisted through distance (a full-time online program), the duration of the program, and even after graduation.

4.6.1 Education and Career: From Resident Assistant to Full-time Practitioner

I began in higher education as interim hall director in 1995. [I was promoted through positions in residential life until I reached an associate director position.] Then I moved institutions [and was assistant dean at three different universities] over the course of ten years. I first came to the University of Holly as an assistant dean. I was in that position [for two years]. Since 2016, though, I have been a director in residence life. I supervise all the professional staff members all the way down to the resident assistants. I supervise [nearly 400 people].

My plan [in 2016] was to finish my doctorate and then search for dean of students positions because that's my career trajectory. But things don't happen the way we plan them, so I took this position. I fell in love with it. For now, it's where I'm going to be until I defend my dissertation next month. My dissertation is on Latina college students who persisted and succeeded in a predominantly white institution.

I was born in Chile. My father was a journalist and a professor when I was born in 1972. In the 1970s he was a protestor against the dictatorship in Chile. [My mother] was an accountant in Chile. [My mother feared for my father's life because of his political activism against the dictatorship.] It was the middle of the coup and we needed to survive, so she gave him an ultimatum. So, he started researching and he found that a family in the United States could sponsor him to leave Chile. My father left Chile in 1977 and then [my mother, older sister, and I] were able to leave in 1978.

My parents started their lives all over again not speaking any English in Massachusetts, because that's where our sponsors lived. [Those are the origins of my] college-going path, because my father always believed that education was the key to everything. When we were little, he [would say,] "You're going to go to college." He wanted us to be doctors and lawyers. My whole life I knew I was going to college. My parents always instilled that education was the most important thing.

I applied for college, and I went to a small state school in Massachusetts. During my first year of college my father was working as an assistant director of career services at a university in Massachusetts. By my sophomore year, he transferred jobs to the school I attended so that I was able to have tuition remission. I also became an RA (resident assistant). When I became an RA, I got a 4.0 GPA every semester because I was able to organize my academics and my life differently. I graduated from college, worked in social services for two years, and realized I wanted to go back for my master's degree in higher education. [I knew that the higher education degree was an option from my years as an RA].

4.6.2 Latina Identity: “Being Latina means a lot to me, because I always had to fight for it.”

Being Latina, Chilean specifically, means passion, love, family, and being humble. That's what it means to me because that's everything I know about my culture. My culture is all those things. It's about understanding those around you. It's about understanding that you could be on a high right now, but you could be on a low tomorrow. It's about putting family first. It's about being passionate about everything. Otherwise there's no sense in doing anything or having anything. Those are the values that I learned and know within my own culture. Chilean, yes, that's my nationality, my ethnicity. That's the first thing that pops up, because I've always had to define that [I am Chilean]. Being Latina means a lot to me because I always had to fight for it. I had to fight and show what that meant.

Obviously, I was born in Chile and came here with a green card. Ever since I was little I knew I was different, because I had to show different identification. My whole family had an accent, but I didn't because I was so little. I knew I had to learn English and I would teach my parents English, so I knew I was different. My parents would say, “You can only speak Spanish in the house, not English”, because they wanted us [my sister and I] to preserve the language. I fought with them as a young child, because I wanted to speak English well and I didn't want to have an accent like them. When I was older I realized that I just didn't want to be like them because they were discriminated upon every day because of their accents.

[Growing up in Massachusetts, where the Latina/o/x population was very small and predominantly Puerto Rican, I always had to define my ethnicity. I had to explain that I was Chilean and even where Chile is on the map.] I always had to justify where I was from [all the way

through high school]. In [elementary and middle] school, I was very quiet and reserved because I knew I was different. I didn't want people to make fun of me. I would try to educate my friends when I was little about where I was from and they would make fun of me. People would ask, "Are you illegal?" I had to deal with that my whole life in Massachusetts.

In high school, I was proud of being Latina. I always said I was Chilean specifically, not Latina. At that time (high school) growing up, I probably appeared to be someone that was trying to be white. I was very preppy. I wore penny loafers and polo shirts. My high school was in a more diverse town so there were Puerto Rican, Black, and white students. The whites hung out with the whites, the Blacks hung out the Blacks, the Puerto Ricans with Puerto Ricans, but I hung out with all of them. Other students would say, "You're not white, you're not Puerto Rican, and you're not Black. So why are you hanging out with all those people? But you dress like you're white, so you must think you're white." I always had to justify who I was. Later on, my master's degree advisor and professor (Dr. Fulton) told me that I was an edge walker, because I ended up walking on the edge of two cultures, and that's what I was, I was always the edge walker.

Then, when I was 18 my whole family became citizens. That was hurtful because we had to denounce Chile in order to be American. I saw the pain in my parents' eyes because they couldn't be Chilean citizens anymore. I was really proud of my family for everything they'd done to get us to this country. I'm proud of who I am as a Latina. [Being Latina means] my values, my culture, and our traditions like living at home until you are married and Christmas Eve being more important than Christmas.

[The greatest evolution in my Latina identity is that] before I was just proud and did my own thing, but now I'm proud and I want to give back to the community. I was always focused and busy going to work, taking care of my kids, and earning my degrees, but now I see myself more

involved with the community and even involving my children in that because it's important for them. I'm part of the Association of Latinos in Higher Education in Massachusetts and at the University where it's mostly Puerto Ricans [so I am proud not only to be Chilean, but to represent the Latina community and my ethnicity within these organizations].

4.6.3 Gender: From a Mother's Love to Equal Pay

[My mother] was so strong when we came to the U.S. In South America she was an accountant, but in the United States she started cleaning houses. Her strength really showed me how to be a strong female. As I get older, I realize how much more I appreciate her. [Growing up] my mother was always telling us (my sister and I) what to do, to clean up [and do our chores]. I always gave her a hard time as a teenager, and as I got older, I realized how hard her life really was because she was always by herself taking care of us because [my dad] was always working. The moment I became a mother I just cried, because I [understood] how she feels about me [and how much she loves me]. [Becoming a mother] was an awakening of what a woman and mother's love is for a child. My mother is like an angel to me. She is the love of my life.

My gender as a Latina [is grounded] in my personal life—[my upbringing] and my family. [At a professional level, though,] as a Latina and as a female in my career it's been tough, because people judge your looks. So, if you're pretty, you're not that smart. If you joke around, you are insensitive. If you're direct, you're a bitch. I have all those parts of me. Both growing up and then in this field (higher education) I have been judged [and treated unequally]. [For example,] in every single job I ever had, except the one I have right now, the male in my professional position has gotten paid more money than I have. That's been a big deal for me, because I work just as hard at

the same job. Now that I'm in my 40s, I don't deal with any of that anymore. Now if I get a job offer, I ask for the most money possible.

4.6.4 Community of Women: Meaning and Influences

Community of women means a lot to me, because, obviously, we all come from a mother. [So for me] motherhood is a sign of what women are and do. Then as you grow older, you have friends that are primarily women in your support networks who are going through some of the same things that you're going through in life. As I got older, my community of women became more of a community of friendships, community of work groups, and also community of community groups. For example, my personal community of women is my family—my mother, my sister, my cousins, my nieces, and my aunts. That's my first support group. The next community of women are my friends [from] high school, college, and my career. I have a solid group of friends that have stayed with me throughout my career and throughout my life. [We are a] close-knit community of females. Another community is my work community of women [in residential life], which is really important to me as well. I am vice president of the e-board for the Latino Staff Organization at my university. The e-board is composed of all Latina women, except one male, [so that's another important community to me right now.] We also have a Women of Color group that meets every month at my university. We go to lunch together...just to support each other because we're at a predominantly white institution. Lastly, there is my cohort in my doctoral program [where I also have a community of women of color].

So, there's a lot of different communities in my life. Depending on what my needs are at the time, depending on what I'm doing, if I'm in school, if I'm working, if I'm home, [how much

I connect with these communities] tends to change. There are times in my life when I use them more or less and [each community plays different] roles depending on what my needs are. For example, for school, it's obviously to support each other through the doctoral program as women of color. If it's work, it's just to make the day-to-day work grind here at the university. My family [community of women] is for more personal stuff...like to help me get through some tough times in my life.

In my career, all women have been influential to be honest. My whole career, I have had mostly all female supervisors who are secure in who they are. They always told me to work hard and stand up for what's right but also had so much faith in me. [For example,] I would start a new job and my new boss [would say,] "Yea, you can go to the board of trustees tomorrow." They believed I could handle it. They always had faith in me [even though I felt like] I didn't even know what I was doing half the time. They weren't Women of Color because I grew up and lived in Massachusetts, but I looked up to them because they were strong females.

[For example,] there are only three people of color in management positions at my university. The Latina/o/x community [at my university] is very proud of me for being the one Latina that's in a management position. I really believe that my resilience, my development, and my achievements have a lot to do with my communities of women, because those are the people that helped me balance myself, helped me stay humble. They always gave me support and always saw in me something bigger than I saw in myself.

[Beyond influencing me professionally, my communities of women have influenced my ability to be myself and to be authentic with my feelings.] Community of women for me is [about being able to be your whole self—to show emotion.] You can never speak to a man or a male colleague about certain things—about who I am and how I feel or my dreams or any of that. I think

sometimes males think that if you're talking about your feelings or if you're emotional, it's because you're weak or you can't handle something. Women understand it's not the case—most of them, anyway. With females, whether they have the same type of family system or structure that I have or not, they tend to be more empathetic. They tend to understand feelings and not think that feeling is a sign of weakness. All my communities of women have helped me feel like it's okay to be myself, to be emotional, to be dramatic if I need to be, because we are all unique individuals who are balancing a million things. So, the communities of women are really beneficial for a woman to grow and learn and feel supported and not feel like she's doing it alone. So, if something really great happens or something horrible happens, I go to the women that I work with or the women I went to school with or the women that are mentors first [because they know me at an emotional and personal level, beyond the professional].

[This level of comfort within my communities of women is all possible, because these communities are built on trust.] I'll be honest, if I didn't trust any of these women, I wouldn't open up to them. Support and being comfortable [with each other] is a big deal. The way you trust somebody is you start talking and taking the time to learn about her. I've learned from them (my communities of women) personally every day. I learned from their experiences and by sharing stories. [You learn that you] can connect with those stories, and [through those shared stories] you get your motivation and you realize you have the same value set. I did that with all these groups [so we have developed a sense of trust with each other].

[All of the women in my different communities of women have a reputation for standing up for what they believe in no matter the obstacles they face.] They all share the same traits and values of working hard, of fighting for what's right, of being ethical. They all value family. They all understand that differences matter [regardless of their own race.] [These women] fight for

what's right even though the fighting could be hard, and they may lose. They're assertive, aggressive, [and] maybe almost feminist. They're always arguing or fighting for something. To be honest, if someone described me [using those traits], I would be more than happy. [Exhibiting] those traits means that I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. [My communities of women] believe in those values and traits whether they are white, Latina, Black, or Asian.

4.6.5 Bodymindspirit: Personal Beliefs and Community Influence

For me, bodymindspirit means the way you perceive things around you, how you interpret things, and how [people and events] affect you. That's what it means to me. The most spiritual time for me is when I finally get to stop and be silent. It's when I'm by myself. It just means a connection between my thoughts, how I interpret them, and how I react to them. For example, I really believe that when you're really stressed out, it affects your whole body. I know that for a fact, because I had to do fertility [treatments to conceive my first child] and there was nothing [physically] wrong with me. Then I got pregnant with [my second child] without using fertility [treatments]. [The stress that my mind and spirit were under was affecting my body.] So, I believe in the mind, body, and spirit connection. For me, it (bodymindspirit) means thinking about what I've done, thinking about the balance of my life, and how stress has affected me. I can talk to any of the women in my communities about it (balance and stress) and feel supported [because] they feel the same way and we [trust in each other].

4.6.6 Meaningful Communities of Women

Master's program peers. [The director of my master's program in higher education is a white woman, Dr. Fulton.] She was my advisor. Dr. Fulton primarily focused on [supporting] her students of color because we were in a very white institution. She really wanted to make sure that [all her students of color felt] a sense of belonging. Because of her, I felt smart. I felt I could do the master's program. She connected me with other women who were either students in higher education or working in it. [Because of her and those connections], I started feeling like I could depend on other women. These women had the same challenges and strengths that I had, and we were able to confide in each other, trust each other, and build a bond in my master's program. We all were going through the same stuff, and we still are. We're all professionals. We were all going through school together. We were all starting our families. There was a lot we had in common, and we weren't judgmental towards each other. The core of the community of women was Dr. Fulton. Even to this day, Dr. Fulton will connect us through Facebook, social media, by email. She continues to keep us together. I'm still very close with some of those women, and Dr. Fulton is still my adviser and mentor to this day.

[When I say we had the same struggles and goals I mean] we were trying to get ahead with our master's degree, yet we were working full-time jobs and starting families. We had guilt that came from giving some of that personal life stuff up to be students and be professionals. We had guilt, because we were working too much or going to school, but we weren't really making that much money at the time [yet still had to support our families]. [Regardless of all the challenges] we still wanted to go to school, even though we probably could've worked more or gotten different jobs. We wanted to put school first. So, we all had school as a priority, but we all were struggling

with the financial burden. We all had our own personal stuff happening that we talked about. So, it was really a bonding group of, “We can do it. We’re going to succeed. We’re going to persist and we’re going to keep on going.” We had each other, and we always connected to see how everybody was doing. [Over 20 years later,] we’re all on the same group text message. We’re all on Facebook together. If we have an event, we put it on Facebook [to let each other know].

Doctoral student peers. The doctoral [peer] community is huge (significant), because we did an online program and [so] you don’t spend much time with your cohort. We connected with each other at the first residency. We got a group of people that we felt comfortable with and we just stayed with that group until the end. The group was all Women of Color, eight women, and actually a couple Men of Color as well.

[The women of color in my doctoral cohort all came from different professional backgrounds within higher education, and some of them had professional experience outside of higher education.] My cohort really taught me a lot about myself. They gave me a lot of confidence because although I didn’t have 30 years of higher education experience, I did have over 20 years of experience. I have worked in different departments that they had never worked in. So, I felt confident in being able to explain different departments. I could explain how higher education works from the student affairs side. Meanwhile, they helped me understand the academic side of higher education. [Because we all had different professional backgrounds, we developed a] really big bond and boosted each other’s confidence. We could help each other out [because we had different knowledge bases].

[We would support each other by] calling each other. We would Facetime each other. We would do Google Hangout. We would help each other with projects and assignments. If there was a point where somebody wasn’t responding, we would just call and call and keep calling. During

weeks of residency [each year] we would have classes together and when classes were over we'd go to dinner every night.

[We also helped each other professionally.] One of my cohort members was looking for a job in Massachusetts at one of the community colleges, and I knew someone there. I called for her, and she got the interview and she got the job. That's how we pull each other up. I think that that's very, very important, because you don't even know it's happening while it's happening, but then when you stop and think about it, you're like, "Wow, we really helped each other get through the program, but we're actually helping each other get through life." We're helping each other get through life, and, because we've been through such an intense program, we know so much about each other's personal lives. We know we're going to be friends for life and that is important to me.

We all wanted to give up every day, to be honest, [but we motivated each other to keep going]. Especially the first year, I felt like we were going through boot camp. That first year was horrible for all of us, because [we] like to see things visually, and read, and then actually practice. But when [everything is online] it's really hard. So, we needed to discuss [the coursework so that] we could understand it. We were all the same that way. I think that if we didn't have each other some of us would not have finished the program. We all struggled, but we all did pretty well. I think that sometimes we didn't believe in ourselves enough, so we needed each other.

[We also shared personal struggles similar to those I shared] with the women in my master's program. We were all in different places in our lives, but yet we all needed each other to keep on moving with this program. We had the same goals and the same mission. We all had some really devastating events in our lives. We all had some type of death in our families, but that brought us closer. We have helped each other finish, [and] we really believe that we made it through [the doctoral program] because we had each other. That's a resource in itself, being able

to have somebody to support you throughout the program besides just your family and friends, because they (family and friends) didn't understand what we were going through. We (cohort members) understood what we were going through.

Colleagues. My first experiences at [my current university] were not that great, because I didn't feel like I really belonged here. It was a cold environment in regard to how people treated each other—[people had] very short answers, don't really help out, everybody kept to themselves. I didn't see anybody that looked like me (Latina) in my whole building. So, for me, it was really hard. I actually connected with the Cultural Center, and that's how I first started my community of women because all the Cultural Center directors are females of color. They made me feel comfortable at the University of Holly. [They validated how I felt about the transition and about being one of the only Latinas here.] [They would say things like,] “Yep, it makes total sense that you're having difficulty. It makes total sense that it's a weird transition. It makes total sense that you feel like you're the only one because this is the environment here.” So, they made me feel it's okay to feel that way, but I needed to create my own identity and my own support network, and I did. One of the directors [a Latina woman] and I connected right away, and she became my go-to person [for support]. She made me feel at home and stable. She helped me navigate the politics at the university. She helped me want to stay [at the university] and now I have this opportunity [in my current professional position].

[The directors at the Cultural Center told me about] the Latino Staff Organization on campus, [which is my second community of women]. We are all Women of Color on the executive board, and one Male of Color. There's a validation there (in the Organization), because it's a group of (Latina and Latino) faculty and staff that are looking to support and create mentorship programs for Latinas and Latinos, so that validates everything [in regards to being minoritized at the

institution]. After I became Vice President of the Organization, then the Women of Color group started up. [This group is smaller and more informal.] A woman in one of the student support services offices contacted Women of Color throughout the university so that we could come together since there are so few of us. We get together for lunch every month and talk about things that we have in common and just support one another [since we share common struggles working in this predominantly white university].

4.7 Melissa

Melissa and I met at a higher education conference. At the time, I was recruiting study participants. I told her about my dissertation study and she was immediately interested and excited to participate. During one of our conversations at the conference, we exchanged stories about our PhD journeys. Melissa provided advice about how to get through the dissertation phase while maintaining work-life balance. Although we were only together for a couple of days, we had several conversations and built rapport as we bonded about our PhD journeys and the challenges of the dissertation stage, which Melissa had already completed.

Melissa mentioned five communities of women in her interviews: family members, sorority sisters, mentors, PhD peers, and her current colleagues. During our interviews she focused most on the latter four communities, which I expand on in the profile. The artifact Melissa chose was a painting she purchased at a conference several years ago. Describing how the painting representing her communities of women, Melissa said:

It's this cadre of women standing around a heart with *mariposas* {butterflies} and flowers around it, and it's colorful. To me, when I saw it, it just represented this group of women. I kind of thought – that's me in the center, and it's Jennifer, there's Lourdes, and there's Paula. Or it's my mom, my sister, my *tía* {aunt}, my grandma. It's all these women who I surrounded myself with. It's peaceful. It's feeling at home whenever I'm with my community of women, whoever, they may be. With all of those women, I can be myself. I can be my best self, and I can relax. I don't have to pretend to be someone else. It's just very relaxing...The *mariposas* {butterflies} and all of the colors [make it a] representation of life and...how the women around me give me life and support me. It's a good reminder of where I've come and what I've been through.

The painting represented all of her communities of women and that she felt “at home” and comfortable within all of them. Women within her communities provided space and trust for Melissa to be her “best self.” Communities were peaceful places where she gathered support and felt revitalized after experiencing challenges, particularly throughout her graduate school years.

4.7.1 Career and Education: First-Generation College Student to the PhD

I work for a community college district. I'm currently in an administrative staff role at the district office. I work to align our community college curriculum with our top transfer institutions. I also teach a student development course at one of the colleges in the district. I know that the student population that I want to continue serving in my career is community college students. I'm not in the ideal job I want. Sometimes, though, I feel like a privileged little brat bitching about my salary, knowing that I'm able to have this salary because of my mom's persistence and yapping

about not quitting school. I am a first-generation college student. My sister and I were born in the Bronx. My grandmother didn't get past high school, but my mom got her GED. My mom always wanted us (my sister and I) to go because she never finished. My mom always told us the importance of school. My mom was the one who told us, "We are never going to end up barefoot, broke, and on welfare." Those three words, in that order, that phrasing exactly, that she never wanted us to have to depend on a man for anything. She said we were going to get our education and we were going to be better. So, we ended up going to the same university: my sister first, and then me. I graduated with my bachelors in May of '06, and I started my master's in August of '06 at the same university. I ended up finishing my master's in education leadership, with a concentration in higher education.

I had three female professors in my master's program, two of which were Latinas. That had the most profound impact on me. I'll be very honest [the university where I earned my bachelor's and master's degrees] is just an anomaly when it comes to scholars of color. Not everyone has this type of experience. At the time, I was also talking with my supervisor. He was kind of a mentor to me. I remember him telling me,

You know kid, you can get that master's degree, but I think the other three letters that matter are really going to be what holds weight for a lot of things. I said, 'A PhD?' He said, 'Yeah. With your skills, those three letters, that's it. You'd be set on fire, kid. You'd get any job anywhere.' I was like, 'Yeah. Let me apply.'

After I graduated in fall 2010 [with my master's degree], I got serious about applying [to PhD programs]. I quit my job and started my PhD program in higher education the next fall. By the summer of 2012, I took on a new job. I worked full-time in higher education from 2012 until

2015 [when I started my dissertation]. So, I was a full-time graduate student and full-time practitioner, too.

4.7.2 Latina Identity: Growing Up Nuyorican

I'm the third-generation to the U. S. My grandparents were all born in Puerto Rico. Then, they all moved to New York. My mom and father were born in New York. They met in New York, and I was born in New York. I think I was in the third grade when we had [an assignment about] how we identify ethnically and culturally. I didn't ask my mom because she was busy and she's working all the time, so I brought in something from Mexico and Italy because I thought that's what Puerto Rican was. I remember taking it home, and my mom goes, "No. Let's have a talk." We talked a little bit more about how my family's from Puerto Rico—reaffirming my affinity, how it was different. We have *pasteles*, and *arroz con gandules*, and it's very different from Mexican culture, and things like that. That's kind of how it (understanding my cultural identity) started—arising out of that class.

Slowly and surely, my affinity for being Puerto Rican in the States and identifying as Nuyorican really grew. [In New York I was] surrounded by other Puerto Ricans, going to the Puerto Rican Day Parade, being surrounded by family, all of that. I think it was more of an embracing of cultural identity in New York and having pride in your ethnic identity and roots. [By the time I was in] high school I was much more aware of being Puerto Rican and the difference between identifying as Puerto Rican living in the States versus being born on the island. I learned [that] from a very early age, from my family. They'd say, "You're Puerto Rican because you were

born here, and you're a descendent, but you're not really Puerto Rican because you weren't born on the island."

In college I took a bilingual and bicultural studies course. I started researching more about Puerto Rico and its contentious relationship with the U. S. and really understanding more after I ended up joining a Latina sorority in college. Now, I'm especially proud to be Puerto Rican and to be Nuyorican. For me, now that identity is more salient. I like making [Puerto Rican] food and being in circles with other Latina/o/xs [through communities like] the American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education. For me, [being Latina is about] making sure that I know and understand that my experiences as a Puerto Rican; as much as they are similar to everybody else's, they are also different [from other Latino nationalities, too].

[When it comes to my race,] I feel conflicted to say white, because I've never necessarily identified with being white, although I know I benefit from the privileges of having lighter skin. I used to say African American because of my ancestral roots, but I feel like I can't because I don't endure the oppressive abuse and systemic oppression that occurs for Black folks in America. So, I identify as Latina other, and if given the opportunity to designate Puerto Rican, I do that.

4.7.3 Gender: Motherhood and Sexism

Being born a female and being socialized as a woman and identifying gender-wise as a woman, we're socialized into this concept of motherhood and having a maternal instinct. When you're a little girl and your family socializes you into being a woman, you are socialized with the concept of what it means to be maternal, and also, conversely, shunned if you disclose that you don't feel maternal, don't want children, can't have, or don't have children.

Being a Latina in academia, first and foremost, is realizing that I'm in privileged spaces. I'm so lucky to be here; I'm thankful for being here. But it also means that I don't act like that in front of other people who don't get it. [I don't act] like, "Oh, I'm so lucky to be here. I'll do anything you ask me to do," because then you get walked all over, and people take advantage of you. [For example, while pursuing my master's] I found out [that a male colleague] was making three grand more a year than me because [he'd been in the position for a couple years longer than I]. Yet, when I finished my master's degree, I didn't get a raise. I was so angry.

4.7.4 Personal Understanding of Bodymindspirit

There's so much that I can interpret from bodymindspirit, but, for the most part I think for me, I see it in two different ways. First, there's this idea of compartmentalizing and being our whole selves. There are just certain spaces in which I exist that I just can't be my whole self, and that just depends on who's around me. For example, in my current position I work with a ton of people of color, so I can code switch, and it's fine. But when I'm not in those spaces, and when I'm around more white-identifying people, or even those who are of color who are socialized and normalized to a white way of knowing and being, I don't code-switch.

[Second,] I also see bodymindspirit as having an intuitive nature. While I might have certain things that I compartmentalize across different spaces, I still have this very intuitive nature when dealing with people. I know if I can trust you or not within the first 5 to 10 minutes of talking to you and how you respond to me. Then, just being able to establish relationships that I know are healthy. Bodymindspirit is an attempt of having some type of holistic balance in your life where you realize the things that you need in the moments that you need them in order to have peace and

clarity moving forward. [It's also about] making sure that [I continue to do] the things that feed my body, my mind, and my spirit—my life.

When I went into my doctorate program, it became even harder [to keep bodymindspirit balance], because I had a full-time job. I used to joke that I was a full-time student, a full-time employee, and a part-time wife, because that's a lot to handle and balance. I had to start stepping back and setting the boundaries of what was school, what was work, [and] what was home. I think that's gotten better over time. I've tried to set aside those different things (responsibilities and identities), knowing that I still exist as a wife in this space. I still exist as a daughter in this space. I still exist as an employee in this space. I don't necessarily have to be all those things at one time. I had to learn how to do that to find balance, so that way when the spillovers happen it doesn't wreck my whole moment for that occasion.

4.7.5 Communities of Women: Meaning and Influences

All of the women in my communities are Women of Color, except Kayla (advisor in the doctoral program). I think we all have similar ideas and values that we hold near and dear to us. Specifically, the women I met through the doctoral program, including my mentors, [are all] racial and social justice [oriented]. Kayla was very vocal about it (racial justice and social justice)—even for being a white woman. She wasn't just an ally, she was an advocate.

[My communities of women, which consist of sorority sisters, graduate school mentors, and PhD peers, are important for several reasons.] [Professionally,] they remind me of what it means to be on the ground. They remind me of why I do the work that I do. They remind me of the practical applications of the work that we're doing. They keep it real. [Both the work I do] in

my current position at the community college and my research specifically impact Latino students. When I talk about some of these philosophical implications, it comes back to: What does that mean for students?

[I sometimes] get upset with everything that's going on with the mini-constituents I have to report to. It gets really tiring and frustrating. They (my community of women) keep asking me questions that help remind me of why I'm here, why I chose this career, and why I'm in doing what I'm doing. They keep me grounded and also keep me sane. I think it's really important to keep the communities of women around me, to keep me in check and make sure that I'm not imagining things. They are a sounding board of women who tell me, "Girl, you are just in your head, and it's because you've been writing all day, and you need to take a break." The women in my communities help keep me grounded.

For example, yesterday in my conversation with Brenda (mentor), I was very frank with her. [I told her that] I know the student population that I want to continue serving in my career are community college students. Whether that's through research as a faculty member, administrative work at a community college, or even as a policymaker. She's said, "Good, I'm glad that you realize that. I'm glad that that's something you're really considering." Sometimes the bigger picture isn't always clear for me. When I talk to them, they help me connect the dots. Lourdes (PhD peer) helps me think more deeply about situations. Brenda helps me think more practically. My sorority sisters are the ones who help keep me grounded, reminding me that I'm in a very different [privileged] space than a lot of people.

[At a personal level] some of them are also married [like I am]. I don't really have a history of understanding what it means to have a healthy marriage and neither does my husband [since his parents are divorced.] I look to a lot of these women for advice, for understanding, for a place to

vent sometimes, especially those who have marriages or the ones whose marriages didn't work. Also, there was a point in my doctorate where I really was, like, I don't know if I want to do this anymore. Every one of the women in the groups that I have been a part of, every one of them, have mattered in this whole process and getting me through. Everybody has been incredibly supportive.

I think that they (communities of women) are important to me because I can learn from these women, and I also have a mentorship [influence] on other Latinas and other women [through my various] roles. The three women that I work with and one male—all four of them are pursuing their PhD. There's ways in which we can learn from each other, and ways in which we can mentor each other. That's why these communities are really important to me, because I don't see myself as someone who ever stops learning.

I think for the most part, in order to complete a PhD, you have to have passion for learning and knowledge that just doesn't end after you complete the doctorate. I have this overwhelming sense of always wanting to learn and grow. That's really important to me, and I keep the women in my communities around because they help me to continue to learn and grow. Everyone who I keep in my life has a purpose. [Each person has] a role not just because we're friends, not just because we're *familia* {family} and not just because we went through the [PhD] process together, but because there are certain things that I learn from [them], which I really am truly grateful for. [As a result,] I want to make sure that I let other people know, especially other Latinas and other Women of Color know, that it (woman-to-woman support and mentorship) exists and it exists in a healthy way. [I want to show other Latinas] that we do have communities of women, communities of Women of Color who want to see other women succeed, and achieve more and achieve higher, and go further up the ladder than what they ever thought was possible. That does exist and that exists within the communities that we breed.

4.7.6 Community of Women's Influence on Bodymindspirit

I think the people who have been the most influential on that (bodymindspirit) have been my sorority sisters and my academic *hermanas* {sisters}. One of my academic *hermanas* {sisters} is divorced [so she offers me some relationship wisdom based on her experiences.] [She asks me] what I'm doing to nurture myself, [both] apart from my relationship and within my relationship. [She asks] how I'm making time for me. [She reminds me to] take time for myself.

They (my academic sisters) have been critical, [because they are] the best sounding board for finding a bodymindspirit balance, for being my whole self, my present self, in different spaces in which I exist. [For instance,] I get stressed; I get anxious or upset, frustrated. Then, I'll text them [to] tell them exactly what's frustrating me and the best way [to handle it]. They're so great about listening to it (both personal and professional frustrations).

I'm meeting with Lourdes (PhD peer) tonight for writing. We meet every week, and we talk about that. Sometimes we don't necessarily write, because sometimes we're just catching up about family. That's important. There are some strengths that she has, [like] her methods and her research. She challenges me to do better. I feel compelled to be my best self around her. I challenge her [too], because we talk about things; we learn from each other. I learned so much, just about how to be a better researcher, how to think more deeply. Not just for my doctoral program but from the ideas that we end up bouncing off of each other about the ways in which we work and do research. We both really have benefitted from that. [For example,] Lourdes ended up getting a dissertation award. She got fully funded for her last year of work. I remember thinking, why wouldn't I even apply to something like that? Finally, I said, "I'll apply for dissertation awards. I'm

applying for three.” I’m doing things like that, which I wouldn’t necessarily have done. It’s because of Lourdes’ influence.

4.7.7 Meaningful Communities of Women

Sorority. [In college I joined a] Latina-specific sorority. A lot of them are all Mexican-American women. For me, that was really important having them at college, because the first year of college I was really thinking about leaving my college [and] transferring back to [a school in] New York. They were definitely helpful to stay and persist.

My sorority sisters were there for me. They would always offer me a ride if I needed it. We would cook for each other. When Alexa had bad panic attacks she would call me and say, "Hey, can you come over? I don't want to be alone." I'd come over to her place. We'd have dinner. I would sleep there. I'd get up and go to work in the morning. Those girls were there for me when my family couldn't be, either because my mom just couldn't help me because she wasn't there physically or my sister [couldn't understand things I was going through]. Even if we don't talk to each other for a year, we pick up where we left off.

My sorority sisters were my bridesmaids, and Kelly (one sorority sister) was my maid of honor. My husband and I are the godparents to her kids. Kelly and I are [very close]. She still does for me; I still do for her. [Additionally, the sorority] has been a place where I can develop my leadership and my mentorship. I held two [leadership] positions when I was active in my chapter. When I graduated I became part of the national board of directors.

Mentors. [Kayla was my advisor and initial dissertation chair. Brenda ended up chairing my dissertation, because Kayla left the institution before I graduated.] [Kayla made an impact on

me] because of her outreach when I was new to the program. She was very, very kind, and affirming in her approach to my learning. Kayla held really high expectations for all of us. Kayla was also very much of the mindset of, “I don't care if you're going to be an administrator, go into the policy research world, [or] be a faculty member. Whatever you want to do, your dissertation is going to set you up, and you are going to publish around this.” That was the mindset working with Kayla, that your dissertation is going to set you up for what you want to do in your career. You are going to publish on it and have a solid working foundation from which to move on from.

[Kayla's mentorship] became more important as [I] started realizing the ways in which people recognize and differentiate the programs from which you graduate with your doctorate. You start realizing that there's a certain level of prestige carried by who you are being represented by or who is in your academic lineage. [Kayla came from a well-known and highly ranked program and university, so that was beneficial in that regard.] The lineage is important because, due to elitism in academia, PhDs from top programs get the majority of faculty positions.

Like Kayla, Brenda [my advisor and final dissertation chair], held high expectations for us. [For instance,] when I went into the dissertation with her and was finishing things, before I sent her one of my last drafts, she said, "Oh, I just had this student assistant print off all of the pages that we're going to go over today." It was a hundred and something pages. When she read my stuff, I knew she cared, because all of my stuff was marked up. It helped me grow. She had advised me to find an editor for my dissertation for the final draft. Brenda told me, “If you want to speed this process along and finish on the timeline you have, get an editor.” [I appreciated that, and it made a significant positive difference in the process.]

[My mentors provided me with holistic support and] I love it. They have personalized the experience to understand that it's not just [me] who goes through the dissertation process. Brenda

jokingly says that [my husband] got the degree, too. I think that's really important holistically. Kayla started taking that approach with me when we had a conversation about [challenges I was going through in my marriage.] She was already very holistic [and after that conversation] she really became more so. They (Kayla and Brenda) ask about me as a person outside of my role in academia. [They are concerned with] what I do personally to make myself happy. I feel like it (their holistic approach) gives me a really good understanding of how to keep a balance—how to keep from feeling like I'm going to drop out. That's so important. [Currently,] I'm transitioning out of being a student and [into] being a colleague. In that community, with my mentors, [I am] seeing myself become more of a professional colleague who is trying to become an expert in the field. They are really helping to guide me towards those understandings.

Academic *hermanas* {sisters}. My doctoral program sisters are my academic *hermanas* {sisters}. They are important to me because they get it. Lourdes, Jennifer, Paula, and I have had a Facebook group just between the four of us for the last three years. That's our way to get to each other. They get the process of being in a doctoral program. They get what it means to have this pressure on you. We're all Women of Color. The reason a lot of us all hung out together is because of Kayla [my first dissertation chair]. Kayla was incredibly intentional about putting us together through a qualitative methods course focused on minoritized student populations and a research project focused on Latinos and access.

[These women were a major source of support. For example, at one point in the PhD process,] Kayla looked over [the first chapter of] my dissertation and told me, "You know, you really should get this proofread before you give it to me." I said, "Okay, no problem." [However,] we were meeting the next day for chapter two. Well, she starts reading my chapter two and says, "You know, I told you, I think you should get this proofed before you give it to me." I said, "Yeah,

I know, you told me that yesterday." She just kind of sighed and said, "You know Melissa I just feel that you really need to just take some time to simmer in the literature a little bit more." [I was taken back because] I was trying to propose [my dissertation study] right after that, since both my committee members were going on vacation for the second half of the summer. [As soon as I was alone] I was in tears. I was bawling. I was so frustrated.

I contacted Lourdes, Jennifer, and Paula that night, and I told them exactly what had happened. All three of them were there to be, like, "Don't worry about it, Melissa. That sucks. My God, I can't believe she said that. It'll be okay." Because one of the things Kayla said was, "Maybe you just need to take a break from writing. This may delay you, but I think you probably should just take a break from writing and really seriously think about what it is you're writing." They really talked me off the ledge, because I was bawling. I just didn't know what to feel. They were the ones who were, like, "We get it. We know." Lourdes was saying, "That happened to me earlier this year." Paula saying, "She did that to me, too." Jennifer saying, "Oh my God, thanks for letting me know what to expect." It was very much like we get it.

When we all lived in the same city we would get together for dinner, to watch movies, have drinks, or have a writing day. After our proposal defenses and our actual [final] defenses, we all went to dinner, always. Then after all of us defended [our dissertations], we had a celebratory dinner to celebrate the fact that all four of us had defended and we were all done. We socialize together not just because of being in the program. We genuinely enjoy each other's company and the feedback that we get from each other. [Although we've graduated, we stay connected.] Since we're not all in the same city anymore, [we meet up] at conferences. We try to room together [and] make it a point at every conference to have a meal together.

I think with my academic *hermanas* {sisters}, it's (our relationships) starting to evolve because we're not with each other [in the same city] anymore. Lourdes and I try to schedule time to try and do projects together on our own every week [through Skype]. We have also scheduled time with Paula and Jennifer to meet up on Skype or Google Hangout. We also have our group text. I feel like even on our group text, it's evolved from where we were as students to where we are now as professionals. A lot of our conversations have evolved from having to turn in this paper, or write this for our dissertation, to "I have to submit this for publication now." The relationships are evolving with the ways our own identities have evolved after completing our PhDs. Not being student[s] anymore but now being in professional roles.

I'm the only married one out of the four of us. My family and some of my sorority sisters have expectations for what family should look like after you get married. [They feel I should] have children. My academic *hermanas* {sisters} haven't said anything about that. I'm the one who brings up wanting to have kids. They're, like, "Do what feels right. Be your own person. Do what you need to do." Whereas in other circles, it's brought up to me.

Current Coworkers. The women in my career who I have met through my job are important because I bounce career ideas off of them. I am able to learn from them what it means to be a leader. [They teach me] how to navigate the political waters at my institution, which is critical in any position that [I'm] ever going to be in. You need to know people who know the system, who know how it works, and who have good relationships with other people throughout the network. That way, that can be your "in," if you will.

[These women are all 10 years or more] older than me. [I consider them] colleagues and mentors. They affirm my role [and] the work that I'm doing. They reinforce the importance of my presence, which is essential. They have seen my own personal strengths. They give me the

guidance and the tools [for] how to approach other people in the network. I go to them and say, “Hey, I’ve got this email going. I have a feeling that this might not be received how I’m intending. Could you take a look and let me know what you think?” I need people with those different lenses to tell me how it’s perceived.

4.8 Tina

I reached out to Tina via email because I read her work in graduate school and admired her as a scholar and woman. I felt intimidated because I respect her, but she was very responsive, generous, and reaffirming. In order to build rapport and make myself transparent and vulnerable as the researcher, I emailed Tina my positionality statement and told her about my personal background and connection to the study’s topic in our introductory phone call.

Tina has nearly 40 years of experience working in higher education. She is a senior scholar, activist, research, practitioner, and professor. She has served in numerous leadership positions in higher education, including being president of a national education organization. She’s also published numerous educational reports, research articles, and books. Tina is well known in the higher education community, especially among Latinx scholars and scholars interested in social justice and equity. Her work focuses on low-income, first-generation, and Latina and Latino students’ experiences. As a theorist, researcher, and practitioner, her work has helped institutions understand the experiences of underrepresented students and provided guidance on how to affirm, validate, and support students of color and their funds of knowledge.

Compared to other participants in this study, Tina held unique identities and perspectives

concerning the topics we discussed in our interviews. She was unique among the participants, because she was the only senior scholar. In her late 60s, Tina was at least 20 years older than all the other participants. Both her age and status as a senior scholar influenced how she conceptualized and talked about communities. Her narrative was theoretical and reflective, and her conceptualizations of community of women, funds of knowledge, and bodymindspirit were integrated. Through our conversations it was clear that, for Tina, community of women, funds of knowledge, and bodymindspirit were all connected. Bodymindspirit was not only ingrained in her descriptions of her communities of women, but it was also embedded into how she understood her own role and purpose in her profession and in the world. Her career and sense of purpose revolved around “deconstructing what knowledge is” to underscore the funds of knowledge that Latino and Latina students bring into educational institutions, which are often overlooked among deficit-based rhetoric and practices.

The artifact Tina selected was a journal that belonged to her mother, who had passed away. The journal represented the bodymindspirit and the deconstruction of knowledge.

My mother, I remember, used to tell us that she wasn't quite sure the year that she was born because there had been a great fire that burned all of the documents, so that always stayed in her mind. What she did is that she created a journal that included information about all of her family. She indicates when they were born, when they died. There are pictures in here. This was her prized possession. Even as she was nearing the end of her journey, if anyone came to visit, she would talk about *el libro* {the book}. Some people wanted to borrow it, and she would say, “No, no.” She didn't let anybody have it because she was afraid to lose it. She passed away [and] I brought the journal with me. It reinforces to me the strength of my mother. I think I get my inner strength from her. It represents her

strength, her intelligence. I think the definitions of intelligence are very limited. There are people who think that poor people don't have anything going on, and nothing could be further from the truth. She was very smart. Even though she didn't get even to finish high school, much less go to college, she had intelligence. [The journal represents] forms of knowledge because it's about deconstructing what knowledge is. It's not just about reading Shakespeare and Thoreau and all that stuff. I mean, yes, there's a role for that, but then there's the knowledge of our strengths—the strengths are, as Tara Yosso calls it, community cultural wealth and that we learn from our struggles. Even though my mom didn't have a quote/unquote "good education" in a book way, academic way, she had her own intelligence. She did the best she could, and I think she did a great job, and I'm very proud of her.

As Tina explained, the journal deconstructed knowledge because it was her mother's creation and her mother did not have a formal education. Yet, she recorded the most critical knowledge—the history of her life and her family members' lives. The journal is also representative of bodymindspirit, because her mother had passed away and so the journal that remained held meaning beyond its tangible pages at a spiritual level. The journal carried the spirit of her mother—the intelligence and strength of her mother—because it represented something that her mother was passionate about—recording family history and events. Her mother's journal kept the family history and the meaning of family and life alive and present, even after her passing.

4.8.1 Education and Career: Community College to Senior Scholar/Activist/Student

Advocate

I'm co-director of Lavender University's Education Research Center. I've always been interested in the educational success of underserved student populations, specifically the Latinx population, so my work really continues along those lines. All of them (my work projects) are concerned with either general student success or Latino students or specifically STEM success. Even whether students are in STEM or not, we've been identifying the assets that Latino students have that propel them to succeed in college. What I'm trying to do now is to change the narrative about student success. Everything is negative and deficit based. We identified those assets both for STEM students and non-STEM students. That's really how I'm trying to change the narrative by not focusing on deficits, by not saying that you have to emulate the white experience to succeed, [but] that the Latinx community has its own ways of knowing that need to be leveraged. What I do now is give talks around the country, workshops, and comprehensive assessments in higher education institutions that invite me to come and share this work and work with faculty and their staff so that they can do a better job in helping more students to succeed.

I began my college career at the local community college, [then] transferred from there to earn an associates degree at [another local] college, back in the 1960s. From there, I transferred to the university [in my home state] to earn a bachelor's degree. I came back to [the city where I grew up] and taught middle school for five years. During that time, I started working on a master's degree in counseling and finished it. Then, I decided that I wanted to develop myself further and applied and was accepted at [an out of state university] and left [my home town], the first in my

family to leave the state, to pursue higher education—[the PhD]. That's my life that made me who I am today, but that's basically my education trajectory.

Early on, I think I was a lost kid. I had no real guidance. I had no one to turn to for guidance about education. Everybody was focused on day-to-day survival. As you grew up, you knew that your role was going to be to work at a grocery store or a restaurant. There was just always something inside of me. There's always been that about me, that I said, "No, no, no. I'm not accepting of this. That's not what I want to be. That's not how I want to live my life." I've always been the type that I just want to do things differently. My mother would always say, "*A Tina le gusta mucho experimentar*" {Tina really likes to experiment}. She was right about that.

[Growing up] I saw a lot of chaos, some violence, and it just made me think that this is not what I want to be. This is not the kind of life that I want to have or that I would want my children to have. Really, that's what drove me to passionately pursue a college education, even though that was not a part of my family's upbringing. I tell my friends, I would be flipping hamburgers somewhere in [my hometown]. Instead, I moved forward. I left [my hometown], even though my parents didn't want me to. I always followed my own sense of where I needed to go. I think that I made the right decisions.

4.8.2 Latina Identity: Critical Perspectives Grew in Graduate School

I think my culture and ethnicity—I grew to appreciate all of what it was and the meaning as I got an education and was able to reflect on those kinds of issues. Again, I didn't sit down with someone and really come up with ideas about what the meaning of culture in the Latino community is, not until much later in my life. That doesn't mean that I wasn't aware of issues. I remember,

when I got to the university [to earn my PhD] that was the time where I had a critical mass of other members of the Latinx community and we would go to a bar and have beers and begin to think about our communities and what we were going to be in life and what [we would do to serve our communities]. Those were very, very special times. I'm glad that I had that opportunity.

Certainly, it (my culture and ethnicity) is a critical part of my life. I am who I am and very proud of that. All of my work is to help others who, as I say, grew up like me with hopes and with dreams but not knowing how to realize them. Everything that I do is for our community, number one, and for other underserved students who are in the same predicament [that I was once in]. I want people to be educated, to get out of poverty, and to be significant members of the larger societal context.

4.8.3 Gender Identity: “Basic Survival was the Primary Focus”

I don't think I concentrated on the meaning of my gender early on. I grew up in a community where basic survival was the primary focus not any kind of critical confrontation of societal issues. On the other hand, the family certainly gives you a context, even though you don't realize it. Somehow it's processing in your mind. My mom had to work several jobs to help the family survive. I learned the role of women in the Mexican-American community, which sometimes they're seen as simply subservient to the man. My mother, on the other hand, was very strong. She had a lot of difficulties, because she was separated [from my father]. Sometimes her own family didn't support her. She was the youngest, so she, I don't think, ever got treated as equally as she wanted to be treated. [Nonetheless,] she made sure that we had food to eat. I think I learned to be strong from my mother.

When I grew up, we had two very distinct categories. You're a man or you're a woman. Initially, I saw myself in a very static way, that I'm just a woman. Now, as I evolve, I see the whole notion of intersectionality that there's my sexuality and there's my socioeconomic class. There's my religious orientation and all of those things are really who I am. It's not assigned to just the category of being a woman.

4.8.4 Personal Understanding of Bodymindspirit

Growing up, we were Catholic and that's all we knew. We followed the tradition and conventions of Catholicism. There was a period during my undergraduate years where I started to question that belief system. The most influential experience that I had was being a fellow of the [Sky] Institute, which addresses issues of spirituality, forgiveness, and compassion. We had intense discussions about different issues, about our lives, about our philosophy, about our spirituality, about our growth. Each one of us had an individual learning project that was part of the contemplative process. We had to outline a project that could address our inner and outer selves. My project was to bring issues of authenticity and spirituality into higher education. My project actually resulted in my book, [which was later published.] This [institute experience] ended over 10 years ago, but that community still meets periodically. That experience was a phenomenal foundation to my own spiritual growth because I developed a deeper sense of wisdom. It helps you to see how we're all connected. It turns the world upside down. Instead of looking at chaos as bad, you look at it as, "What's the good thing here? What can we learn from this?" It really reshapes your thinking. That's part of the wisdom process.

[Also, throughout decades of working in higher education,] I find that people also want ideas about love, forgiveness, compassion, and healing. I've done some things along those lines as well. That's part of what I hope to do now as I move forward to my future and the next stage of my life. I think that it's not just about me as an individual in terms of my own spirituality but awareness and becoming a better person. Again, it goes back to making a difference in our society. You do this because you want a better society. Bringing it (the concept of bodymindspirit) to education, you want to build students' capacities that go beyond intellectual reasoning and problem-solving and critical thinking, which are very important, but what about teamwork? What about being a good person? What about coming to terms with your emotions? What about compassion? What about empathy?

As I give talks on this and I ask faculty and staff, if you could guarantee that students would graduate from this college with the most important competency, what would that be? Always, without fail, the largest list has to do with what I just talked about. People talk about students seeing the glass half full, that they want them to be better leaders. They want them to work well with others. Then I stop and say, "How much time are you spending on this? If you're saying that this is the most important thing." So, they all start laughing because they're not spending enough time on that. I think that's the spirituality so to speak that I feel, or [at least] a part of it.

The other part of it is our own reflection, our own contemplative practice, which I think is important. If we're going to do this work, I think we need to have our own contemplative practice as well. It could be meditation. It could be journaling. It could be poetry. It could be walking in nature. It could be whatever but something that takes you deeper as a human being, where you have a deep exploration of who you are, what your gifts are to the world, how you're going to make a difference, and how you want to walk in this world as a human being. All of those things are a

part of what I would include in the realm of spirituality. It (body, mind, and spirit) is all connected. It's not one or the other; it's all connected. If you don't take care of your body and you get sick, you can't do anything. It's about wholeness. All of that makes the phenomenal person. It's all connected. I see everything as connected.

4.8.5 Communities of Women: Meaning and Influences

Well, I have a community of women in both my personal and in my professional life, and they're both very important. Frankly, I've never given thought to [whether] I have a community or not. I just operate, basically, knowing that there are some people that I can count on whenever I need support or guidance or just to have friends.

Let me start with friends from my personal life, and sometimes they're personal and professional—the people that are professionals, but we hang out. We go to the movies. We call each other to support each other. I'm at a stage in my life where I'm seeing more people get sick and getting really close to the end of our journeys, so these types of discussions are more prevalent now than, say, when I was in my 30s and 40s. I have some friends who are professional and personal. We can talk about academic issues, but we also speak about our personal lives, our careers, our families, our loved ones. [There is also the] community of women in the GLBT community. I think that is also a really important part of our lives as we move forward and confront another set of issues. Those are all very important to me.

I actually have a good group of people that fit that particular category of being both personal and professional. I define the community as having both sets of people [personal and professional], getting support, those sets of people that are there that you know if something could

happen, that you can pick up the phone and call them, and so I'm fortunate to have that. It's hard to categorize because people can be both professionally and personally supportive in a very significant way at the same time.

I don't think that there was a formal process of formation [for my communities]. These communities are there. They evolved. People tend to form relationships with others who are pretty much where they are. In the gay and lesbian community, for example, there's just sort of an affinity there. We all share an identity that has been oppressed and marginalized and acted on with violence at times. Just to have people that you don't have to explain yourself to and who are academic colleagues as well, they're professional colleagues—[is very meaningful]. They also have these other [intersecting] identities—that gives you a special connection.

The scholars [community], I think we are really building on what others have created. For example, a number of these people I know are very good friends of Gloria Anzaldua and are taking her work further. [One of my friends] started the Society for the Study of Gloria Anzaldua, and there's a big conference next month. That brings together a wide range of individuals, whether they be gay or straight, but I think that a number of them are really there admiring Gloria's work. I think that what gives us inspiration and drive and passion is knowing that we need to create a body of work that is cutting edge, that moves us beyond the boundaries that have been imposed particularly on Women of Color, who have often been marginalized in terms of their ideas and their thinking. It's our way of speaking truth to power. I feel I am part of that community that is shaping new thinking and that is paving the way for others like you to say, "Okay, this is acceptable. This is validating to me."

It's not like we're consciously thinking of it. This is just coming from our hearts. This is the way we are authentic. This is what we believe in. This is our truth. This is the way we move in

the world. Everything that I've done is to help our people and other underserved groups. Everything I've done is to pave the way and to know that I've left this world in a better place than where I found it or left our community in a better place than where I found it. Everywhere I go, I meet people like you who inspire me, because as I get close to the end of my journey, I know that you will be there.

How my communities evolved. [My communities of women have evolved spiritually.] I think in my community, again, I'm at a different stage than your life. We've grown. They're in their 60s. Some people are starting their 70s. I think we have a spiritual dimension, and that's another area of the community that I think is very important. Not all of my friends have that, but those that do have that spiritual dimension have developed not just in the way of generating knowledge and scholarship—and all those things are important, obviously—but we've also grown in terms of wisdom. [We've grown] in terms of being careful thinkers, being judicious with our words, knowing that we have to get along with people, knowing that there's a larger pattern that the more we try to control, the less we control it, and that we need to step back when there's chaos and see chaos sometimes as a friend, as a way that we're being taught a lesson. If we don't learn the lesson of that chaotic situation, we're doomed to repeat the problem. These people I mentioned are pretty much there [in the sense that they understand their greater life concepts]. Not all of my friends are there, but I seem to connect more with them (those who understand these concepts). It's not just the growing in terms of being intellectually smart. I think that that's an important part of it, but I think we also need to be intelligent as social, emotional, and spiritual human beings.

Community influence on my sense of purpose and bodymindspirit. They (women in my communities) have given me models [in terms of] what they do and passion for their work. [They] care for our Latino community. [They perpetuate] the idea of mentoring other Latinas and

Latinos. [They show me the importance of] just moving forward, knowing that there are obstacles. There have always been obstacles, but we've jumped over them. We've grown as people, and now we're at stages in our own communities where Latinas reached out to me [to give talks at retreats and different events]. They could've gone to somebody else, but there was something in me that they saw that they could benefit from.

Many of us (fellow women scholars and I) got our doctorates in the '80s, [at the time] I had a community of doctoral and master students. We would be talking about what we were going to do and how we could make an impact. That drive, that passion has always been with me. In fact, that's the reason I pushed through a doctorate. I knew there was a greater purpose for me, and that's part of the spirituality as well. We need to be attuned to what our purpose is in life—what do we want to contribute to the world? I think we (women in my communities and I) are bonded by a common sense of purpose in life and in our professions. We're bonded by the care that we have for each other. In our lives, we have always worked to do good things, good things for our community. We hope that our work will leave a significant impact and push our community along. That's the beauty of the journey—that you can leave this world and know that you did everything you could to make it better.

4.8.6 Three Important Women in my Community of Women

My partner. Well, let me begin with my partner, who is a phenomenal and well-recognized artist. I've only known her for about five years, but she's a source of inspiration for me. Her work is very social justice-oriented. She's both a creative and an intellectual partner for me. I think that scholars ought to have an artistic side to them as well as a creative side to them.

Fellow academic scholar. Another person that is close to me is Nelly, [who is also an academic scholar.] We've known each other since the early '70s. I just really admire her work and her passion and all of the things that she's done: multiple books that she's worked on, [she's a] folklorist, and her contributions to literature. [She is] a very humble human being. [We are close friends.] Her mother passed away last year, and I went to a rosary at her home. She throws Halloween parties. We go and put on a costume, so we have fun. Even though we don't see each other every day, I know I can pick up the phone right now and we could talk. She can do the same thing for me.

My friend the attorney. My friend, Magda, the attorney, she's also a tremendous intellectual partner for me. At this stage, we're all talking about retirement and, "How did you do it and what did you have to do and how are you managing your finances?" Like I tell my friends, nobody prepares you for this stage of life. There's no course that will teach you all that you need to know. You have to figure things out, and it takes time. It's very time-intensive because you have to do a lot of reading. You have to really look at your lifestyle. You have to look and see what your goals are and where your money's going to go and did you save enough money. I would just tell you save, save, save. [Magda has provided a lot of guidance and advice on how to manage my finances now that I am in the later stages of my life journey.]

4.9 Chapter Summary

Participant profiles provided holistic portrayals of the experiences and narratives that each woman shared through her three interviews. Each profile's introduction provides a summary of

how the participant and I met and the extent of our relationship. I provide an overview of the participant's professional and academic experiences. I also discuss her chosen artifact and how it related to her identity, funds of knowledge, bodymindspirit and/or community of women. The body of each profile shows how the participant made meaning of her ethnic identity, gender identity, educational trajectory, childhood, family dynamics, and bodymindspirit. Moreover, profiles provide a comprehensive picture of the communities of women that were meaningful in participants' lives. In-depth stories about their relationships with specific women in their communities of women illuminate why these communities of women were meaningful to participants at personal, professional, academic, and bodymindspirit levels. It was necessary to share participant profiles before delving into thematic analysis for two reasons. First, first person profiles honor each woman by presenting a comprehensive picture of her story and experiences—rather than a thematic analysis that can sometimes become decontextualized and manipulated by the researcher. Second, profiles provide the researchers a holistic picture of participants' stories so that they can contextualize thematic findings in ways that remain more authentic of participants' actual lived experiences.

5.0 Chapter 5: Foundational Components of Communities of Women of Color

Communities of Women of Color¹⁰ have four foundational components that define them as community. These four components inductively emerged as themes during data analysis. First, women in communities had a pre-established *conocimiento* (reflective consciousness) about the power, influence, and value that Women of Color possess. Second, Communities of Women of Color formed in shared spaces or places. Even though over time women may move away from the space and place of the community's origin, the formations of communities occur in a specific and tangible space and place. Third, in order to form community, women had mutual epistemological perspectives. I call this epistemological solidarity. Epistemological solidarity brings women together. Fourth, Communities of Women of Color endure and evolve over time. Both shared space and place and epistemological solidarity help women build community by fostering the development of trust and friendship¹¹. Trust and friendship are important in Communities of Women of Color, because they, combined with epistemological solidarity, promote the development of the fourth foundational component—the community's endurance and evolution over time. As such, trust and friendship are embedded into the analysis of themes two and three. This chapter focuses on the first research question guiding the study: how do Latinas in academia

¹⁰Women in participants' communities were not exclusively Latinas. Some participants had white women who had critical perspectives about race in their communities. However, since the informants of this study were Latinas and all of them expressed that their communities of women were composed mostly, if not entirely, of Women of Color, I choose to refer to these communities as Communities of Women of Color in the thematic findings and conclusion chapters.

¹¹ Because the development and significance of trust and friendship in communities of women are embedded in four of my findings' themes (two of the themes in this chapter and two of the themes in the next chapter), I choose to discuss trust and friendship within these themes, rather than make them a separate theme.

make meaning of their communities of women? The foundational components of Communities of Women of Color examined in this chapter are grounded in participants' narratives about what communities of women mean to them and why their communities of women matter significantly in their lives. Moreover, foundational components one and three, *conocimiento* about *el poder y el valor de la mujer* and epistemological solidarity, reveal the funds of knowledge that are cultivated within Latinas' communities of women. Thus, foundational components one and three illuminate the third research question: What funds of knowledge are cultivated in Latinas' communities of women? In this chapter, I present how four themes manifested for the participants and their Communities of Women of Color. These themes illuminate the foundational components of participants' Communities of Women of Color reveal the funds of knowledge cultivated in their communities.

5.1.1 Component 1: Pre-established *Conocimiento* about *el Poder y el Valor de la Mujer*

Participants had core women figures in their lives who demonstrated how powerful and influential *mujeres* (women) can be. Thus, participants went into community with pre-established *conocimiento* (reflective consciousness) about *el poder y el valor de la mujer* (the power and the value of women). In the case of this study, it was mothers and grandmothers who shaped participants' views of *el poder y el valor de la mujer*. Mothers and grandmothers shaped participants' ways of knowing about women by passing on cultural funds of knowledge via "*consejos...and la experiencia*" (advice...and the experience) (Villenas & Moreno, 2001, p. 675). The funds of knowledge cultivated between participants and their mothers and grandmothers align with research on Latina mother-daughter pedagogies and the influence of mothers on Latinas'

identities and educational trajectories (Cammarota, 2004; Ceja, 2004; Easley, Bianca, & Leech, 2012; Ovink, 2013; Villenas, 2001; Villenas & Moreno, 2001). Mothers and grandmothers were exemplars of strength as they thrived, even though they struggled, and made critical, positive influences in participants' lives. The influence that mothers and grandmothers had on participants' identities, funds of knowledge, and educational and/or professional trajectories are a testament to their power and value in the lives of participants. Knowing the power and value of *mujeres* makes women *open* to coming into community together, because they believe in and recognize *el poder y el valor de la mujer*. While all participants discussed their mothers and/or grandmother's as influential women in their communities, I focus on the five richest cases in this chapter.

Tina's mother was her primary giver of funds of knowledge; her mother was a strong and resilient woman who overcame years of constant hardships. Tina was strong enough to embark on her own educational and professional journeys, because her mother set an example of what it took to overcome hardships and continue on no matter the struggle she faced. Tina's mother was poor and separated from Tina's father. Being a single mother was a significant obstacle for Tina's mother, because it was a cultural taboo. Tina explained that "because she (Tina's mother) was separated [from her husband] her own family didn't support her [or] treat her as equally as she wanted to be treated." Tina's "mom had to work several jobs to help the family survive...on about \$15 per week." In Latina/o/x culture "amplified family, in many ways a community...guarantees protection and caretaking" for those who abide by a set of cultural norms (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 141). However, the security and support Tina's mother received from her family diminished when she executed an agency over her own body that was considered a cultural taboo at the time (separating from the father of her children). Tina's mother's decisions to take agency over her own

body and her nuclear family, disrupting oppressive cultural norms, taught Tina that she did not have to accept tradition or a certain way of life.

Tina grew to question her surroundings, envisioning herself beyond the poverty she grew up in. When reflecting on her childhood and growing up in poverty, she said,

There was just always something inside of me...that I said, no, no, no...I'm not accepting of this...That's not how I want to live my life. I've always...just wanted to do things differently. My mother would always say, '*a Tina le gusta mucho experimentar*' (Tina really likes to experiment.).

Tina's mother passed on funds of knowledge through *la experiencia* as she taught her children by example—through her own struggles, strength, and agency (Villenas & Moreno, 2001). Tina's experience aligns with research indicating that for Latinas “knowing that their parents...struggled economically, or their awareness of the working conditions of their parents, [becomes] a catalyst for wanting to expand their educational opportunities beyond high school” (Ceja, 2004, p. 355). Her mother's struggle and *poder* gave Tina an understanding of her own individual *poder de mujer* as she sought a life beyond her childhood's economic conditions and achieved a PhD and a notable academic career.

Despite having less than a high school education, Tina's mother both prioritized her children's education and created knowledge on her own terms. For example, it was always a priority that her children attend school, even if it meant that they “had to move a lot so [they] could be close to school [and] could walk to school.” Her mother worked so much she could not take her children to school, but she ensured that schools were walking distance from home. Additionally, Tina's mother was the primary keeper of knowledge in her family. Tina demonstrated this with her artifact, which was her mother's journal—a book in which Tina's mother kept record of all the

important family events and dates. This journal was her mother's "prized possession." In explaining what the journal meant to her, Tina said, "It reinforces to me the strength of my mother. I think I get my inner strength from her." For Tina, the journal represented her mother's "strength, her intelligence," because "even though she didn't get to even finish high school, much less go to college, she had intelligence." Furthermore, the type of cultural and familial knowledge that Tina's mother recorded shaped Tina's views of what counts as knowledge. As Tina said, "There are people who think that poor people don't have anything going on [in terms of intelligence], and nothing could be further from the truth. She was very smart." Tina dedicated her life's work to "identifying the assets that Latino students have that propel them to succeed in college...[and to] change the narrative about student success." She wanted her scholarship to demonstrate that Students of Color do not have to "emulate the white experience to succeed, that the Latinx community has its own way of knowing that needs to be leveraged." Tina's mother demonstrated that knowledge and education are not bound to attending college or white ways of knowing. She was a powerful influence on Tina's ways of knowing, which manifested in Tina's scholarship and activism for the uplift of the Latina/o/x community and Students of Color in higher education.

Similar to Tina's mother, Carmen's mother also experienced occupational struggles. Carmen's mother taught her the value of education through challenges in her professional life, which were a result of immigrating to the United States where her professional credentials were no longer valid. Carmen and her mother's experiences were similar to other Latina mothers whose occupational struggles, due to immigrating and/or not having a college degree, motivated daughters to earn a college degree (Cammarota, 2004; Ceja, 2004; Easley et al., 2012; Ovink, 2013). In Chile, Carmen's mother often cared for Carmen and her sister on her own because Carmen's father was a political activist who was often away at protests and had been a political

prisoner. Her mother was also an accountant in Chile. From an early age, Carmen's mother taught her *el poder y el valor de la mujer* as she was often the primary caregiver and breadwinner in her family. When they immigrated to the United States, Carmen's mother "started cleaning houses" to support her family. Eventually, Carmen's mother worked her way into a law firm where she did bookkeeping and accounting. Carmen believed that she was capable of anything because of her mother's *experiencia* and perseverance.

Carmen's mother got through political warfare, immigration, and economic hardships. Because of her mother's strength, Carmen knew that she could get through school and whatever challenges life presented. As she said,

Her (mother's) strength really showed me how to be a strong female... she has gone through so much in her life and still comes out strong and happy...because of that, I always think that when things are really bad, they're not as bad as they can be because she's gone through worse things and I've seen it and she's fine.

Earning her masters and doctoral degrees was challenging for Carmen, because she had a family of her own and prioritizing her education meant making financial sacrifices and spending time away from her kids. However, the upbringing and lifelong support that her mother provided, along with the work ethic and strength she demonstrated, led Carmen to persevere in her own educational and professional goals no matter how challenging it was at times. Carmen affirmed her mother's strength and the influence it had on her saying,

My persistence and success comes from having a mother who really could manage anything. Even if it was stressful or sad, she got through it and just continued on. She always taught us, my sister and I...to be strong, to not depend on anyone but ourselves, to get our education.

Carmen's mother taught her *el poder y el valor de la mujer* by example—by weathering multiple life changes and rebuilding her career as best she could. Carmen's mother taught her that life's hardships and challenges did not define her life, her happiness, or hinder the pursuit of her educational and professional ambitions.

Unlike Tina and Carmen's mothers, Marlen's grandmother was highly educated. She exemplified how education, combined with being a mother and caregiver, fostered a powerful *mujer* identity. Marlen's grandmother embodied strength via her new *mestiza* consciousness—understanding, accepting, and embracing her intersecting and sometimes-colliding identities (Anzaldúa, 2007). Marlen's grandmother was a first-generation Cuban immigrant; she had a law degree, a PhD in education, and five children. Marlen explained that her grandmother had a major influence on her because “she raised me, so I was in a household where a woman was in charge.” Her grandmother was an example of a powerful, highly educated woman who also had five children and helped raise her grandchildren. She did it all: embracing her multiple identities as a mother, grandmother, caregiver, and scholar. Her grandmother's influence on Marlen's personal and professional identities became evident when Marlen described herself in much the same way as her grandmother. Marlen said that her community of women colleagues looked up to her as a role model, because “I have kids. I go to the gym. I cook. I'm a wife. I have this [high level] position, [and a doctorate]...like super woman.” Marlen's community of women colleagues viewed Marlen in much the same way that Marlen described her grandmother—highly educated, professional and personally accomplished, and family-oriented.

Despite her colleagues perceiving her as a “super woman,” Marlen would “bring them down to reality” and assure her community of women that “there were no super-human qualities...[but] there [were] trade-offs” in attempting to keep balance between all her roles.

Marlen's response to her colleagues shows that she embraced her multiple identities even though many times it meant "not doing 100% by your family" or not giving 100% to your job. Marlen embraced the fluidity of her multiple identities even though many times it meant not keeping perfect balance between them. Marlen, like her grandmother, embraced her many roles, thus gaining a "whole perspective, one that includes, rather than excludes...developing a tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" and imbalances (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 101). Through her *experiencia*, Marlen's grandmother was the first woman to teach her that *el poder y el valor de la mujer* meant she could be all things; she didn't have to choose between complex or colliding identities.

Melissa's mother's experiences and influences were similar to that of Carmen and Tina's mothers who transmitted much of their pedagogies through their lived experiences and life *lucha* — "daily ordinary struggle...to survive and to live fully" (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 129). Melissa's mother's strength was evident in her influence on Melissa's educational and professional trajectories. She passed on the meaning of *el poder y el valor de la mujer* via *consejos* (advice) and her *lucha*. The *lucha* that Melissa's mother went through in daily life molded the *consejos* she gave her daughters and the goals she set for them. Melissa shared her mother's repeated *consejo* to them, "My mom was the one who told us, 'You are never going to end up barefoot, broke, and on welfare.' Those three words, in that order...exactly...she never wanted us to have to depend on a man for anything." Melissa's mother worked "manual labor intensive" jobs and her highest education level was a GED. Due to her limited education, she and her two daughters moved back and forth between states every time she found a better job. Because of her constant *lucha*, Melissa's mother always aspired for her daughters to achieve more than she had. Melissa's mother always

told Melissa and her sister that “[they] were going to get [their] education, and [they] were going go to school, and we were going to be better” than she had ever had the opportunity to be.

In addition to *consejos*, Melissa’s mother made sure her daughters were college-bound by advocating for them in school, which was a part of her daily *lucha*. Melissa pointed out that her mother’s education level did not prevent her from being an advocate, saying, “My mom has been the fierce advocate in ways that traditional literature about Latino families, and specifically those without a college education, have discounted.” For example, when Melissa and her sister transferred elementary schools, she demanded that school administrators test them so they would be placed in the correct grade levels and not be set back. Later, when Melissa transferred high schools, the administrators did not want to place Melissa in the AP courses she had been enrolled in at her previous high school. To ensure that Melissa continued on the trajectory to college, Melissa’s mother advocated for her until she was enrolled in the AP courses. Melissa’s mother did not have a college education. Nonetheless, her aspirations for Melissa and her consistent advocacy were highly influential in Melissa’s educational trajectory, illustrating that mother’s *experiencias*, *lucha*, and *consejos* surpass the influence of mother’s education level (Ramirez, Garcia, Hudson, 2016). Melissa’s mother’s *experiencia*, *lucha* and *consejos* shaped Melissa’s epistemological perspectives about what she could achieve.

The strength in her mother’s *lucha* taught Melissa to be strong and persistent in her own *luchas*. Melissa earned her bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees while persisting through her own *lucha* of juggling full-time work, full-time academics, and her marriage through both of her graduate degrees. Melissa described those years saying, “I used to joke that I was a full-time student, a full-time employee, and a part-time wife, because that’s a lot to handle, and balance, and do.” Despite struggling to keep balance, Melissa described her *lucha* as a “problem of

privilege...compared to [her] mom.” Thus, she felt that if her mother was strong enough to persist in her life *lucha*, she was strong and capable enough to fight for and achieve her own educational ambitions. *El poder y el valor de la mujer* that her mother taught her contributed to Melissa persistence through the achievement of her PhD.

Like Marlin’s grandmother and Melissa’s mother, Lucero’s mother also was influential in her educational trajectory. Lucero attended an Ivy League college and attributed how far she had gotten in her education to how strong-willed her mother was about her education. When Lucero was in college and took courses on Women of Color feminism, she realized the agency and power of her grandmother and mother, stating,

I began to understand the different power that my mother and my grandmothers had in the family. In particular, my mother was the one that outlined the path for us (Lucero and her sister) to college, and the one who protected us in our time to be academic people, and the one who defended us against the men in the family when they questioned the rationale for educating girls. She was the one that did all that. It wasn’t my dad.

Lucero’s mother championed Lucero’s Ivy League education even when persisting was hard. Lucero’s mother had strong convictions and expectations regarding Lucero’s education. For example, Lucero contemplated leaving the Ivy League college and moving back home because she felt like an outsider at the predominantly white institution. However, Lucero’s mother did not allow her to leave the Ivy League institution, because she felt there was no comparable “high enough quality” college in their hometown. Although it was hard on Lucero at the time, when reflecting on the event and her mother’s choices Lucero said, “I can appreciate that she set a goal. She set a bar that was very high, and she would never, ever hear of us (Lucero and her sister) second-guessing or giving up on that goal.” Because of her mother’s high educational expectations,

Lucero earned a degree from an Ivy League college, went on to work at multiple universities, and continued her education through to the doctoral degree.

In addition to fortifying her educational path, Lucero's mother also safeguarded her gender identity. Like Tina's mother, Lucero's mother also disrupted normative gender roles and sexist norms in her family. For instance, when Lucero would come home from college she would notice that her cousins would "serve their brothers...then they ate. Whereas my sisters and I, we all sat at the table with my male cousins." Although Lucero did not pay much attention to this at the time, her mother protected her from Latina/o/x funds of knowledge that objectify Latina's bodies and minds (Anzaldúa, 2007; Isasi-Díaz, 1996). Lucero's mother showed her strength and value in disrupting sexist gender norms. Consequently, Lucero intentionally encouraged her own daughter to "have gender expression however [she] conceptualize[d] it," despite her extended family being "not very accepting of it." The fact that Lucero protected her own daughter's gender expression illustrates the impact of Lucero's mother on her *conocimiento* about *el poder y el valor de la mujer*. Like her mother, Lucero's *lucha* included disrupting how the family "dichotomized, masculine and feminine" gender norms and expressions. Both Lucero and her mother contributed toward the "uprooting of dualistic thinking in the individual and collective consciousness" of their families (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 102). Lucero's story shows how *conocimiento* about *el poder y el valor de la mujer* are passed down between generations of Latinas.

Lucero's mother and grandmother also taught her spiritual funds of knowledge that shaped her spiritual identity. Although Lucero grew up Catholic and described her mother as a traditional Catholic, when her mother died it "was a big turning point for the way that [she] saw [her] spirituality." Lucero's grandmother always talked about spirituality in a traditional Mexican way, teaching her that "you can feel the energy of people who have passed if you look for it." Lucero

became much more spiritual and focused on “the parallel worlds of the living and the dead” after her mother died. When explaining what that meant, she said, “I feel my mom in my house all the time...I think it’s because I invoke her.” This was important to Lucero, because she never felt her mother when she attended Catholic mass or when her family held group prayers for her mother at the time of her death. This caused Lucero, who had already been distant from Catholicism, to become even more distant. Lucero was in a state of *nepantlism*—a crossroads—as she decolonized her spirituality and shedded Catholic beliefs from her upbringing and embracing indigenous beliefs by acknowledging the energy of the dead (Anzaldúa, 2007; Téllez, 2014). When Lucero’s mother died, her grandmother began having deeper conversations with Lucero about the energy of the dead; they often discussed life and death and whether or not they would feel the energy of Lucero’s mother again. Lucero’s grandmother invoked Lucero’s state of *nepantlism* through her spiritual funds of knowledge. This process influenced Lucero’s bodymindspirit evolution by helping her identify “Catholicism [as] antithetical to [her] evolving identity as a socially conscious and spiritual woman” (Téllez, 2014, p. 151).

As part of her spiritual transition, Lucero started attending yoga “to still [her] mind and [her] body.” Yoga, meditating, contemplating whether her life decisions aligned with what she wanted and who she was, and whether she had disappointed her mother with her life choices became her spiritual practice. Questioning her life decisions as part of her spiritual evolution towards a holistic bodymindspirit experience makes sense, since “many prayers, after all, are questions” in the process of reconnecting body, mind, and spirit (Lara, 2002, p. 436). Lucero’s spiritual evolution also involved teaching her children about the worlds of the living and the dead, because she “love[d] everything about the way Mexicans view death.” Due to the death of her mother and the spiritual beliefs her grandmother taught her, Lucero’s spirituality became much

more intimate, contemplative, and connected to the energy between the worlds of the living and the dead. As she relied less on the “literal and more [on the] psychic sense of reality” (Anzladua, 2007, p. 67) to grow her spiritual identity, Lucero broke through “western binary ways of thinking” that keep body, mind, and spirit apart (Lara, 2002, p. 436). Lucero now tuned into *la facultad* to “see in surface phenomenon” like the death of her mother, “deeper realities” like the energy of the dead (Anzaldúa, 2007, p. 60). Her mother’s death and her grandmother’s spiritual funds of knowledge transformed Lucero’s bodymindspirit ways of being and knowing. Thus, coming into *conocimiento* about *el poder y el valor de la mujer* is powerful enough to inspire spiritual decolonization and transcendence.

5.1.2 Component 2: Shared Space and Place

From a geographical perspective, cultural spaces and physical places have historically been and continue to be central to the formation of Latina/o/x community at local neighborhood, regional, and national levels (Arreola, 2004). I examine shared space and place at a micro-level as it pertains to the creation of Communities of Women of Color for Latinas in academia. The important distinction and contribution that this study makes is that shared space and place matter, because they facilitate the development of intimate and trusting friendships, a core factor in building sense of community among Women of Color.

For all participants, community was created in physical places or spaces that they shared with women. While communities were created through physical space and place, they were sometimes maintained through virtual space and place, such as group chats and text messages. For the participants of this study, tangible spaces and places included: 1) working in the same higher

education institution or office, 2) attending the same graduate school or program, 3) attending the same college and/or initiating into the same sorority, or 4) being mothers whose children attend the same school. The examples below, however, focus on shared space and place in college and graduate school. It is worth noting that collegiate and academic shared space and place may be a result of my sampling strategy since all participants either studied or worked in higher education. However, Communities of Women of Color may be created in shared spaces and places beyond the borders of academia. Being in the same physical space or place was important in the formation of community, because it enabled women to develop trust and friendship, which are essential to building a sense of community.

Amelia and Melissa both discussed sorority sisters as part of their communities of women. Both of them joined sororities in college and described their relationship with sorority sisters as formative to their sense of belonging in college. Sharing physical spaces was important in building community. Melissa recounted how in college her sorority sister experienced “really bad panic attacks” so she would “go over to her place...chill out, have dinner, sleep there...get up and go to work in the morning.” Moreover, Melissa struggled financially in college and recounted how she and a sorority sister who lived in the same apartment complex cooked at each other’s apartments or would “bring food over.” Community building hinged on sharing close proximity and physical spaces, which made interactions like sleeping over for emotional support and cooking together possible. By sharing physical spaces Melissa and her sorority sisters were able to interact in ways that fostered deep trusting friendships, fortifying their sense of community.

Amelia never thought she would join a sorority in college, because she was “more of a tomboy;” however, she did join a sorority and built deep friendships. Amelia’s sorority sisters “provided [her] with immense support...being the first in [her] family to go to college...to be

within an organization of strong women” gave her validation and sense of belonging. As a first-generation college student, her sorority sisters shared social capital that enriched her college experience and promoted her persistence. Being in physical proximity allowed Amelia to build a sense of community with her sorority sisters, which she described as being “surrounded by [older] women [who were] role models to [her].” Amelia’s community of women cultivated trust and friendship by encouraging and validating each other’s abilities “to pursue leadership opportunities [in their college and their sorority]...and job opportunities.” Thus, shared space and place were critical to community building. Moreover, Amelia demonstrated the deep and enduring friendship that this community of women built while attending the same college, saying, “I could reach out still to any one of them and they would be there for me” now, years after college.

Lucero also built a strong community of women in college. When Lucero arrived at college, a group of Latina student activists “took [her] under their wing.” Lucero explained that the “women who were coming in, [her] class...accepted the help. [They] understood very early on that [they] needed that help” from the Latina student activists who knew the predominantly white campus climate and how to disrupt, survive, and thrive in it. As Lucero recounted,

We would work together. There were lots of nights when [I] felt drained from working, and [I’d] call them, and say, “Hey, I’m writing this paper. I’m trying to finish it. Can I come finish it in your room? I just need you to be in the same room with me while I finish this paper.

Sharing space and place fostered a sense of community in which women should be honest and vulnerable yet offer one another mutual strength and support. Additionally, Lucero and her community of women held a historic student protest at their college. They made change toward equity and social justice on their campus by protesting against white professors who believed

“Latino studies was a subculture,” an illegitimate field of knowledge and scholarship. Accompanied by college student who supported their demands, Lucero and her community of women initiated the protest and “camped out in the student center...together pretty much 24/7 for the four days that [they] were on the hunger strike.” Without shared space and place, it would have been impossible for Lucero’s Community of Women of Color to engage in this formidable event together; the protest forged and solidified their sense of community. These experiences in Lucero’s college Community of Women of Color led to deep friendships; over 20 years later, they stay in contact and organize annual reunions.

Carmen’s community of women included master’s program peers, mentors, doctoral program peers, and colleagues. For Carmen, community was about forming close bonds and “trusting somebody else to be able to open up to.” For instance, when reflecting on how her community of women came to be, Carmen said, “It (community) has to do with spending time with them and sharing stories because... you can connect with those stories. That is where you get your motivation (to build community).” Carmen went on to say that “You can’t get stories by just texting and emailing. You have to talk.” Sharing stories and time, also meant getting to know one another in person, “going out to dinner” together, and learning from women’s stories and “behaviors” whether she could trust them. Thus, sharing space and place was a critical part of getting to know women and assessing whether they had enough in common to develop trust and community. For example, Carmen attended and graduated from an online doctoral program; she and her cohort met for a weeklong residency every year. When describing the genesis of her doctoral peer community at the first residency, she said, “We got a group of people that we felt comfortable with and we stayed with that group until the end. That group was all Women of Color...If we did not meet physically and talk, we would not be close.” At subsequent residencies,

Carmen and her Community of Women of Color would attend class together and then go to dinner together for the whole week to keep their community strong. Between residencies, they would maintain constant contact through Google Hangout and FaceTime. Thus, even in situations where opportunities for shared space and place are extremely limited, such as Carmen's, shared space and place was critical to the creation of Communities of Women of Color and the development of trust and friendship within community.

Sharing space and place with women in her community was also a significant part of Conchita's experience. Cora was Conchita's doctoral cohort peer and her closest friend in graduate school. Cora and Conchita spent a lot of time together, which fostered their sense of trust and friendship. As Conchita explained,

She (Cora) knows when I need a break and when I need to relax...We've gone to the theater...to L.A., [and] we've gone exercising. I'm sane because of her...She's like three doors away from me [in the office, so] when something bad happens, I can just go to her office and close the door and yell.

Thus, sharing space and place fortified Conchita and Cora's friendship. Shared space and place was important in community building, because it made understanding each other easier. Sharing space and place enabled them to get to know each other more intimately, as Conchita said, Cora knew when she needed "a break...to relax." Having shared space via their graduate student offices was important because they could confide in each other about the research and academic issues they faced, building mutual trust and sense of community. Conchita felt that these "experiences speak to the real thing," meaning that she believed their friendship was the "real thing" because they lived through both positive and negative situations together. This would not have been

possible without sharing spaces and places in which to have these experiences and build these memories.

5.1.3 Component 3: Epistemological Solidarity

The study participants had epistemological solidarity, which means that they had common ways of knowing and thinking that brought them together. For all participants in this study, epistemological solidarity manifested via common values for social justice and equity. Epistemological solidarity is a foundational component of Communities of Women of Color, because participants felt that they could trust women who have some of the same ways of knowing and values as they did. Just as shared space and place, epistemological solidarity inspired trust toward the development of friendships and solidified a sense of community among women.

Tina's Community of Women of Color had been in academia since the '80s. Their shared epistemologies about the value of Latina/o/x funds of knowledge brought them into community. For example, Tina recounted that even as far back as graduate school they would often come together and talk about "how [they] could make an impact" in their (Latinx) community. The women in Tina's community had an "immediate affinity," because they had all been Latina education scholars for multiple decades and their scholarship advanced critical racial perspectives for the purpose of strengthening the Latina/o/x community. Women in her community were established scholars who, like Tina, had dedicated much of their professional lives to asset-based and equity-driven scholarship, which illustrates their epistemological solidarity over the advancement of the Latina/o/x community and Latina/o/x college students. The women in Tina's community were social justice advocates through their research and practice; some were

community activists. Their values for social justice led them to “create a body of work that is cutting edge, that moves beyond the boundaries that have been imposed particularly on Women of Color who have been marginalized in terms of ideas and thinking.” For instance, one of the women in Tina’s community developed a national conference honoring Gloria Anzaldúa. The conference showcases the transformative scholarship of a pioneer in Latina feminist living theory and the subsequent work of scholars of color who continue to uplift the Latina/o/x community through feminist perspectives. Thus, Tina’s Community of Women of Color shared epistemological solidarity over the value of Women of Color’s ways of knowing and the advancement of Latina funds of knowledge as a legitimate epistemological standpoint in academia.

Importantly, however, Tina and her community of women acknowledged and embraced their epistemological differences. Tina explained this by saying,

We’re bonded by a common sense of purpose in life and in our professions. We’re bonded by the care that we have for each other. While we may disagree on certain things—and certainly we do because we’re all different—we agree mostly...In our lives, we have always worked to do good things...for our community.

While women in community certainly have differing perspectives, their epistemological solidarity around core values, such as Latina/o/x community uplift, fortifies their relationships and bonds them into community. The epistemological solidarity that bonds Communities of Women of Color together does not preclude women in community from having differences in their ways of knowing. Rather, epistemological solidarity over meaningful core values led women in community to develop intimate enough relationships that they are able to respect each other’s differences in thinking. In Tina’s case, they were able to respect each other’s epistemological difference, because they were bonded by a “common sense of purpose in life and in [their] professions,” which

indicates that epistemological solidarity over core values creates a deep community bond that surpasses more marginal individual differences. Furthermore, their epistemological differences were important, because women in Tina's community appreciated and learned from their different ways of thinking, which arose from their different life experiences.

Epistemological solidarity can also overcome racial differences. Lucero explained that although her PhD cohort members, Mila and Doria, were "both white, so with them, it [was] more about the academic work," she felt that they had "a more nuanced understanding of race and racism, [so she could] have conversation with them" about those topics. According to Burciaga and Tavares (2006), solidarity and sisterhood among women is born from understanding our difference and commonalities. Lucero, Mila, and Doris found "common ground while embracing their differences" in terms of cultural and racial experiences (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006, p. 137). Nonetheless, Lucero's community of women established epistemological solidarity over their shared perspectives about "the way academia currently functions...it preferences men, it preferences white men, and it preferences their research...[creating] a barrier for a lot of women...especially for Women of Color." Thus, this epistemological solidarity made Lucero feel that she could count on her community of women because they were "supportive regardless of what [her] decisions is (to pursue faculty jobs or not)," fortifying their sense of trust, friendship, and community irrespective of their professional choices.

Epistemological solidarity in the form of shared values was the core of Marlen's community of women. Marlen reflected on this saying, "Looking back at all of the women that have comprised parts of my communities over the years...[They] came from a place of shared values." At the time of our interviews, Marlen described sharing common "values and guiding principles" with her community of women colleagues, whom were mostly Women of Color

working within the Office of Faculty Education at Flora University. Marlen and her community of women shared epistemological solidarity regarding “the conviction that teaching matters and that teaching is a calling.” Their epistemological solidarity also rested on their values for and actions toward social justice. As Marlen said, “at work we are brought together with a deep sense of social justice. We want to be warriors for equity.” As a result, they embarked on a mission as a community to make faculty more “empathic, kind, and tolerant” as a means to positively affect campus climate and the experiences of Students of Color at the university. In Marlen’s community of women, epistemological solidarity promoted a unified sense of purpose, which manifested in their daily work as higher education practitioners. In this case, women’s epistemological solidarity reinforced sense of community in ways that made the community strong enough to intentionally advance equity and social justice within institutions of higher education. This aligns with research showing that Women of Color who come together with a shared vision and mission for equity and social justice are capable of grassroots activism that transforms their larger neighborhood schools and community (Mejia et al., 2013).

Conchita and her research Community of Women of Color shared common values and critical perspectives about race and racism. Being a part of this community of women had a transformative effect on how Conchita conceptualized her racial identity. Conchita experienced a “struggle of flesh, a struggle of borders, an inner war” as she examined the meaning of her race in Mexico, versus the meaning of her race in the U.S. context (Anzaldúa, 2007). Conchita explained that in Mexico she was aware that she had “lighter skin than other people,” but she did not have “an awareness of being white...because she was the privileged one.” However, upon immigrating to the United States for her doctoral program, she realized that “no matter how white you are, if you have an accent, you become racialized.” To learn more about racism and being Latina in the

United States, Conchita sought out a Community of Women of Color researchers who cultivated epistemological solidarity over critical race perspectives.

At first, Conchita felt vulnerable within this community; she “felt like the clueless one...because [she] was the only one born outside [of the U.S.]” and had limited knowledge about race and racism in the U.S. context. However, when Communities of Women of Color are founded in epistemological solidarity via common values, such as Conchita’s community was, “community [becomes] an extension, a continuation of the family (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 140). Consequently, over time Conchita developed more comfort and trust with her Community of Women of Color researchers. The development of trust in her community led Conchita to think and talk about her racial identity more openly. Surrounded by validation and critical perspectives in her community, Conchita began to question the meanings of her racial identity and of racism in both national and institutional contexts. By conducting critical research with this community of women, Conchita learned about racism in the U.S. context and its structural effects on higher education and society at large. Conchita felt that “[she] would be really colorblind in [her] way of thinking” if it were not for the critical research she and her Community of Women of Color engaged in together. Cultivating epistemological solidarity with a community of women who had established critical ways of thinking and conducting research expanded Conchita’s funds of knowledge regarding her own racial identity and of racism in the United States.

Conchita’s experience speaks to the impact that epistemological solidarity can have on the development of Women of Color’s critical consciousness and racial identity development. For Conchita, it meant decolonizing herself as she became empowered by a racial identity she once felt marginalized and restrained her (Anzaldúa, 2007). Developing a critical perspective for the meaning of her racial identity led Conchita to affect change at a broader level by becoming an

advocate for “younger Latina women” in her program who felt as overwhelmed as she once had because “it was a really white place.” Similar to Marlen’s experience, being in a Community of Women of Color with whom she cultivated epistemological solidarity motivated Conchita to affect change at a broader school level.

Melissa explained that all the women in her communities had “similar ideas and values that [they held] near and dear...about racial justice and social justice.” Kayla, Melissa’s first advisor, was part of her community of women. Melissa described that Kayla was an advocate for Women of Color. Kayla “was very intentional about putting [Women of Color] together” in the PhD program so that they could build mutual support. Thus, Melissa and the doctoral peers who would become her community of women met because Kayla recruited them all to be in her qualitative methods course, which focused on access for racially underrepresented students. Through this course, Melissa and her doctoral peers discovered that they had mutual critical, assets-based perspectives about Students of Color. Thus, due to their shared epistemological perspectives and a faculty member who also shared the same views for equity and social justice Melissa’s Community of Women was born. Over time, Melissa and her Women of Color peers developed a community rooted in epistemological solidarity. Like many of the other women in this study, epistemological solidarity in Melissa’s Community of Women of Color manifested in their work. Melissa and her Community of Women served first-generation, community college students of color through equity-based perspectives; they all used their research and practice to disrupt racist norms that hindered the success of underrepresented and under-served college students. Even after graduate school, Melissa and her Community of Women of Color remained close friends, continuously validating and supporting each other’s work by writing together or attending professional conferences together. Epistemological solidarity contributes to the endurance of

Communities of Women of Color over time—endurance through time is the fourth and final component of Communities of Women of Color.

5.1.4 Component 4: Endurance and Evolution Through Time

Women mentioned mature communities that they established between 10 and 40 years prior to the time of our interviews, yet those communities were still maintained and valued¹². Women in communities that endured over time had strong friendships and mutual trust, which women cultivated via shared space and place, and epistemological solidarity. While shared space and place was critical in the beginning stages of establishing community, many of the women in these communities no longer attended the same education programs or lived in the same cities. Nonetheless, participants' communities endured through time and remained meaningful, because they were founded in pre-established *conocimiento* of *el poder y el valor de la mujer* and shared space and place and epistemological solidarity. Moreover, as communities endured through time, they also evolved as women's identities evolved. This is significant, because it means that communities changed to meet the changing need and identities of the women within them.

Tina's community of women scholars built their community throughout the '80s and '90s in graduate school and then as emerging scholars in the fields of education and Latina/o/x studies. As Tina's community of women endured through time, it also evolved to meet women's changing needs and identities. For example, their work and commitment to critical Latina/o/x scholarship

¹² Participants did also mention some communities that were contextual and no longer mattered to them. However, since these communities were transitional and did not endure through time, I do not focus on them in my current analysis.

was still a major part of their community. However, Tina also said, “I’m seeing more people get sick and get really close to the end of our journeys, so these types of discussions are more prevalent now than, say, when I was in my 30s and 40s.” As women’s identities evolved, the type of support and validation that they cultivated changed to meet their needs.

Melissa’s sorority sisters were part of her community of women. Their community had persisted for over a decade beyond college. Her community also endured and evolved over time to meet the needs of evolving identities—from students to mothers and wives. For example, Melissa and her sorority sisters were part of each other’s wedding parties. Melissa was the godmother to one of her sorority sister’s children. Thus, in college they supported each other to persist through struggles with sense of belonging and financial hardships. In the years after college, they continued to cultivate community by being part of each other’s major life events, including marriages, divorces, and childrearing. Community’s endurance and evolution over time involves becoming more intimately invested in each other’s daily lives and life events.

Additionally, although Melissa and her Women of Color graduate school peers had already graduated from their doctoral program, they still maintained community. Melissa had scheduled writing dates with Lourdes in person or on Google Hangout or Skype; thereby the two mutually supporting their continued scholarship. Furthermore, Melissa and her community of graduate school peers made a point to spend time together at annual national conferences by rooming together and having dinner. Melissa explained the evolution saying, “the relationships are there, and they’re evolving with the ways in which our own identities have evolved after completing our PhDs. Not being in that student life anymore, but now being in professional roles.” Melissa’s community of women no longer shared space and place because they moved to different cities after graduation. Nevertheless, since they built a strong foundation while in graduate school their

community endured over time, and their relationships in community transformed to match their individual identity transformations from students to professionals.

Lucero's community of women from college endured through time as they arranged to meet annually. Like the other Communities of Women of Color in this study, Lucero's community built a strong foundation. The most formidable event in the community's foundation was the student protest and hunger strike they initiated. In Lucero's case, her community of women endured over time, particularly because of their deep epistemological solidarity—their deep-rooted values of equity and social justice. Lucero felt this was “the very strong reason why [they] are still connected,” because although over 20 years had passed, their epistemological solidarity remained strong. Lucero explained that whenever their “communities are marginalized and oppressed and when it (marginalization and oppression) happens in [their] lives or in the lives of [their] children” they reach out to each other and reflect on the “support and the strength” with which they fought oppression back in college. These conversations help them gather strength to disrupt current inequities in their lives. While their identities changed over time as they become wives, mothers, and professionals, their community endured, because they continued to draw strength from their epistemological solidarity. In Lucero's case, a formidable event during the community's establishment “cemented [their] relationships for a long time” promoting their community's endurance and evolution over time to the point where “it [n]ever occurred to [them] not to keep in touch.”

Similar to Lucero, Carmen also tried to meet with her community of women from her master's program annually. They mostly maintained communication through their group text messages and by posting events in their Facebook group so that they could reunite in person whenever possible. Carmen explained that she was “still very close with [that community of

women] and that advisor/mentor [who brought them together] is still [her] adviser/mentor to this day.” Dr. Fulton, Carmen’s mentor since 1995, was part of her community of women from her master’s experience. Dr. Fulton was very influential to Carmen’s community of women because, as Carmen said,

She’s continually stayed in my life and...she’s met other women [over the years] that are like me and combined us together and we’ve...become really close just by her support and her guidance because she sees something in us that she thinks we would be able to connect over.

In Carmen’s case, her mentor played a critical role in the evolution and endurance of her community of women over time by continuously contributing to the community’s growth. Carmen’s community not only endured through time, but it evolved as more women entered the community. While this community of women initially consisted of master’s students in higher education, it grew to include higher education professionals from across the country as their identities evolved from being students to being full-time working higher education practitioners.

5.2 Chapter Summary

Women who came into community had pre-established knowledge about *el poder y el valor de la mujer*. Core female figures in participants’ lives showed them that women are capable of overcoming life hardships, thriving under oppressive circumstances, and advocating for their own and their family’s well-being and social prosperity. These *mujer* pedagogies showed participants their own strength and agency by shaping their identities, ways of knowing, and educational and

professional paths in empowering ways. As a result, women came into community with *mujerista* values and were willing to invest themselves in community building because they understood the value of relationships between women.

Having shared spaces and places in which to interact is critical for the creation of Communities of Women of Color, because it is through shared physical connection that women develop trust and friendships. However, once communities are solidified, they transcend shared spaces and places; the women in this study showed that shared space and place is not required for communities to endure and evolve over time. Furthermore, epistemological solidarity did not preclude women from having differences in their ways of knowing. Yet, epistemological solidarity manifested in core common values had the power to inspire the birth of communities and foster the endurance and evolution of communities over time. Epistemological solidarity transcended differences in race and led Communities of Women of Color to disrupt oppression and inequity via scholarship and/or daily practice. Epistemological solidarity over critical race perspectives also contributed to women's critical consciousness and their understandings of racial identity. Because women in community shared epistemological solidarity via common core values and had trust and friendship, communities were able to endure through time. Over time, Communities of Women of Color evolved to reflect the evolution of individual women's need and identities.

6.0 Chapter 6: Transformative Experiences in Communities of Women of Color

With this study I first sought to determine how Latinas define their communities of women. I also sought to understand: 1) what funds of knowledge are cultivated in Latinas' communities of women and 2) how bodymindspirit is cultivated in Latinas' communities of women. I believed that examining these questions would illuminate how being part of communities of women transforms Latinas' journeys in academia. The purpose of investigating this phenomenon was to contribute knowledge for a transformed academy that functions holistically and critically in ways that acknowledge, honor, reflect, and respond to the epistemologies and lived experiences of Latinas in academia. Based on the data, I defined transformative experiences as experiences that were a result of participants having Communities of Women of Color in which they cultivated mutual support and uplift, validation, legitimization, and empowerment. Based on participants' stories, transformative experiences in Communities of Women of Color were composed of experiences that validate and legitimize participants': 1) bodymindspirit wholeness, 2) multiple and complex identities as Latinas, and the unity (as opposed to compartmentalization) and power of these identities, 3) personal and emotional development as women, and 4) academic and/or professional journeys in academia.

Four distinct themes inductively emerged during data analysis illuminating the transformative experiences that came from participants being part of Communities of Women of Color. First, women in community were able to be their bodymindspirit selves with one another. This means that women did not have to compartmentalize their multiple and complex identities as women, scholars, practitioners, daughters, mothers, and/or wives among other identities. This

theme aligns directly with the third research question: How is bodymindspirit cultivated among Latinas' communities of women? The ability to be bodymindspirit present meant that women could be their whole and authentic selves; their communities afforded them this opportunity and space. Second, participants cultivated reciprocal emotional, academic, and/or professional support within their communities. This theme revealed what funds of knowledge are cultivated in Latinas' communities of women as they exchanged knowledge about their personal, professional, and academic lives in order to support and empower each other in their respective journeys. Third, all participants strived to uplift People of Color beyond their respective Communities of Women of Color. Participants' experiences within their Communities of Women of Color inspired them to uplift other Latinas, Latina/o/xs, or People of Color. Finally, being in Communities of Women of Color led participants to disrupt patriarchal and oppressive environments. Women in community gathered the strength, validation, and support necessary to transgress the bounds of oppressive and patriarchal norms that attempt to limit them and their communities. Women in community exchanged Latina funds of knowledge and inserted those funds of knowledge into their daily academic and professional lives. Thus, when participants interacted with peers and colleagues they centered their Latina funds of knowledge—asserting the legitimization of their experiences and ways of knowing. These interactions disrupted white patriarchal norms. All four transformative experiences of being in Communities of Women of Color were beneficial to participants. Two of the transformative experiences, uplifting People of Color and the disruption of patriarchal and oppressive environments, were not only beneficial to women in community but also benefitted the broader Latina/o/x and academic communities.

6.1.1 Transformative Experience 1: Bodymindspirit Wholeness

Bodymindspirit wholeness means the ability to be one's whole self, breaking with "western binary ways of thinking" that keep body, mind, and spirit apart (Lara, 2002, p. 436). Women who are their whole and authentic bodymindspirit selves in their daily personal and professional lives transgress the bounds of "Western binary oppositions" between body, mind, and spirit in other words, between reason and emotion (Lara, 2002, p. 434). Within their Communities of Women of Color, all eight participants felt the comfort and freedom to be their bodymindspirit selves, meaning they were their intellectual, physical, intuitive, spiritual, and emotional selves all at once. Being their bodymindspirit selves in community meant that women were authentic and vulnerable about their multiple identities and the simultaneous existence of those identities across all aspects of their lives. Being their bodymindspirit selves also meant that they did not compartmentalize their identities. Within Communities of Women of Color being authentic about spirituality or emotion did not discredit women's reason or intellect. While all participants experienced bodymindspirit wholeness within their Communities of Women of Color, here I focus on the seven richest cases.

Alma's experiences illuminate that it is not necessary to give precedence to a scholarly or academic identity in order to be respected and supported within Communities of Women of Color. Alma described that it was her ability to be herself around her Women of Color doctoral peers, Noelia and Mercy, which made their community powerful and meaningful. Alma's community of women was a space where she did not have to "sugarcoat anything." Rather, within her community, Alma could be honest and comfortable without having to worry about whether her behavior aligned with academic norms or expectations. Alma described the contrast between having to

constantly perform “what a student or researcher is like” and having to “put on this mask” of PhD student or researcher in academic spaces, versus the ability to “literally just be me” within her Community of Women of Color.

Alma’s community was a place where she could cultivate bodymindspirit because she did not have to compartmentalize her identities. As Alma said, “they know all of me. They know me as a student. They know me as a wife. They know me as a sister...[and] daughter” which gave her a sense of bodymindspirit liberation within academia—a space to be her whole authentic self. Because her peers knew her holistically, she felt the “freedom to be vulnerable, to be goofy, [and] to say things that [she] wouldn’t say in academic spaces,” exemplifying their bodymindspirit connection. Furthermore, because they could be their whole selves with each other, Alma described their community as a “little bubble away from all the other shit” in academia. Within their community “bubble,” the women did not have to be concerned with performing academia in ways that aligned with white, patriarchal culture. Community was a place they could both be “goofy” *and* talk about race and intersectionality in critical ways. They did not have to choose. Within their community being “goofy,” being sisters, or wives did not discredit them in any way as students or researchers. Consequently, in being bodymindspirit connected as a Community of Women of Color, Alma and her peers transgressed the boundaries of academia “as an individual space...a male-centered space” and a predominantly white space (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006, p. 137; Lara 2002).

Alma and her Community of Women of Color shared a bodymindspirit connection evidenced by Alma’s ability to be her whole self with them, not just her academic self. Conversely, Alma felt she could not be her holistic bodymindspirit self outside of her community of women. She did not discuss her identities as a sister, daughter, or wife with other peers because she “never

had interactions with anybody outside of that community that made a personal connection. It was just always academic, so it just stayed academic.” As such, Alma’s relationships with women in her community were the most meaningful in her doctoral journey because they “support[ed] each other and encourage[ed] each other” in bodymindspirit ways—as students and researchers, *and* as sisters, daughters, and wives. The meaning, intimacy, and bodymindspirit connection of their community is illustrated by the fact that they called each other “scholar sisters.” Alma’s inability to be and share her bodymindspirit self outside of her Community of Women of Color speaks to the critical role that Communities of Women of Color play for Latinas in academia, specifically in their paths through the doctorate.

Like Alma, Melissa also developed relationships that transcended academic identity with her community of women. Just as Alma was transparent about her identity as a wife with her community, so was Melissa. Melissa confided in her doctoral advisors and mentors, sorority sisters, and doctoral peers, all of whom were part of her community of women, about the challenges of balancing her full-time profession, academics, and marriage. For example, during a semester when Melissa was struggling in her marriage she was honest with her first dissertation advisor, Kayla (a white woman) about that aspect of her life and how she felt that her personal and academic lives were interconnected—making it impossible for her to compartmentalize her identities as a wife and a doctoral student. Her advisor was appreciative and receptive to her bodymindspirit transparency. Melissa explained that although Kayla was “already very holistic,” after their conversation she continued to follow up with Melissa about her personal life. Melissa’s advisor understood that a holistic approach was important to Melissa. Thus, Kayla modified her communications with Melissa, which opened the door to a bodymindspirit connection in which

she expressed concern not just for Melissa’s academic and intellectual development, but for her emotional wellness too.

As Melissa said, her advisor Kayla and two other Women of Color academic mentors “ask[ed] about [her] as a person outside of [her] role in academia,” making their relationships meaningful and valuable to Melissa’s life and even more specifically to her graduate experience. Melissa’s experience is consistent with research supporting that Women of Color in academia validate each other’s ways of knowing and encourage each other to be their authentic and holistic selves (Gonzalez, 2006; Leyva, 2011; Espino et al., 2010). Melissa was vulnerable and the women in her community were receptive and supportive through their words and actions. This dynamic fostered the opportunity for Melissa to be her bodymindspirit self—making her relationships with women in her community even stronger.

The community of women was a place where Melissa, and her doctoral peers, Lourdes, Paula, and Jennifer, could be their whole authentic selves without judgment. Similar to Alma and her community, Melissa called her peer Community of Women of Color “*academia hermanas*” (academic sisters). Their mutual trust and support was unconditional, for example, Melissa and Lourdes supported each other about their academic and professional choices. While they chose separate paths—Lourdes was in an academic position and Melissa was a practitioner—they maintained a close friendship. Melissa and Lourdes scheduled time to “do projects together and write together...every week.” Melissa also said “Sometimes we don't necessarily write, because sometimes we're just catching up about family...that's important,” illuminating the holistic nature of their relationship, which was representative of the community. Melissa’s Community of Women of Color was a place where she felt at home, an experience she illustrated through her artifact, saying,

It [the painting] is this cadre of women standing around a heart with *mariposas* {butterflies} and flowers around it, and it's colorful...It's peaceful. It's feeling at home whenever I'm with my community of women...With all of those women, I can be myself. I can be my best self, and I can relax. I don't have to pretend to be someone else..."

Similar to Alma, for whom being her bodymindspirit self signified not having to “sugarcoat anything” or put on a “mask,” for Melissa bodymindspirit meant being her truest, most honest, and vulnerable self. Being her bodymindspirit self was meaningful because it meant being her “best self.” Thus, in Melissa’s experience, community of women is a space where Latinas in academia can manifest their most authentic and best selves.

A lack of boundaries between identities was also how bodymindspirit manifested in Marlen’s community of women. Marlen’s community of women built bonds that transgressed the borders of their professional identities. They grew to “shape each other’s existence... spend[ing] a lot of time talking about [their] own lives, spouses, and children.” They trusted in each other enough to not have “work-life boundaries.” Rather, they all felt that there was “an artificiality to that (work-life boundaries) and realized how important it [was] to come into a community and know that [they] are safe and supported all day.” Being their authentic bodymindspirit selves in community was how they achieved feeling “safe and supported” in academia.

Due to white, patriarchal norms that are still upheld in academia, Women of Color in academia are “expected to leave our personal lives out of our ‘intellectual’ workspaces” (Ayala et al., 2006, p. 261). However, Marlen’s community of women disrupted white, patriarchal norms that cause “feelings of isolation and fragmentation” among People and Women of Color in academia (Ayala et al., 2006, p. 261). Ayala et al. (2006) argue that embedding our bodymindspirit selves into academia requires us to “maintain a sense of connection and wholeness for our well-

being” as Women of Color (p. 261). In giving preference to holism over boundaries, Marlen and her colleagues afforded one another the opportunity to be their bodymindspirit selves. Thus, their community was important because it was a space that validated, encouraged, and legitimized their bodymindspirit approach to life as both higher education practitioners and women. Similar to other participants’ experiences, in Marlen’s community there was no need to compartmentalize or compromise their authenticity at either personal or professional levels. Within community, Marlen and her colleagues were free to approach personal and professional life with bodymindspirit wholeness.

There were both similarities and differences between the manifestations of bodymindspirit in Tina’s Community of Women of Color compared to those in other participants’ communities. For instance, similar to other participants, when Tina described her community she said, “we can talk about academic issues, but we also speak about our personal lives, our careers, our families, our loved ones. Those are all very important to me.” Thus, Tina also had holistic relationships in her Community of Women of Color, which transgressed academic boundaries. Tina and her community of women had knowledge and care for each other’s emotional, personal, and spiritual lives—especially because many of them were beginning to think about death and dying. Tina explained that because women in her community were “getting really close to the end of [their] journeys...these types of discussions [about death and dying] are more prevalent now.” As a result, they would consistently “call each other to support each other” through the spiritual changes and evolution that came with the transition into this life stage.

However, Tina also described bodymindspirit as imbedded in her and her colleagues’ scholarship. This was unique from the other participants’ bodymindspirit experiences and manifestation in community. Tina described her and her colleagues’ scholarship as “coming from

[their] hearts...to help our people and other underserved groups” of color. Through scholarship that comes from their “hearts” Tina and her community of women “reintegrate the bodymindspirit as a legitimate and empowering source of knowledge” into academia (Lara, 2002, p. 436). Having a Community of Women of Color that was authentic and cared about the community of Latinxs and People of Color encouraged, validated, and legitimized Tina and her colleagues’ bodymindspirit scholarship. For Tina and her Community of Women of Color, bodymindspirit scholarship meant two things. First bodymindspirit scholarship meant that it originated from their souls, their hearts, their lives, and their personal *luchas* as Women of Color. Second, bodymindspirit scholarship meant critical scholarship that advanced an academic and activist agenda to uplift the Latinx community.

During her master’s program, Carmen and her peers built community over their experiences juggling their multiple identities. They were full-time students, but they were also working professionals in higher education and had families. Thus, dedicated their time to earning a master’s degree meant overcoming the challenges of balancing their multiple roles. For Carmen and her peers building community was critical because it was a space where they felt accepted and validated in holistic ways. When reflecting on the value of her Communities of Women of Color, Carmen said,

All my communities of women have helped me feel like it’s okay to be that way—to be myself, to be emotional, to be dramatic if I need to be because we are all unique individuals who are balancing a million things. So the communities of women are really beneficial for a woman to grow and learn and feel supported and not feel like she’s doing it alone.

By “it” Carmen meant being her whole self in spaces that traditionally have required the split between the rational mind and the spirit and emotions. Carmen did not have to “conceal [her]

emotions, fragment her mind from her body” within her community of women (Lara, 2002, p. 434).

Similarly, Lucero also valued her community of women because she was able to be her bodymindspirit self with them. Juggling multiple identities meant that Lucero had to navigate between being a mother and being a full-time doctoral student. Lucero had reservations about beginning her doctoral program because she was uncertain of the compromises she would have to make as a mother. She described this sense of internal conflict saying, “starting the PhD was intimidating for me. I waited so long...[because of] my kids and the role that I wanted to play in their lives and who I wanted to be as a parent.” However, Lucero was vulnerable about her feelings of conflict with her Community of Women of Color and sought their advice and support when making her decision to apply to PhD programs and afterwards as she navigated motherhood and academic scholarship. Lucero explained the level of support and influence that her community of women provided, saying, “women who are mothers [in my community]... influenced me to pursue [the PhD] even though I felt conflicted...They gave me the sense that it was never going to be the right time; it was never going to be perfect.”

Later, during her program she continued to “talk about parenting and school” and how to manage motherhood and academia with women in her community who were mothers and doctoral graduates. Within her Community of Women of Color Lucero could be her bodymindspirit self—embracing her identities as mother and academic scholar, as well as the process of balancing and navigating both worlds. Her community of women empowered and validated her ability to do and be both—dismantling the notion that being both mother and scholar meant compromising one or both identities. Lucero’s community of women gave her the reassurance that she could do both and that her children would appreciate her journey and accomplishments. They assured her that

pursuing the PhD “would give [her] kids a different sense of who [she is] as a mother and [that it would] be just as important for them to see [her] doing this [PhD], as it is for [her] to do this.” The support that Lucero’s community offered legitimized her identities and empowered her to approach her life with bodymindspirit wholeness—making choices about and navigating academia and motherhood in holistic ways.

While Carmen and Lucero experienced bodymindspirit in community by being open and vulnerable and juggling multiple identities while in graduate school, Amelia’s bodymindspirit experience involved being vulnerable about her health and career choices. Amelia suffered from tendinitis in graduate school. Stella, whom Amelia described as her closest friend within her graduate peer Community of Women of Color, provided invaluable emotional and physical support. As Amelia navigating through graduate school, she was open and vulnerable with Stella about her physical ailment and needing help. Amelia described how critical Stella’s support was, saying,

She [Amelia] helped me to carry books or driving me home because...I couldn’t even turn the steering wheel...I’m not one to ask for help, but she’s the same way. Because we had that solid friendship, we know this about one another, and so she just sometimes would know when to step in.

Although it was challenging to be vulnerable, Amelia was her holistic bodymindspirit self with Stella. Amelia could be honest and open about a physical ailment that made her feel weak, yet she did not feel ashamed or threatened because they knew how to “reach out and uplift one another” during hard times. Her experiences align with research proposing that vulnerability, knowledge, and support in regards to one’s physical and emotional health are critical parts of bodymindspirit connection in Communities of Women of Color (Ayala et al., 2006; Lara, 2008; Perez, 2017).

Moreover, Amelia was also open with Stella about her academic experiences and choices. For instance, Amelia went through a stressful time of transition when she accepted and started a full-time practitioner position in a different state before beginning her dissertation. During this stressful time, however, she trusted in Stella as her confidant; they had “conversations and reflections” about their experiences in the PhD program and about their post-PhD personal and professional transitions. Amelia and Stella built a bodymindspirit connection as their friendship transgressed the boundaries of their academic lives and identities.

6.1.2 Transformative Experience 2: Reciprocal Emotional, Academic, and/or Professional Support

All participants experienced reciprocal forms of emotional, academic and/or professional support within their Communities of Women of Color. Emotional support was characterized by women’s reciprocal care of one another’s feelings and well being during difficult situations. Academic support was characterized by women’s reciprocal support of one another’s educational development and success. Professional support was characterized by women’s reciprocal care for each other’s career growth and development. Most times, participants received more than one form of support (emotion, academic, and/or professional) from their Communities of Women of Color. In some cases, these forms of support occurred simultaneously or in an intertwined manner. Most importantly, these three forms of support matter among Communities of Women of Color because they encourage and empower women through their personal, academic, and professional journeys—and simultaneously validate women’s funds of knowledge and life experiences. For six

of the eight participants emotional and academic support led to persistence through graduate school. In this section, I focus on the five richest cases.

When reflecting on why her communities of women were meaningful to her, Amelia immediately began talking about her Latina doctoral peers. Her peers gave her continued emotional support throughout the PhD program. While Amelia always knew she would finish the PhD, the emotional support she received was critical to her academic journey. Amelia believed the PhD would have been much more difficult and “isolating” without her community of Latina peers. She also viewed her Community of Women of Color as a “persistence tool [that shields them from]...the microaggressions that [they] experience in the classroom or uncertainties about how to navigate this doctoral process.” The emotional support that Amelia’s Community of Women of Color offered her through the PhD process positively influenced her academic growth, especially as Amelia navigated challenging environments. Furthermore, Amelia’s community provided reciprocal emotional support as it was a “space to process...the things that [they] (Women of Color) do experience that others don’t” while in a doctoral program “and [where they were] affirmed [that those] things are not in [their] head.” Thus, Community of Women of Color is space where Latinas’ experiences in academia are legitimized and validated through reciprocal emotional support. Moreover, Amelia’s experience also speaks to the validation of Latinas’ funds of knowledge within Communities of Women of Color, which is a form of academic support. As Amelia recounted, her community of women was “completely critical” because they provided “affirmation that the work that [she] does matters, even if it may be difficult to write some days...I matter and my perspectives matter.” Amelia’s community of Latina doctoral peers was a space “where deficit perspectives [were] negated and where [their] experiences [were] validated and acknowledged,” (Luedke, 2016, p. 50). Amelia’s Community of Women of Color provided

emotional and academic support through mutual encouragement and “words of affirmation.” Through these forms of support, Amelia and her Latina peers also protected one another from academic experiences and environments that made their individual endurance and persistence difficult. Within Amelia’s community, women were one another’s “supporters and role models”—validating each other’s funds of knowledge and empowering one another’s individual legitimacy and place in academia.

Alma’s Community of Women of Color in graduate school also legitimized each other’s funds of knowledge and place in academia through emotional and academic support. As friends and peers, Alma, Noelia, and Mercy offered each other invaluable academic support during their doctoral studies. For instance, in the first year of their doctoral program they “would split the readings and then outline the readings” to make sure they could partake in meaningful class discussion. This was important to them in the beginning of their doctoral programs, because they were just learning how to approach and manage high volumes of academic readings for classes. By supporting each other, they felt more confident and prepared for critical classroom discussions. Their mutual academic support was also critical because within the classroom their perspectives and funds of knowledge as Women of Color were often invalidated. Thus, Alma explained that in the classroom, “Some days, we made our voices known more than others...we were able to advocate for each other, validate one another, and create a space for ourselves that said, ‘We belong here, too.’” Alma and her peer Community of Women of Color offered one another academic and emotional support simultaneously as they forged space for themselves and their perspectives in the classroom. By offering one another emotional support through mutual validation Alma, Noelia, and Mercy maintained a sense of place in academia at times when they felt unheard and invisible in academic settings. Alma, Noelia, and Mercy also practiced reciprocal emotional and academic

support by “celebrat[ing] the [doctoral] milestones” as they reached them. For instance, by celebrating their “last day of class” in the program, they validated and legitimized each other’s experiences and place in academia and contributed to their mutual persistence through each stage of the doctoral process. Their celebratory ritual provided both emotional and academic support toward their continued success and persistence.

Furthermore, as they advanced in their academic studies, they all sought the mentorship of Women of Color scholars. As Alma said, “Each of us has sought out professors that are Women of Color to mentor us. Through that, we have gotten nuggets of information or really good mentoring strategies from these women, and we've shared them with each other.”

Building these mentoring relationships was meaningful to Alma, Noelia, and Mercy because it contributed to their academic success and persistence through graduate school. However, these mentor relationships were increasingly powerful because Alma, Noelia, and Mercy exchanged the funds of knowledge that they drew from their respective mentors, thus multiplying their strategies for academic success. This exchange of funds of knowledge from their respective mentors was yet another way in which Alma and her Community of Women of Color cultivated mutual academic support and fostered each other’s academic success. Existing research on *mujerista* mentoring is very limited but proposes that successful *mujerista* mentoring means integrating the academic, the professional, and the personal into a culturally relevant mentor-mentee relationship (Villaseñor et al., 2014). However, Alma’s experiences with mentoring and passing on funds of knowledge gathered from mentoring illuminates one facet of what *mujerista* mentoring within Community of Women of Color in academia looks like. Like Amelia, Melissa experienced emotional support within her community of women at times when navigating the doctoral process tested her commitment. For example, when Melissa received negative feedback

from her academic advisor that delayed her dissertation defense, she confided in her doctoral peers, Lourdes, Paula, and Jennifer. Lourdes, Paula, and Jennifer “really talked [Melissa] off the ledge” at a time when Melissa was emotionally distressed and doubted her ability to persist in the PhD program. Lourdes, Paula, and Jennifer validated Melissa’s feelings, saying “Don’t worry about it [Melissa]. That sucks. I cannot believe [your advisor] said that. It’ll be okay.” Her community of women’s validation and emotional support was critical to Melissa’s persistence. While Melissa described this time as “a point in [her] doctorate where [she felt] like, ‘I don't know if I want to do this anymore,’” she persisted because “every one of the women [in Melissa’s community]...mattered in this whole process and getting [her] through it (the PhD).” Because Melissa did not have to “conceal [her] emotions, fragment her mind from her body” within her community of women, she was able to be honest and vulnerable enough to receive the emotional support and validation she needed at a turning point in her doctoral path (Lara, 2002, p. 434).

Furthermore, Melissa, Carmen, and Marlen all experienced mutual professional support within their Communities of Women of Color. Melissa explained that her colleagues at the district of community colleges were important to her professional development, because they taught her “what it means to be a leader...[and] how to navigate some of the political waters at [her] institution.” As a newly minted PhD, her more experienced colleagues were critical in Melissa’s adjustment and navigation of the institution’s political culture. Melissa’s colleagues helped her navigate institutional politics by providing guidance on daily tasks, like reading over an email when Melissa felt that her communication “might not be received how [she was] intending it to be received...especially when a lot of my communications go out to faculty.” Thus, Melissa specifically sought the professional guidance of more experienced faculty members within her

community of women colleagues. Moreover, Melissa described the constant support and validation her community of women colleagues provided,

They speak on my behalf. They affirm my role [and] the work that I'm doing. They reinforce the importance of my presence, which is essential. They have seen my own personal strengths. They give me the guidance and the tools [for] how to approach other people in the [institutional] network.

As a new professional at her institution and recent doctoral graduate, Melissa community of women colleagues was critical to her success within the new professional environment. Her community of women provided constant support and affirmation and fostered Melissa's professional growth and sense of place as a Woman of Color at the institution.

Like Melissa's community of women colleagues, Carmen's community was also a source of professional support. However, in Carmen's case, her community provided a combination of professional and emotional support as Carmen adjusted as a Woman of Color at her predominantly white institution. Through this challenging transition, Carmen's Community of Women of Color gave her a sense of validation and affirmation. Carmen described the Latina directors at the university's Cultural Center as part of her community. These women were critical to Carmen's transition into the university. Carmen had previously been working at a racially diverse university, so at first Carmen "didn't feel like [she] really belonged" at University of Holly because of the "cold environment" and because "nobody really looked like [her] in [her] whole building." The absence of People of Color made Carmen feel isolated and out of place, which are feelings that are common among Latinas in academia (Gonzalez, 2006; Ramirez, 2014; Reyes & Rios, 2005). The Latina directors at the Cultural Center validated Carmen's experience by saying things like, "it makes total sense that you're having difficulty...[with your] transition...[and] that you feel like

you're the only one because this is the environment" at the university. Her community of women colleagues also encouraged Carmen to "create [her] own identity and [her] own support network" at the university by introducing her to other Women of Color and Latina/o/x organizations. Not only did Carmen's Community of Women of Color foster emotional support when Carmen was in need of validation and a sense of belonging, but they also encouraged her professional growth by affirming that she would find a sense of place at the predominantly white institution. Beyond affirming her sense of place, they guided her to develop a network of People of Color at the institution. Research suggests that "cultural centers...facilitate [the] survival and resistance" of People of Color at predominantly white postsecondary institutions (Yosso & Benavides Lopez, 2010, p. 92). However, Carmen's experience illuminates the significance of emotional and professional support and validation cultivated within Communities of Women of Color for their survival and thriving at predominantly white institutions.

Marlen's community of women was a "happy bubble" in which her community offered emotional and professional support. Her community was a space within the university where she felt supported and protected from university politics. Marlen and her colleagues created a "safe bubble" that shielded them from work-related stressors. For example, they were responsible for executing a "high profile project," on which they all worked. Marlen shared that "through a political battle it (the project) was taken away" from them, which was "really demoralizing" for one of her colleagues who was the point person. While the outcome was out of their control, despite the countless hours they had invested in it, they all offered their colleague "moral support and championing" to ensure she found a "sense of closure." Thus, their community was a "bubble" that protected them from stressful university politics and where they cared for each other's moral

well-being by consistently offering one another a combination of professional and emotional support.

While Marlen's and her colleagues exchanged mutual emotional and professional support in the "safe and happy place" that was their community, their community was not perfect. Importantly, however, Marlen and her colleagues executed agency over their community such that they intentionally and openly addressed any issues that arose within it. As Marlen said,

Everything that happens at the university is outside of our bubble. We make our happy bubble. And, we do have influence over what our space is like. So, if there is ever any negativity...we address it. We work through it.

Thus, maintaining an environment of mutual emotional and professional support, encouragement, and validation in community means that women must acknowledge when negativity or conflict arises within the community. According to Marlen's experience, in order for Communities of Women of Color to continue to grow and cultivate women's empowerment, when community issues arise women must address them authentically and openly.

6.1.3 Transformative Experience 3: Paying it Forward by Uplifting People of Color

Uplifting other People of Color was part of all participants' stories. Participants discussed uplifting People of Color in terms of supporting and mentoring the next generation of Latinas, Latina/o/xs, and/or People of Color within academia or in society at large. Seven of the participants' actions and/or visions toward uplifting People of Color were connected to their sense of purpose. Seven participants described uplifting Latinas, Latinxs, and/or People of Color as part of their sense of purpose to "pay it forward," which was inspired by the uplift they experienced in

their own Communities of Women of Color. Importantly, participants' membership in their communities of women made them more aware of the significance of mentoring and supporting other Latinas. Participants uplifted Latinas, Latina/o/xs, and/or People of Color either on their own or collectively with their Communities of Women of Color. In most cases, participants uplifted People of Color individually as a result of personally experiencing support, validation, and empowerment within their Communities of Women of Color. However, Tina and Carman, for instance, uplifted People of Color through a collective effort with their Communities of Women of Color. Although seven participants discussed uplifting People of Color as part of their sense of purpose and desire to pay it forward, I focus on the five richest cases.

Being part of a Community of Women of Color influenced Carmen to consider the uplift of People of Color in academia. For instance, Carmen explained that she and her Community of Women of Color from her doctoral cohort were planning on "getting together and writing...a journal article" about their experiences as Women of Color in a full-time, online higher education doctoral program. Furthermore, they were also considering the idea of:

recruiting...People of Color to work in higher education...like a Spelman and Johnson, but specifically focusing on People of Color...helping them through the interviewing and recruiting process...and trying to mentor folks through higher education in general, and student affairs in particular.

Carmen and her Community of Women of Color's journey through their doctoral program led them to think about how they could support People of Color in their field.

Because of the support they provided each other in their community of women, they were motivated to create a more formal community or agency in which they would each have a role in mentoring People of Color from their recruitment to their professional development in student

affairs. Carmen and her community of women faced several hurdles in their doctoral program, including difficulties: 1) learning through a mostly online format, 2) navigating their full-time jobs and full-time doctoral program, and 3) experiencing and overcoming personal life stressors including “sickness and death” in their families. These challenges, combined with the constant, reciprocal, and holistic support they offered each other to persist in their program and graduate, made them aware of the need for a formal community or organization to assist People of Color in the field of higher education. Thus, in Carmen’s case, being in a Community of Women of Color resulted in a communal vision for their own creation of a formal support community for People of Color in their field.

Amelia and Alma both described their sense of purpose as supporting Latinas coming after them in academia and doctoral study. For example, Amelia explained that her purpose as a Latina in academia was “to have more of us in different spaces and to support those that are coming behind us.” Amelia was the only Latina in her doctoral program in her first year. Though at times she felt isolated and out of place, mentoring three Latina master’s students, whom she described as part of her Community of Women of Color, gave her a deep sense of purpose. Amelia described this experience saying,

I found that they [Latina master’s students] often looked to me for advice or support, venting, [and] encouragement. I felt truly privileged to be able to provide that to them. It also gave me a sense of purpose and a reminder that although I’m the only one [Latina] this [first] year as a PhD student, there’s three that are master’s students, and I’m here for them...knowing that I’m a resource and that others view me as a role model pushes me to keep moving, to make sure that I get it [PhD] done because it is not just for me, it is also for them.”

The fact that Amelia felt she needed to complete her PhD not just for herself but for this community of women, demonstrated the influence the Community of Women of Color had on Amelia's sense of purpose and on her desire to support younger Latina scholars' academic success and persistence. Being part of a Community of Women of Color fortified Amelia's journey through academia as demonstrated by her motivation to persist because of the younger Latina scholars who viewed her as a "role model" and her investment in mentoring them through their journeys. In Amelia's case, her Community of Women of Color cultivated reciprocal uplift between Latinas.

Like Amelia, Alma's sense of purpose included uplifting her fellow Latinas in academia. However, Alma's sense of purpose was rooted in a critical awareness of the white, patriarchal nature of academia. Alma understood that,

Academia is like a boys' club. Everything that we do in academic spaces—our publication process, qualifying exams, and our dissertation process—those processes all benefit white men and the way that they've been conditioned to perform their whole lives.

Alma's critical views of academia combined with being part of her Community of Women of Color made Alma "more aware of and more intentional about what [she was] doing to mentor other Latinas." Alma reflected on her Community of Women of Color's influence on her purpose to uplift other Latinas in academia, saying,

I feel like that [mentoring fellow Latinas] has become part of the purpose of why I'm here [earning my PhD]. It's not just to graduate. I deserve to be here, but we all deserve to be here. I realize the importance of making space for other Latinas, and for other Women of Color. I'm just very aware that that's necessary to get us to these next positions [post PhD]. For me, it [the PhD] also means creating this community, where we can empower each

other. That's how we...start to really change what the academy. I don't want to play the [white, patriarchal academic] game. I want to change the game.

Being part of a Community of Women of Color that empowered and legitimized Alma in academia “made [her] conscious of that kind of paying it forward” to fellow Latina graduate students. Furthermore, Alma’s critical views of academia as a “boys’ club” that “benefited white men” made her realize that it was only through coming into community and legitimizing one another that Latinas and Women of Color could change academia from a white, patriarchal place to a place that could begin to reflect their funds of knowledge, human needs, and research agendas.

Like Alma, Conchita had critical views of academia and sense purpose to uplift People of Color in order to transform oppressive academic culture. Conchita’s sense of purpose was inspired by her Community of Women of Color who offered her unconditional bodymindspirit support throughout her doctoral path and who also “taught [her] to fight the system in different ways— that it’s okay to stand up for what you believe in...that it needs to be done for others, not [just] for [her].” Conchita’s Community Women of Color was understanding, honest, and holistic as they helped her to understand her own racial identity within the United States context and develop a critical understanding of race at a national level. Because of this experience Conchita felt that “the only way to pay back so much love is with love...[to] produce something from it.” Thus, she actively supported graduate Students of Color entering her school by advocating for their needs through her leadership on the graduate student council.

Similar to Amelia and Alma, Conchita also felt a strong need and purpose to “pay it forward” to fellow Latinas and People of Color in academia. Conchita expressed her sense of purpose and how it originated from her experiences within her Community of Women of Color, saying,

I feel like [my Community of Women of Color] took care of me. Now, I'm paying it forward to other People of Color...arriving now. I think that is important...especially when I think about a community of women of color. I feel like you received a lot. Then it's time that you pay it forward to somebody else.”

The support and validation that Conchita received in her Community of Women of Color was transformative because it inspired her sense of purpose to paying it forward by supporting other People of Color. The support and empowerment cultivated within Communities of Women of Color was meant to be shared and passed on—forming a web of support for incoming and future generations of People of Color in academia.

Melissa wanted to mentor and support Women of Color, because she wanted to demonstrate that “woman-to-woman support and mentorship” exists and can be transformative for Women of Color in academia. Melissa explained that her Community of Women of Color taught her that “we can learn from each other...[and] we can mentor each other.” Cultivating reciprocal learning and mentorship in her community developed Melissa’s desire to mentor other Latinas and Women of Color in academia. When describing her sense of purpose, Melissa said,

I want to make sure that I let other...Latinas and other Women of Color know that it (woman-to-woman support and mentorship) exists and it exists in a healthy way...We do have communities of Women of Color who want to see other women succeed and achieve more and achieve higher and go further up the ladder than what they ever thought was possible. That does exist and that exists within the communities that we breed.

Melissa’s Community of Women of color supported her unconditionally, which made her feel legitimized and empowered as a Women of Color in academia. This experience led her to mentor fellow Women of Color. For instance, Melissa mentored four Women of Color colleagues who

were pursuing their doctoral degrees. Thus, having a strong Community of Women of Color motivates women to support and mentor fellow Women of Color—impacting community uplift and shaping women’s sense of purpose at personal and professional levels.

6.1.4 Transformative Experience 4: Disruption of Patriarchal and Oppressive Environments

Being part of a Community of Women of Color gave women the support, legitimization, and empowerment necessary for them to disrupt patriarchal and oppressive environments either individually or with their community of women. Participants disrupted patriarchal and oppressive academic environments in different ways and at different levels of impact. For instance, Conchita advocated for Students of Color within her school through her position on the graduate student council, while Alma and her community of women disrupted white-dominant discourses in the classroom. Meanwhile, Carmen and Lucero and their Communities of Women of Color engaged in activism in order to demand the hiring of Latina/o/x faculty and the creation of a Latino studies department. While women affected change at varying institutional levels, Communities of Women of Color had the power to make change and contribute to the incremental transformation of academia from a white, patriarchal place to a place that reflects the identities, needs, and funds of knowledge of Women of Color. Furthermore, Communities of Women of Color were places in which participants legitimized and validated their funds of knowledge. As participants validated, legitimized, and further developed their Women of Color funds of knowledge and ways of knowing within their respective communities, they also began to embody these authentic ways of being outside of their Communities of Women of Color. Being their authentic selves and

expressing their Latina funds of knowledge and ways of knowing in professional and academic settings disrupted patriarchal and oppressive norms in those spaces.

Both Conchita and Alma took action to disrupt academic environments that oppressed them as Women of Color and their fellow Students of Color. Conchita believed that “being a woman just means destroying the patterns. It means fighting every single day to change stuff for [herself] and for others—to just smash patriarchy.” By working with her community of women researchers, Conchita gained critical perspectives about racism and the institutional oppression of People of Color in the United States. Conchita explained, “After spending time with Dr. Lopez and her research team, I started being more open about my racial beliefs back [with my white cohort members]. I’ve gotten braver about talking with them about race.” Conchita’s Community of Women of Color contributed to her critical race consciousness. Because of her community Conchita developed the strength and consciousness needed to come into academic spaces and interact with peers in ways that asserted and were true to her Latina funds of knowledge—as illustrated in her conversation about racial identity with peers.

Furthermore, Conchita witnessed women in her academic community, both peers and graduate students, who “stood their ground” by advocating for themselves and other women. Due to these factors, Conchita felt empowered to become a leader on the graduate student council. Through her leadership position, Conchita purposefully advocated for graduate Students of Color. Most recently, Conchita had represented the graduate student body on a panel demanding stipends for graduate students in the School of Education. Conchita felt that this issue was especially important for Students of Color who sometimes lacked the cultural capital necessary to advocate for their own funding. She recounted how she “stood her ground...[in front of] the vice provost” demanding stipends for students, because in “that moment it was my turn to do it for others the

same way they've (women in my community) done it for me, [and] I've seen them (women in my community) doing it for others.” Thus, Conchita’s community of women in graduate school inspired and empowered her to advocate for women and for Students of Color, thus disrupting oppressive structures at her institution through her leadership position on the student council.

Having a Community of Women of Color was critical to Alma, because she felt that the white, patriarchal environment of academia was “not conducive to the way that [she knew] how to act or perform as Woman of Color.” For this reason, Alma’s Community of Women of Color was critical to her persistence and thriving in academia. As she said, “If I didn’t have my specific community of women...I would definitely not feel like this space was for me. I don’t see how it could be sustainable emotionally or mental-health-wise.” In an academic environment that was often “counterintuitive” to Alma’s values, ways of thinking, and performing—her Community of Women of Color affirmed her belonging in academia. In the case of Alma and her peers Community of Women of Color (Noelia and Mercy), it was inevitable that by being their authentic bodymindspirit selves they would contribute to the transformation of academia from a white, patriarchal place to a place that reflected their funds of knowledge as Women of Color.

In their first year of doctoral study, Alma, Noelia, and Mercy experienced “a lot of invalidating experiences, or just dismissing [of their] contributions to the [classroom] discussion.” Furthermore, Alma recounted that “Students of Color in [her] cohort would want to lead [class discussion] on the weeks that were on issues about race or intersectionality, [but peers and professors] wouldn't spend a lot of time on these topics when [they'd] bring them up.” In response to their experiences with invalidation and microaggressions in the classroom, Alma and her Community of Women of Color “started a group message on [their] laptops” where they would discuss race, intersectionality, and critical perspectives from the class readings. Alma, Noelia, and

Mercy “would validate each other in the computer space,” because when they brought up critical issues in class “they would just get dismissed” while white students’ perspectives dominated classroom discussions.

Over time, Alma, Noelia, and Mercy empowered each other enough to advocate for their own, and each other’s, ways of knowing within the real-time verbal classroom discussions. Alma explained that as they transitioned from critical discussions in their virtual space to the classroom,

It kind of became like a performance, but we needed to perform by telling the rest of the class how great we were, so that they could realize it too...If not, then we would just be these quiet women that were only speaking when they were asked questions, and we didn't want to do that. It [the group messages] gave me more courage to participate in a way, in class, that I didn't think I could, or I didn't really feel empowered to.

Alma and her peers disrupted white, patriarchal norms within the classroom by inserting their critical funds of knowledge and epistemological perspectives into the classroom discussion. At the same time, they asserted their own identities as Women of Color thinkers and scholars. Their community was critical, because by validating and legitimizing each other’s perspectives within the safe space of their community, they gradually cultivated the power and “courage” to disrupt dominant white perspectives in the classroom. Because of the strength gathered within community, Alma, Noelia, and Mercy changed the white-perspective-dominant culture of their classroom. They asserted their standpoints as Women of Color scholars in ways that Alma “didn’t really feel empowered to” without the stronghold of her Community of Women of Color. Alma’s experiences speak to the critical ways in which Communities of Women of Color in academia can affect social change and transgress the bounds of oppressive environments and dominant white, patriarchal

discourses and environments. In community, Alma and her peers felt safe from microaggressions and empowered to validate each other's perspectives and experiences.

Both Carmen and Lucero disrupted the culture of white patriarchy by building strong Latina/o/x communities on campus and advocating for increasing Latina/o/x faculty and staff members. The Latino Staff Organization at Carmen's university was led by Latinas, including herself. Carmen described the Latinas on the executive board at part of her Community of Women of Color. Before their leadership, the organization was focused on individual members' needs and interests. This impeded the creation of an authentic sense of community and commitment among the members, who were People of Color at the university. When Carmen and the other Latina leaders came together as the Latino Staff Organization's executive board, they began to promote "support and mentorship programs for Latinas and Latinos...[which included] recruitment, retention, and mentorship opportunities" at the university. Leadership by Carmen's Community of Women of Color impacted change, because they "really looked beyond...the individual issues, and looked at all the Latino issues in general." Carmen expressed that, as a result of their leadership, "More people are attending our programs and we're opening our programs to all People of Color, not just Latinos." Through the Latino Staff Organization, Carmen and her Community of Women of Color disrupted the racial climate at their predominantly white institution by revitalizing an institutional organization meant to serve, support, and strengthen the Latina/o/x and People of Color communities at their institution. While the organization was weak and disorganized prior to their leadership, the Community of Women of Color's shared vision to serve Latinxs and People of Colors' needs as a community strengthened the organization and increased their membership, which created a stronger presence for People of Color at their predominantly white institution.

Lucero and her Community of Women of Color also fortified the presence and agency of the Latina/o/x community at their institution, which consequently disrupted the institution's white, patriarchal culture. Lucero and her Community of Women of Color in college, which consisted of Latina students, were student activists. When their Ivy League institution "posted permanent tenure track positions...[but] hired [two Latinos as] adjunct faculty" and refused to consider creating a Latino Studies department, Lucero and her Community of Women of Color initiated a four-day hunger strike. Lucero and her community of women were confronted with "racist comments [from faculty] like, 'If you don't like it here, go home.'" Nonetheless, they continued in their pursuit of racial justice, because they knew it was the only way to change the predominantly white, patriarchal culture at the institution.

This Community of Women of Color succeeded in changing white, patriarchal culture. As a result of their protest, the institution "did create a Latino Studies department" and hired Latina/o/x faculty and administrators. Another result of their hunger strike was that "students became a part of the hiring process," which further disrupted the oppressive environment against which they protested. Lucero and her community of women endured emotional and physical distress in order to change the culture of their institution. She recounted the event saying, "We were weak from not eating. We were tired. We were also not sleeping." However, their activism had lasting long-term effects as many of them returned to the college to celebrate the "tenth-year anniversary of the Latino Studies program." Through their activism, Lucero and her Community of Women of Color "change[d] the social order [within their institution] by taking into consideration the way Latinas see and understand reality" (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 69). By bringing to light and life their epistemological standpoints, lived experiences, and needs through activism, Lucero and her Community of Women of Color achieved institutional social change.

Tina and her Community of Women of Color affected social change as well but through their individual and collaborative scholarship. Tina and her community shared “inspiration and drive and passion” that led them to produce scholarship that transgressed academia’s white, patriarchal ways of knowing. As Tina explained, “All of them [scholars in her community of women] are concerned with either general student success, or Latino students, or specifically STEM success.” Thus, they produced individual and collaborative research to “change the narrative of student success” that privileges white ways of knowing and forms of capital. To disrupt the research discourse in which “the dominant language is about how Latino students are at risk,” Tina and her Community of Women of Color scholars “identified...assets both for STEM and non-STEM students [of color].” The purpose and results of their research and academic talks showcase the strengths of Students of Color, including Latina/o/xs and how their “resilience and navigational ability, resistance to stereotypes” contribute to their academic success in and outside of STEM fields. Tina and her Community of Women of Color scholars are transforming academia into a place that acknowledges Latina/o/xs funds of knowledge and social and cultural capital, thereby disrupting an academic “society that is patriarchal in nature.”

6.2 Chapter Summary

Participants had experiences in their Communities of Women of Color that were transformative to their journeys in academia. Being part of Communities of Women of Color gave participants the support, empowerment, validation, and legitimization needed to survive, thrive, uplift others, and even contribute to the transformation of oppressive environments. Within

Communities of Women of Color, participants were able to be their authentic bodymindspirit selves even in academic environments where bodymindspirit being was non-normative. Communities of Women of Color were also safe spaces where women were free to be their bodymindspirit selves when they did not feel comfortable, safe, or supported enough to be their holistic authentic selves in academic environments outside of their community. Second, being part of Communities of Women of Color helped participants survive and thrive in academia, because their communities were constant bastions of emotional, academic, and/or professional support; this championed women's personal, professional, and academic prosperity.

Third, being part of a community of women that offers consistent support and validation contributes to women's sense of purpose by inspiring their desire and action toward uplifting other Latinas, Women of Color, and/or People of Color. Women impacted community uplift either individually, inspired by their experiences in their own communities of women to "pay it forward," or via collaborative efforts with their Communities of Women of Color. For example, Communities of Women of Color uplifted People of Color through their collaborative scholarship or communal initiatives. Lastly, Communities of Women of Color have the agency to disrupt oppressive and patriarchal environments in academia. As with community uplift, participants disrupted oppressive environments either as a community or individually but were inspired primarily by the reciprocal support, validation, and legitimization they cultivated within their Communities of Women of Color.

7.0 Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

In this chapter, I provide a definition of Communities of Women of Color in academia based on my research findings. I discuss my research findings in relation to Chicana feminist theory and *mujerismo* and how my study's findings align with, diverge from, and extend both of these theories. Then I present the contributions to current research, paying special attention to how it extends knowledge about *mujerista* mentoring and how funds of knowledge are cultivated among Communities of Women of Color in academia. Furthermore, I discuss how Communities of Women of Color are legitimizing, empowering, and protective spaces for Latinas facing and disrupting academia's persistently white, patriarchal culture. Based on my contributions to research, I provide recommendations for practice. Finally, I make suggestions for future research.

7.1 Defining Communities of Women of Color in Academia

Communities of Women of Color in academia have specific foundational components and transformative experiences that define them. The geneses of Communities of Women of Color are facilitated through shared space and place as well as through epistemological solidarity among women. Communities of Women of Color are *bodymindspirit* communities in which Latinas in this study were able to be their whole selves and experience reciprocal emotional, academic, and/or professional support. Communities of Women of Color are spaces that validate *el valor y el poder de la mujer* as well as *bodymindspirit* wellness and self-care. Beyond championing each other,

women in community seek the uplift of other People of Color and disrupt patriarchal and oppressive environments. Although Communities of Women of Color continue to evolve over time, once established, the relationships between women in community endure through time.

7.1.1 Foundational Components of Communities of Women of Color in Academia

1. Women in communities have a pre-established *conocimiento* about *el poder y el valor de la mujer*. Women who are open and receptive to building community have a pre-existing knowledge about the power, agency, and value that women possess. They have a belief system that upholds women's power, agency, and value and therefore are receptive to building community. Furthermore, this pre-established *conocimiento* influences the formation of a belief system in women by which they recognize the value and opportunity in forming community together.
2. Communities of Women of Color are formed via shared space and place. This means that shared space and place is necessary in the initial formation of community among Women of Color in academia. However, once community is established, if women move away from each other and physical distance ensues, the community continues. Shared physical space and place is a quality necessary for the genesis of community building but not necessary for the endurance of continuance of the community.
3. In order for a Community of Women to form, establish, and persist, women in the community must share epistemological solidarity. This means that women in community have common ways of knowing and thinking that unite them. In the case of this study, women experienced epistemological solidarity around shared values for social justice and

equity. Having epistemological solidarity does not preclude having differences in ways of thinking and values, but it does mean that some core values are shared, which brings women together and facilitates the development of their mutual bonds and sense of community.

4. Communities of Women of Color in academia evolve and endure over time. This means that women enter the community at difference points in time. Therefore, the community is an evolving system. However, Communities of Women of Color in academia also endure over time. Women within these communities remain connected over the years, even after they no longer share the same physical space or place.

7.1.2 Transformative Experiences within Communities of Women of Color in Academia

1. Women in community are able to be their bodymindspirit selves with one another. In community, women experience bodymindspirit wholeness. This means that they are able to be their authentic whole selves in community. In community, there is no need to compartmentalize identities. Women in community are open about being mothers, scholars, practitioners, wives, partners, daughters, writers, activists, professionals, etc. without having to strategically place their multiple and complex identities in a hierarchy of importance depending on context. Thus, Communities of Women of Color in academic are bodymindspirit communities.
2. Women in academia who are part of Communities of Women of Color experience reciprocal emotional, academic and/or professional support. Women in community give

and receive these forms of support in order to flourish both in academia and in bodymindspirit ways.

3. Women in academia who are part of Communities of Women of Color uplift People of Color beyond their communities of women. Women in communities have a desire to pay it forward to People of Color much the same way they receive support and uplift from their Communities of Women of Color.
4. Communities of Women of Color in academia disrupt patriarchal and oppressive environments. Women in community harness the strength, validation, and support necessary to transgress the bounds of oppressive and patriarchal norms that attempt to constrain them and their communities.

7.2 Mujerismo in Communities of Women of Color

Mujerismo is about the epistemologies and life experiences of “grassroots Latinas”—“common folk” Latinas (Isasi-Díaz in an interview with Isherwood, 2011, p. 8). This study focused on a specific group of Latinas—those in academia and the experiences they share within their Communities of Women of Color. According to Isasi-Díaz’s conceptualization of *mujerismo*—solidarity, *la familia/la comunidad* (the family/the community), and *la lucha* (the struggle/fight), are central to the spiritual fabric of Latina communities. As this study affirmed, bodymindspirit is also a central component of *mujerismo*; an important finding considering research examining this concept is limited (Lara, 2002; Perez Huber, 2017). My discussion demonstrates how this study’s findings contribute to the understandings of these central *mujerista* concepts.

7.2.1 *La Familia/La Comunidad* (The Family/The Community)

Isasi-Díaz (1996) focused on *la familia/la comunidad* in terms of the nuclear family as well as “extended family and...neighbors” (p. 140). She argued that family/community “provides Latinas...a sense of self-identity and self-worth...[because] *familia/comunidad* relies on interdependence and this allows a space for Hispanic women to be counted...considered important...[and] dealt with in respectful ways, to be valued” (p. 143). Grounded in liberative theology, *mujerismo* and *la familia/la comunidad* are based on Latinas’ religious and spiritual beliefs and domestic lives. Furthermore, the original conceptualization of *la familia/la comunidad* was based on the lives of Latinas who experience poverty and powerlessness through intersecting forms of oppression. However, the theoretical concept of *la familia/la comunidad* can be applied to analyze aspects of Latinas’ lives beyond the domestic, the religious, and the experience of Latinas in poverty. As such, my study extends knowledge about what constitutes *la comunidad* for Latinas by examining what community means for Latinas in the context of academia, which means Latinas who are not necessarily poor or powerless.

Isasi-Díaz’s (1996) interpretation suggests that community is important, because of its interdependent nature, which means that Latinas are important and valued because the extended Latina/o/x community benefits from Latinas’ roles in the community. My findings extend beyond this conceptualization and the domestic realm, and suggest that Communities of Women of Color are important because of the transformative experiences that occur in them, which empower and legitimize Latinas’ roles and epistemological standpoints in academia. Furthermore, my findings support that family members have a significant impact in Latinas’ openness to and formation of communities of women because participants’ pre-established *conocimiento* about *el poder y el*

valor de la mujer were primarily established through their relationships with their mothers and grandmothers. My findings extend beyond the influences of nuclear family, extended family, and neighbors and illuminate the significance that epistemological solidarity has on the formation of communities for Latinas in academia. Epistemological solidarity is the pathway to building *la comunidad* with professional colleagues, peers, sorority sisters, mentors, and advisors in academia. For example, Melissa's community of women consisted of her sorority sisters from college who enabled her to persist in her education even during the most challenging times. Later Melissa's community grew to include doctoral peers, professional colleagues, and even her graduate school mentors and advisors. Tina's community of women included her fellow scholar colleague as well as fellow community and social justice activists. For Conchita, on the other hand, her aunts and godmothers, along with her college and graduate school peers composed the most significant part of her community of women. Similarly, Lucero recounted that her grandmother and mother were the core of her community of women while friends who were mothers and those who were earning or had earned doctoral degrees composed a critical part of her community of women as she juggled motherhood and doctoral study. Beyond redefining who is part of *la comunidad* for Latinas, this study highlights that academia itself is a context that provides common space and/or place for building *la comunidad* among Latinas. Moreover, my study's findings speak to the role that Latinas' intellectual identities (via epistemological solidarity) have on the formation and meaning of community, which extends beyond Isasi-Díaz' familial identities (e.g. sister, daughter, mother) centered the perspective of Latina community and solidarity.

7.2.2 *La Lucha* (The Struggle/Fight)

Lucha is Latinas' "struggle...to survive and live fully (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 129), such that we are not defined or defeated by the challenges we navigate and thrive through. As Isasi-Díaz (1996) proposed, *la lucha* is part of Latinas' consciousness; it is a fight for "women's liberation" and as such the "struggle is...life. ¡*La vida es la lucha!*" (p. 27). *La lucha* is a process that makes us stronger, makes us know ourselves, and empowers us to make "radical change" (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 92). This study contributed to knowledge about *la lucha*, because it helped define what *lucha* is for Latinas in academia and for Communities of Women of Color in academia. In the case of this study, participants made radical change both at personal and institutional levels. For participants, *la lucha* encompassed being their bodymindspirit selves within white, patriarchal academic cultures that socialize us (Latinas) to develop our rationality and our intellect in ways that are bodymindspirit neutral—uninterested or acknowledging of ourselves as whole people who possess emotional, spiritual, intuitive, feminine, masculine, and non-white cultural knowledge. For example, *la lucha* involved participants' weaving, unweaving, and interweaving their identities as mothers, wives, sisters, scholars, writers, practitioners, and friends. Participants engaged in a push and pull with themselves and between their identities to find a balance. It was in this *lucha*—in the weaving and unweaving of identities—that participants found strength in being their authentic interwoven selves, fulfilling their multiple identities not with perfect balance but with authenticity. Communities of Women of Color are important, because they are spaces in which women can be authentic and embrace the natural fluidity and imbalance between their identities as a powerful state of being. Communities of Women of Color are places where solidarity can be built on the shared and continuous *lucha* to understand and be our most authentic bodymindspirit selves.

Moreover, Isasi-Díaz (1996) argued, “to bring about radical change in one’s society requires...strategies that can effectively undo and replace control and domination with commonality of feelings and interests” (p. 92). Participants created institutional level change that disrupted white, patriarchal culture and norms through their Communities of Women of Color. For example, Lucero and her Community of Women of Color successfully changed the culture of their institution through social activism resulting in the creation of a Latino studies department that continues to flourish decades later. Through their activism they combated and changed the white, patriarchal culture that white, male professors fought to maintain since the establishment of the institution and through the time of their student protest. Similar to Lucero, Carmen also contributed to institutional change with her Community of Women of Color as they led a Latina/o/x organization that focused on empowering the voices and career paths of Latina/o/xs and People of Color at their predominantly white institution. Tina and her Community of Women of Color created change in academia through their scholarship, which focused on researching Students of Color through strengths-based perspectives to combat historic and current research grounded in deficit-based notions about Students of Color. By joining in communal *lucha* with their Communities of Women of Color, participants imparted change that reflected and responded to their needs as Latinas and to the needs of People of Color at colleges and universities.

7.2.3 Solidarity

All participants described a deep sense of trust, friendship, and sisterhood embedded within their respective Communities of Women of Color. For example, Alma referred to her Community of Women of Color as “scholar sisters,” and Melissa referred to hers as “academic *hermanas*”

(academic sisters). Beyond using these terms that allude to solidarity and sisterhood, all participants described relationships with women in their communities that indicated solidarity. For instance, Lucero went through a hunger strike with her college peers that resulted in the formation of a community that endured for over two decades even after they no longer shared physical space and place. Similarly, Carmen created community with women peers in her undergraduate and master's programs, which endured through time, because they shared common family and educational values and experienced the same struggles as they tried to balance their family, education, and careers. The authenticity, trust, and bodymindspirit nature of participants' Communities of Women of Color set a foundation for the growth of solidarity between women. Communities of Women of Color transgressed the boundaries of participants' academic identities, as they became family—*hermanas*. When Latinas in community share solidarity and trust, sisterhood becomes characteristic of these communities both inside and outside of academia (Espino et al., 2010; Isasi-Díaz, 1996). Moreover, sister scholar relationships among Women of Color in academia are critical because women can confide in one another more freely without judgments based on cultural or academic expectations (Espino et al., 2010).

According to *mujerismo*, solidarity is “grounded in ‘common responsibilities and interests,’ which necessarily arouse shared feelings and lead to joint action” (Isasi-Díaz, 1996, p. 89). In this study, participants shared common interests and values for equity and social justice. I call this epistemological solidarity, which extends *mujerista* theoretical perspectives about what constitutes solidarity among Latinas. Epistemological solidarity was a foundational component of Communities of Women of Color. Thus, sharing common ways of knowing and thinking led to feelings of trust and solidarity between women and fortified their sense of community. Moreover, this study's findings contribute to the conceptualization of solidarity as participants demonstrated

that, although they may have had differences in values and beliefs with women in their communities, they respected those differences. Having epistemological solidarity regarding equity and social justice values created balance between their epistemological differences and similarities and contributed to their continued solidarity despite differences. This demonstrates that while women will have differences in their ways of thinking and knowing, that does not preclude the formation and fortification of solidarity within Communities of Women of Color. Furthermore, when women in communities experience conflicts, being open and authentic about those conflicts is essential to continued community growth and sisterhood.

7.2.4 Bodymindspirit

Little has been written about the concept of bodymindspirit outside of Lara's (2002) concise conceptualization. Lara conceptualizes bodymindspirit as the act of putting the three elements together—refusing to compartmentalize ourselves and abide by Western binaries that keep us from joining our body, mind, and spirit. Participants' experiences did align with Lara's interpretation of bodymindspirit as they described the ability to be their whole and authentic (i.e. bodymindspirit) selves with their Communities of Women of Color. Moreover, participants' experiences and embodiment of bodymindspirit also has commonalities with mindfulness. Mindfulness scholarship that is anti-oppressive and maintains cultural authenticity affirms that people who practice mindfulness are continually aware and accepting of their multiple social identities (Palma Cobian & Guida, 2018; Nhat Hanh, 2002). As such, participants in this study described experiences and understandings of their own bodymindspirit selves in ways that align with bodymindspirit and mindfulness literature. However, this study's findings make a

contribution to knowledge about how Latinas experience bodymindspirit, because participants also focused on self-care when describing what bodymindspirit meant to them. Lara did acknowledge self-care in her description of bodymindspirit, but she neither unpacked what self-care implied for bodymindspirit wholeness nor embedded self-care deeply into her conceptualization.

When asked what bodymindspirit meant to them and if/how it was related to their Communities of Women of Color, participants described their communities as being concerned with “needing to take care of all aspects of ourselves” (Amelia). Communities of Women of Color were concerned with keeping balance as women in academia between their scholarly responsibilities and the responsibilities to care for their own bodymindspirit. Alma described that her peer Community of Women of Color was aware that “When you’re always thinking about doing work, taking care of yourself gets left off.” Because this topic was often at the forefront of discussion in their community, Alma was “very aware of this balance between [her] mind, [her] body, [her] health, and also spirituality.” Similarly, Melissa recounted that her peer Community of Women of Color constantly reminded her “to nurture [herself]...and make time for [herself].” Her community of women was concerned with Melissa’s bodymindspirit well-being; they held each other accountable to nurturing themselves in bodymindspirit ways, encouraging a balance between self-care and scholarship. Carmen’s community of women also encouraged her self-care. As she said, “I can talk to any of the women in my communities about it (keeping balance and dealing with stress) and feel supported and feel like, ‘Oh my God, I feel the same way.’” I get the same response from them.” The trust and shared experiences between Carmen and women in her community enabled them to build trust, bond over the challenges of keeping bodymindspirit balance, and encourage each other to make time for bodymindspirit nourishment. Latinas’ Communities of Women of Color encourage women to practice self-care. Because self-care can

easily be neglected amid other professional and familial responsibilities, Communities of Women of Color play a critical role in legitimizing the importance of taking time for self-care. Practicing self-care and honoring their need to nurture themselves is important, because it is a critical component of Latina in academia's bodymindspirit well-being. Women in community are guardians of each other's continued bodymindspirit well-being.

7.3 New *Mestiza* Consciousness in Communities of Women of Color

Chicana feminists argue that Latinas go through multiple states of being and consciousness. New mestiza consciousness, *conocimiento* (reflective consciousness) and *nepantla* are theoretical concepts that attempt to explain these states of being and consciousness. These are closely interconnected concepts central to Chicana feminist theory. In order to illuminate their interconnectedness within the findings of my study, I discuss these concepts in unison in this section. I use the steps in Anzaldúa's (2002) "path to *conocimiento*" to discuss the processes through *conocimiento*, *nepantla*, and new *mestiza* consciousness and to make sense of the roles that Communities of Women of Color have on participants' processes through their states of being (p. 540).

Participants demonstrated new mestiza consciousness through their awareness and perspectives about white, patriarchal norms in academia and how those adversely affected them and other People of Color. They demonstrated *conocimiento* by struggling, recognizing, and embracing their multiple complex identities. These struggles between identities represent participants' states of *nepantlismo* (*nepantlism* - state of being "torn between ways") (Anzaldúa,

2007, p. 100). Participants had pride in being their whole authentic selves; their Communities of Women of Color were places in which they could grow their *conocimientos* for their bodymindspirit identities. In the seventh and final stage of *conocimiento* Latinas accept inner conflict, know how to negotiate conflict between how she interprets the world and how others interpret it, and finds those with whom to be her bodymindspirit self-forming “holistic alliances” (p. 545). All participants demonstrated that they had achieved this shift in reality and final state of *conocimiento*. In other words, participants had struggled with *nepantlismo* to achieve new *mestiza* consciousness. In order to clearly illustrate the stages of *conocimiento* and the role that Communities of Women of Color play as a woman transitions through the stages, I focus on the details of one case. While each participant had unique experiences in their paths to *conocimiento*, Lucero’s case is rich and representative of the major themes (struggles, transitions) that participants underwent as they transitioned through states of being to reach new *mestiza* consciousness. I describe Lucero’s transitions through the path to *conocimiento* and conclude by synthesizing how two Communities of Women of Color in her life were formative to her process culminating in the seventh stage—new *mestiza* consciousness.

In stage one of the path to *conocimiento* “two or more opposing...belief systems appear side by side or intertwined...compel[ing] you to critique your own perspective and assumptions” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 547). When Lucero took a “class on Women of Color and culture” in college she realized that she had never “questioned...[her] life before then because everything around [her] was congruent. Everything played out in the way that [she] expected it to based on [her Latina] cultural values and traditions.” When Lucero learned about “women of color feminism” in college, however, her *facultad* was awakened. She experienced a “shift in attention and [was able to] see through the surface of things” that once seemed routine and mundane (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 547).

As Lucero said “goodbye to old ways of being,” she returned home from college with a different understanding of her culture (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 547).

In stage two of the path to *conocimiento* Lucero entered *nepantla*. As a woman enters the “zone between changes where you struggle to find equilibrium between the outer expression of change and your inner relationship to it,” she begins to dismantle false truths (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 548-549). Lucero entered stage two after taking her Women of Color and culture class. At that point she began to question sexist gender norms that she witnessed in her family. Her first time returning home after that class, Lucero witnessed her female cousins serving men food before serving themselves. Lucero had witnessed this countless times over her lifetime, but for the first time she saw a common family occurrence through different eyes—through her expanding *conocimiento*. She felt outraged; the ways she thought about men and women’s roles in Latina/o/x culture started to transition—dropping her deeper into *nepantla*. As Lucero witnessed sexist behavior in her family, she thought, “Nobody is questioning this? Nobody is thinking twice about this? Nobody is considering how this changes outcomes for girls?” Thus, she began to “question the basic tenets and identities inherited from your family, your education and your different culture...[including] the inferiority of *mujeres*” (women) (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 548). At this stage, Lucero’s cousins, who were part of her community of women, contributed to her sense of conflict as she witnessed them abiding by sexist cultural behaviors. Lucero’s aunts also played a role as she interpreted them to be enforcers of these sexist cultural behaviors.

In stage three of the path of *conocimiento*, Latinas start to pay “the cost of knowing” that the truths and cultural norms they have accepted as their own no longer align with their bodymindspirit selves. As such we begin to feel “guilt and bitterness” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 550). At this point, Lucero tried to make amends and create a new schema or *facultad* about Latina/o/x

culture. Lucero can “not change [her] reality but [she] can change [her] attitude toward it, [her] interpretation of it” (p.552). In attempting to amend the conflict between her new knowledge and her cultural history, Lucero became disenchanted, “mourning the loss” of the culture she once loved without questions or conditions (p. 551). As a result, Lucero began to believe that Latina/o/x “culture was patriarchal in nature.”

In the fourth and fifth stages, the path to *conocimiento nepantilismo* continues. However, at this point “you continually reinterpret your past, you reshape your present.” (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 556). Lucero first interpreted Women of Color feminism and Latina/o/x culture as split and opposing, which led her to reinterpret her culture as patriarchal. Yet, in a reinterpretation of the split between Women of Color feminism and Latina/o/x culture, Lucero “began to understand the different power that [her] mother and [her] grandmothers had in the family.” She realized that these women protected Lucero and her sister “in their time to be academic people...outlined their path to go to college...[and] defended [them] against the men in the family when they questioned the rationale for educating girls.” Thus, these women in Lucero’s family contributed to her continued *conocimiento* as she understood and accepted a more complex reality concerning the identities of the women around her—and her own identity. Lucero’s reinterpretation better “encapsulates [her] life” experiences, which is characteristic of the fifth stage (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 559). Lucero built a story that reflects her truth, but she was aware that her truth and experiences are always fluid; there is always a sense of conflict and a struggle between her ever-evolving Western academic and Latina/o/x cultural experiences and knowledge.

In the sixth stage of *conocimiento*, Latinas realize that their most recent interpretations and life schemas continue to fall short. For instance, when Lucero became a mother, her daughter’s gender performance was sometimes misaligned with Latina/o/x culture, which caused family

members to make comments and ask questions. This is when Lucero recognized that while Latina/o/x culture is her identity and can be empowering—it can also be disempowering. Lucero accepted it. Again, her cultural interpretations required shifting. Lucero continued to teach her daughter Latina/o/x cultural traditions like *dia de los muertos* and *posadas* while embracing and encouraging her daughter's non-normative gender expression. Lucero continuously reinterpreted and re-embodied her Latina/o/x culture based on her ever-evolving experiences and those of her loved ones. The way in which Lucero responded to the cultural conflict provoked by her daughter's gender expression demonstrated that she had reached the seventh stage of *conocimiento*. The reinterpretations that once shocked and conflicted Lucero, she now approached with acceptance for a constant state of evolution. She embraced and passed on the cultural parts that empowered and legitimized her and her children, while leaving disempowering aspects at rest.

Anzaldúa (2002) described the seventh and final stage as a place in which Latinas accept conflicting realities and experiences, develop critical understandings of *nepantlism*, and identify interpersonal and intrapersonal points of alliance where one would usually see and feel opposition and conflict. Anzaldúa explained:

In the seventh, the critical turning point of transformation, you shift realities, develop an ethical, compassionate strategy with which to negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others, and find common ground by forming holistic alliances. You include these practices in your daily life, act on your vision—enacting spiritual activism. (2002, p. 545)

Communities of Women of Color played significant roles in reconciling the seemingly opposing and conflicting identities and situations that participants experienced. Two Communities of Women of Color were particularly influential to Lucero as she transitioned through the stages of

conocimiento to reach the seventh stage—new *mestiza* consciousness.

Lucero’s familial community of women, composed of her grandmother and mother, taught her how to negotiate conflict and awakened her spiritual activism. Her mother and grandmother demonstrated how to balance traditional Latina/o/x cultural norms while enacting their own authority even when cultural norms and their authority were at odds (e.g. sexist cultural norms and their championing Lucero and her sister’s college education and independence to attend Ivy League institutions in different states). Her mother and grandmother were also primarily responsible for Lucero’s spiritual awakening as she reinterpreted what faith and religion meant to her, thus transitioning from traditional Catholicism to fluid spirituality. Furthermore, Lucero’s college peer Community of Women of Color were critical in teaching her how to “negotiate conflict and difference within self and between others” as they sought institutional change for the empowerment and incorporation of Latina/o/xs on campus through a peaceful protest (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 545). While Anzaldúa primarily conceptualized the path to *conocimiento* as an internal and individual process, Communities of Women of Color can play a formative role as Latinas form “holistic alliances” and enact “spiritual activism” by being their whole bodymindspirit selves in everyday life and in environments that historically oppose wholeness—like academia (Anzaldúa, 2002, p. 545).

7.4 Implications for Latinas in Academia

The most important thing we can do for ourselves and each other as Latinas in academia is to find each other, to connect, and through those connections form authentic, safe, empowering,

and protective communities in which we can be more of our true authentic selves. Communities of Women of Color in which we can be our true authentic selves are significant for Latinas in academia because these spaces make us stronger and more set in our true, imbalanced, powerful and fluid identities as scholars, mujeres, activists, mothers, daughters, partners, lovers, writers, artists, practitioners, and more. Communities of Women of Color are spaces in which we reveal ourselves and talk about ourselves as ever evolving and ever growing bodymindspirit beings. Because of the power that comes with being who we really are—Latinas in academia who are part of Communities of Women of Color cultivate the strength and understanding that being true to your authentic self is sufficient to make change in every day life. For Latinas in Communities of Women of Color in academia, this understanding and certainty led to their disruption of white patriarchal norms and led them to uplift other People of Color around them within the academic setting. The impact that Communities of Women of Color have on the identities and behaviors of Latinas in academia matter because these communities give us a sense of foundation and bodymindspirit connection and wisdom that is necessary to affect radical change in academia—toward a Latina engrained place that begins to feel and smell like us. The more we do to cause change, to voice our authentic thoughts, to speak our epistemological truths—the more we grace this place (academia) with the legacy of our ancestors, our spirit, our cultural intuition, and our Latina bodymindspirit prismatic essence (Delgado Bernal, 1998). The more we do this within our Communities of Women of Color in academia, and as individual Latinas who are part of these communities, the more that academia transforms in Latina bodymindspirit ways.

The stories that participants shared during our interviews were those of challenges and triumphs. However, participants were always glad that they kept going—that they did not give up when they were supporting their families and pursuing their graduate degrees, or when they moved

states away to pursue their educational dreams even when family or friends did not approve, or when they were defining what Latina meant to them or their children—deciding what cultural aspects to pass on and which to leave behind. Participants experienced sexism and racism throughout their educational journeys, especially in doctoral programs. However, not one participant said she regretted her choice to endure hard things in the pursuit of her purpose or what she felt was right with her spirit. I offer these stories and this reflection so that Latinas in the world—in graduate school or thinking about attending graduate school—know that enduring and thriving through hard things is worth it and that we (other Women of Color) will be there along the way. We can help each other thrive. In fact, it is imperative that we do so. So, if you are thinking about graduation school—go. If you are thinking about challenging yourself by going into spaces where you are the only one or one of few—go. If you are contemplating transgressing a personal, familial, cultural, academic, or social boundary—do it. Alone you can do so much, with allies, sisters, *hermanas*, and Communities of Women of Color surrounding you, you can do just as much but with even more power and energy—for when you feel a depletion of strength or spirit, your Community of Women of Color is there to be a lifeline—to offer their own strength and energy so that you may restore and continue to press on for your purpose. Communities of Women of Color know that *en la lucha esta la vida*. The fight for and the path toward purpose and bodymindspirit fulfillment is life’s essence. When we fight for our bodymindspirit purpose—the paths we know in our souls to be ours—we transform the world.

7.5 Contributions to Research and Recommendations for Practice

Existing literature on Communities of Women of Color in higher education is extremely limited, which makes my study essential to the development of research in this regard. Yet, there are studies that focus on communities of Latinas both within and beyond the setting of academia. Here I discuss how my study extends existing literature and how it can inform an emerging body of research about Communities of Women of Color in academia. First, I discuss Communities of Women of Color as protective and empowering spaces for Latinas in academia. Second, I discuss the contributions to existing literature on Latina funds of knowledge by focusing on the funds of knowledge cultivated and exchanged within the Communities of Women of Color in this study. Third, I discuss how Communities of Women of Color inform *mujerista* mentoring practices. I provide recommendations for practice based on the research contributions of my study.

7.5.1 Protective and Empowering Communities

Communities of Women of Color are protective spaces for Latinas in academia. In their communities, participants felt safe from hostile academic and professional environments. Carmen, Marlen, and Melissa's respective Communities of Women of Color provided professional support and affirmed their sense of belonging in the field of higher education. This is important because Carmen, Marlen, and Melissa faced stressful, invalidating, and oppressive situations and environments professionally, which made them question their place and value in higher education. Unfortunately, these are common experiences for Latinas and Women of Color in higher education (Cuádras, 2005; Espinoza, 2010; Gándara, 1982; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Gonzalez, 2006,

2007; McClure, 2018; Perez Huber & Cueva, 2012; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001); however, participants' Communities of Women of Color were protective and affirmed their professional value and sense of place. Current research about Latinas in communities outside of academia suggests that the spaces in which Latinas can cultivate self-legitimization and empowerment are scarce—illuminating why Communities of Women of Color matter (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Villenas, 2001, 2006; Mejia et al., 2013). This study's findings confirm that Latinas' experiences within academia are similar and that Communities of Women of Color for Latinas in academia offer similar resources, including reciprocal legitimization, empowerment, and space to grow in bodymindspirit ways.

Communities of Women of Color are also protective and empowering spaces for Latina graduate students. Conchita, Alma, and Lucero experienced microaggressions and invalidations in their academic departments and on campus in general. Unfortunately, their experiences with microaggressions and invalidations are not uncommon. Latina graduate students report that institutional, departmental, and program-level climates are often discriminatory and lack the resources that are necessary to foster their academic and personal development (Aguirre-Covarrubias, Arellano, & Espinoza, 2015; Espino, Muñoz, Marquez Kiyama, 2010; Gonzalez, 2006; Ibarra, 1996; Ramirez, 2014; Reyes & Rios, 2005). However, with their respective Communities of Women of Color, participants harnessed the power to combat microaggressions and invalidations—and even transformed hostile environments into ones that included their perspectives and responded to their needs as women and People of Color. For example, Alma and her community of women peers transformed the classroom discourse from a white-perspective-dominant one to one that included their epistemological standpoints and lived experiences as Women of Color. Moreover, Lucero and her doctoral peer Community of Women of Color gave

each other the reciprocal emotional and academic support necessary to persist when sexism and elitism made them doubt themselves and their place in academia. This means that Communities of Women of Color are not only a resource for Latinas' academic and personal development but a source of validation and legitimization that empowers Latinas in academia to persist and to disrupt the white, patriarchal environments that attempt to oppress them. These findings align with existing research on Latina communities of women in everyday life that engage in grassroots political activism and contribute to the transformation of their environments to better serve their needs (Galvan, 2001, 2006; Mejia et al., 2013; Villenas, 2001, 2006). These findings also align with recent research examining the experiences of Black women pursuing doctoral degrees in the field of education (McClure, 2018). Black women doctoral students experience poor advisement and mentorship, a lack of Women of Color faculty with whom to form relationships, and hostile gender and racial climates within their programs (McClure, 2018). When faced with adverse and hostile situations that weigh on their bodymindspirit, Black women doctoral students form formal and informal counterspaces with other Women of Color; these counterspaces provide safe space to be authentic and vulnerable, and empower Black women to persist and thrive (McClure, 2018).

Recommendation for practice. Communities of Women of Color are created through a grassroots process by and for Latinas. However, colleges and universities may encourage the formation of Communities of Women of Color by dispersing information about the benefits of building and maintaining a community of women. Schools within universities can do this by publishing about Communities of Women of Color in their monthly newsletters. They can also share information about the characteristics and transformative experiences that occur in Communities of Women of Color with their graduate student councils, faculty members, administrators and staff—who can then pass on information to students as well as other faculty

and practitioners. Knowledge and awareness can be a grassroots tactic that colleges and university leaders employ to encourage community building for Latinas in academia. Schools may even consider designing and launching semester or annual community campaigns to encourage community building. An important part of such campaigns may be intimate, small scale, gatherings targeting Latinas in diverse positions in academia including students, faculty, and administrators. This may foster connection building and eventually community creation at a grassroots level between Latinas. A potential institutional benefit may be the cultivation and flourishing of positive, supportive, and more Latina-engrained climates, increased student persistence, and reduced professional turnover.

7.5.2 Funds of Knowledge

Latina funds of knowledge constitute ways of knowing that come from our (Latina) bodymindspirits—our intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and corporal *conocimientos* (Anzaldúa, 2007; Nygreen et al., 2016). This study contributes to this body of knowledge by illuminating that *conocimiento* about *el valor y el poder de la mujer* is a Latina fund of knowledge critical in the formation of Communities of Women of Color. Furthermore, *conocimiento* about *el poder y el valor de la mujer* is a significant spiritual fund of knowledge, because, once acquired, *esta inculcado en nuestras almas* (it is inculcated in our souls) and in our consciousness. *Conocimiento* about *el poder y el valor de la mujer* becomes *inculcado en el alma*, because this knowledge is passed down to us from: 1) witnessing the lives and lessons of our mother, grandmothers, and women in our *familias* (families), 2) forming intimate bonds with these women, and 3) receiving their *consejos* and learning from their *experiencias*. Through the process of *conocimiento* about *el*

poder y el valor de la mujer, we summon our historical cross-generational *poder* to navigate current sexist, racist, patriarchal and elitist situations in academia and beyond it.

Secondly, bodymindspirit funds of knowledge include acknowledging and honoring our own well-being and practicing bodymindspirit (e.g. emotional, corporal, intellectual, and spiritual) self-care as a means to ensure our survival and thriving in academia. Communities of Women of Color are imperative to this fund of knowledge, because women in communities monitor and protect each other's bodymindspirit wellness, legitimize the need to engage in self-care, and hold each other accountable for practicing self-care. The contribution that Communities of Women of Color make to ensuring self-care is an important aspect of bodymindspirit funds of knowledge and wellness. Developing healthy bodymindspirit self-care routines promote Latina higher education scholars' and practitioners' continued development and success in academia. Based on participants' experiences, women in community were aware that without proper bodymindspirit self-care, success in competitive, white, patriarchal professional environments becomes even more challenging. Thus, practicing bodymindspirit self-care was critical in women's continued growth as scholars and practitioners.

Thirdly, funds of knowledge in Communities of Women of Color included pedagogies of gratitude and service. Women in communities wanted to help other Latinas, Women of Color, and People of Color achieve success through the academic and professional processes that they were going through or had gone through. The resources, support, validation, and friendships that participants experienced in their Communities of Women of Color had an influence on their sense of purpose and —inspired them to want to give back or pay it forward. Because of these experiences, participants felt a sense of gratitude and a need to serve others in Latina, Women of Color, or People of Color communities. Thus, through transformative experiences in their

Communities of Women of Color, participants gained pedagogies of gratitude and service as they strived to contribute to the uplift of fellow Latinas, Women of Color, and People of Color in academia.

Recommendation for practice. Institutions may acknowledge and encourage awareness of and education about *el poder y el valor de la mujer* by integrating Latina feminist and mujerista scholarship, as well as scholarship by Women of Color into the curriculum across disciplines. Even in women and gender studies departments and courses, which would seem a fitting place to center endarkened feminism, the presence and incorporation of intersectional, Black feminist and Latina feminist scholarship is lacking. Moreover, scholarship by Women of Color should not be limited to Black feminist thought courses or Chicana studies courses. Black and Latina feminist scholarship and Women of Color's scholarship should permeate women and gender studies as well as other disciplines. This is necessary for the legitimization of Women of Color's epistemologies and scholarship in academia. Scholarship by Women of Color should permeate across college courses and academic disciplines. Professors must make an intentional effort to incorporate scholarship by Women of Color into their courses, which would foster Women of Color and People of Color's connection with academia, research, and scholarship. This is a significant educational deficit that must be rectified—and by rectifying this curricular deficit institutions of higher education would simultaneously underscore and display value for *el poder y el valor de la mujer*..

Institutions may encourage bodymindspirit self-care by incorporating bodymindspirit into new employee, undergraduate, and graduate students' orientations. A dedicated speaker in orientation on this topic would be beneficial and representative of the institution or school's commitment to bodymindspirit wellness. Furthermore, for faculty and staff, there could be an in-person bodymindspirit-summit on techniques to help reduce stress and learn effective time

management skills. The bodymindspirit summit should include local businesses and professionals that specialize in stress reduction and wellness at the intellectual, spiritual, and physical levels. Vendors may include aromatherapy specialists, yoga and meditations instructors, technology industries that specialize in helping people use their time more efficiently, etc. Importantly, events or summits focused on bodymindspirit should be planned and implemented using an anti-oppressive collective mindfulness approach in order to avoid appropriating cultural traditions and perpetuating colonization (Berila, 2015; Palma Cobian & Guida, 2018). University schools and departments may also consider creating small spaces throughout their buildings for relaxation, resting, or writing. These spaces should have features that promote a bodymindspirit connection like water features, windows, light, books or videos about bodymindspirit wellness, how to achieve it, and how to maintain it. Bodymindspirit spaces should be small and intimate but dispersed in different locations across university buildings. University counseling services, psychologists, and perhaps even landscape architecture students may play critical roles in contributing to the design of bodymindspirit spaces on campus.

7.5.3 Mujerista Mentoring

I base suggestions for mujerista mentoring on the foundational components and transformative experiences that occur in Communities of Women of Color. In order to be meaningful to Latinas in academia, mujerista mentoring should include some of the same components of Communities of Women of Color. The proposition that mujerista mentoring should include some of the components of Communities of Women of Color makes sense as both mentoring and communities rely on the formation of trusting relationships. Furthermore, mujerista

mentoring is not limited to relationships between Latina women in academia. Rather, if *mujerista* mentoring were carried out by all higher education practitioners, including academic counselors and advisors, as well as faculty mentors and advisors, as a new mentoring model across institutions, this would create change toward an academia and higher education system that acknowledges, legitimizes, and validates intersecting identities and bodymindspirit wholeness. Thus, *mujerista* mentoring would not only benefit Latinas but all persons in higher education.

Firstly, *mujerista* mentoring should consist of authentic and trusting relationships. Existing literature proposes that solidarity is a critical part of *mujerista* mentoring because solidarity between Latinas contributes to their thriving in academia (Martinez-Roldán & Quiñonez, 2016; Tijerina-Revilla, 2010; Villaseñor et al., 2013). This study's findings suggest that solidarity in *mujerista* mentoring can be built specifically through shared epistemological perspectives and lived experiences between Women of Color. Women in *mujerista* mentoring relationships should also acknowledge and discuss points of lived and epistemological divergences honestly—as this is a critical part of cultivating authentic solidarity among Communities of Women of Color.

Secondly, *mujerista* mentoring should acknowledge, legitimize, and validate the power and significance of Latinas' multiple intersecting identities (Tijerina-Revilla, 2010; Villaseñor et al., 2013). This will inherently encourage the integration of Latinas' bodymindspirit state of being and ways of knowing, because validating the value and power of Latinas' multiple intersecting identities encourages internal unity between body, mind, and spirit. Discussing and encouraging a bodymindspirit state of being and ways of knowing is powerful for Latinas in academia, because the split between the body, mind, and spirit is a Western binary norm that keeps us from realizing our fullest intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical selves (Lara, 2002). Through open and constant discourse about how important our multiple intersecting identities and our bodymindspirit

state of being and ways of knowing are, *mujerista* mentoring relationships can make significant contributions to the bodymindspirit liberation of Latinas in academia. It would be liberating and empowering for Latinas to be able to engage in real time, live, daily talk about our whole selves—not just about our academic lives—within academic spaces. This study’s findings show that integrating our whole bodymindspirit identities into daily academic life is an act of patriarchal disruption and self-affirmation, empowerment, and growth that solidifies our meaning and place in academia and in the world.

Thirdly, *mujerista* mentoring should be protective but also transformative. Existing literature proposes that *mujerista* mentoring relationships should offer Latinas protection from sexist, racist, classist, and elitist academic environments that invalidate Latina ways of knowing and being (Ek et al., 2010; Martinez-Roldán & Quiñonez, 2016; Tijerina-Revilla, 2010). Moreover, *mujerista* mentorship is protective, because it contributes to Latinas’ professional advancement and academic persistence in academia (Ek et al., 2010). However, beyond safeguarding and encouraging Latinas through challenges and adversities, women in *mujerista* mentoring relationships have the opportunity to engage in transformative practices that contribute to changing academia into a place that reflects Latinas’ ways of knowing and being—and responds to our needs. To be clear, *mujerista* mentoring is a transformative practice because these relationships legitimize Latinas’ epistemological standpoints and create academic environments that respond to Latinas’ bodymindspirit ways of knowing and needs. Thus, *mujerista* mentoring relationships in and of themselves are transformative. *Mujerista* mentorship is transformative, because it redefines revolution to mean “our (Latina) own movement toward ourselves and towards social justice” (Tijerina-Revilla, 2010, p. 58). However, mentors and mentees could also affect transformation beyond their mentoring relationships. For example, in this study, Communities of

Women of Color harnessed the power and resources necessary to engage in transformative practices that disrupted white, patriarchal norms at the classroom and institutional levels. Similarly, groups of women could form alliances across *mujerista* mentoring relationships to affect transformation at levels beyond the relationship pair and into their respective programs, department, schools, and even across institutions. Organized or institutionalized *mujerista* mentoring could facilitate a cross-institutional community for Women of Color. The formation of a wider *mujerista* mentoring community could facilitate transformation toward a *mujerista* academia that reflects and responds to the identities and needs of Women of Color across institutions. By joining together and practicing *mujerista* mentoring, we can create incremental change.

Recommendation for practice. Institutions should consider designing *mujerista* mentoring programs. Specific school or departments designing *mujerista* mentoring programs within a university may seek out faculty, administrators, and students who would be interested in participating. Although Latinas may be more responsive, the program should be open to all. The program may be designed with different components, such as peer-peer, faculty-student, administrator-student, faculty-faculty, and faculty-administrator mentoring components. In other words, mentorship relationships should not be limited to faculty-students or administrator-student mentor-mentee relationships. Departments should provide resources for the *mujerista* mentoring program. Resources may include relationship-building spaces, workshops, books and research articles on *mujerismo*, *bodymindspirit*, and *mujerista* mentoring. Resources should also include funding for program activities such as retreats. Funding resources through the *mujerista* mentoring program should also include scholarships to subsidize tuition, books, research materials and equipment. A *mujerista* mentoring program should also fund mentor and mentees' conference

attendance, at least one time per year, in order to support their academic, personal, and professional development.

7.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research on Communities of Women of Color would benefit from an ethnographic approach. In the ethnographic approach, the researcher would be able to observe, serve, and learn from actual Communities of Women of Color, accessing more sources and units of data and therefore potentially yielding richer results (e.g. Tijerina-Revilla, 2009, 2010). An ethnographic approach may also be more capable of illuminating the bodymindspirit fabric of Communities of Women of Color—what brings and keeps women together in community and why community matters to Women of Color in academia. Observational data may capture experiences in communities that one-on-one interviews and artifact analysis may miss due to these methods' time restraints and limitations, which may consequently affect relationship building and reciprocity between researcher and participants. Ethnographic methods may facilitate a more holistic approach to research. This would be beneficial, because, in order to understand the bodymindspirit fabric of Communities of Women of Color, researchers should be as bodymindspirit invested into the work as possible.

Collecting Latinas' *testimonios* focused on how Communities of Women of Color affect Latinas journeys in academia specifically may produce more focused and in-depth knowledge. Data collection through a *testimonio* methodology can further illuminate the political nature of Communities of Women of Color within the context of academia. Given that *testimonio*

methodology calls for social action (Reyes & Curry Rodriguez, 2012) it would be an effective approach to examining the nature of self-advocacy within Communities of Women of Color in academia and how that specific experience within Communities of Women of Color contributes to the political transformation of academia. I took a more exploratory approach by asking broader protocol questions that inquired about how communities of women mattered to any or all aspects of participants' lives. Having protocol questions specifically focus on academia, rather than probes, can produce more knowledge about the role of Communities of Women of Color for Latinas in the academic context. Also using *testimonios* as a method may result in richer data and would follow the methodological approach of canonical Chicana and Latina feminist scholarship investigating and legitimizing Latina funds of knowledge (Facio & Lara, 2014; The Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2002).

Studies using the concept of bodymindspirit are very limited (Ayala et al., 2006; Perez Huber, 2017). Although more research must be conducted to understand how bodymindspirit is embodied and conceptualized by Latinas, bodymindspirit is useful for understanding and analyzing Latinas' experiences, identities, and funds of knowledge. Tina was at a more self-actualized stage of life and her understandings of bodymindspirit were more developed as she had lived in a bodymindspirit state of wholeness for longer and had deeply reflected on this state of being prior to our interviews. Interviewing senior scholar Latinas to better understand bodymindspirit would be a significant contribution to the body of research on bodymindspirit as experienced by Latinas. Future studies with the purpose of investigating how Latinas define bodymindspirit in everyday life would contribute to the current research gap on this topic.

7.7 Considering the Tina Time-lapse Effect for Future Research

Initially, Tina's story did not seem to fit with those of the other participants. Tina was at least 20 years older than the other participants. Her interviews were much more reflective. As Tina told her story she had a deep sense of understanding and acceptance for the events of her life. It felt as though Tina had spent meaningfully time contemplating her life's story, long before our interviews took place. The spirit of the other participants' interviews lacked this deep sense of reflection. I interpreted that this was the result of her age and the time that Tina had spent meditating on the meaning and purpose of her own life and the world around her. Tina saw everything as connected and understood everything—every event and every person—to be part of a much bigger whole.

Tina gave me the perspective of what some participants might experience 20 after our interviews. She fast forwarded through time and gave insight to what some of the reflections about Communities of Women of Color or being a Latina in academia may look like for the other participants in two decades. Although the spirit of Tina's story and her reflections were different from those of other participants, Tina's story was rich, deep and insightful. She reflected on her past and on her interpretations of past experiences. Meanwhile, all the other participants told me the stories of what they had experienced in the not-so-distant past or in the present time during the interviews. Tina took me back 50 years of her lifetime and shared with me the insights of a wise woman who had gone through some of life's major milestones, changes, challenges, and triumphs. She had gone through graduate school, was a community activist, developed a career as a notable researcher and practitioner, and cultivated a deep community of family and friends.

Tina's stories and perspectives are invaluable to this study as her narrative is a message for a younger generation of Latinas in academia, including the ones in this study. Professionally, Tina pushed the boundaries on what got to count as scholarship and what academics recognized as the forms of capital that Students of Color brought to college. Tina was a pioneer through her scholarship and her community activism. Conchita, for example, also disrupted norms and pushed the boundaries within her graduate program and school. During her doctoral program, Conchita faced administrative leaders in her school and demanded changes that would benefit all graduate students, and especially incoming graduate Students of Color. Based on Tina's life experiences and the stories she shared during our interviews, I believe Tina would advise Conchita to continue to press on the white patriarchal hierarchies, cultures, and boundaries that hinder our thriving. Tina would say, "Conchita, these challenges that you are confronting by going to leaders and speaking up about the issues that affect graduate students and the need for specific resources to help retain and support graduate students are worth confronting. Standing up and pressing on for what you believe in and know is right is exactly what life's purpose is about; this is how we make change happen—by acting upon what we feel and know is right—by doing work that advances equity and the forward movement of our Latinx people. Always remember too, that we are all connected and that we should demonstrate respect as we share our messages and our perspectives even with those who do not agree with us." I believe that this would be part of Tina's message to Conchita. At Conchita's age, Tina did many of the same things that Conchita was doing, speaking with stakeholder and leaders to change the status quo in her department, secure better opportunities for graduate Students of Color, and make meaningful change within her spheres of influence at the academic and community levels. Throughout her career Tina continued to work from this core purpose or philosophy, ultimately affecting change within her spheres of influence and her

academic field. In order to craft a narrative that transcends generations and time, future research on Latinas in academia should include participants from different age groups and generations. Continued research about Communities of Women of Color in academia matters because in and through these communities we, Latinas, are transforming academia. The more we know about the ways in which Communities of Women of Color are making transformation, the more tools and knowledge we will gain to support the continued Latina cultural transformation of academia—a transformation in which Latina epistemological standpoints and ways of being become engrained into the cultural fabric of academia as an institution.

7.8 Concluding Thoughts

My interest in this dissertation topic was born from my own formative experiences with my Community of Women of Color both within and beyond academia. I attribute much of my personal, academic, and bodymindspirit growth to my relationships with Women of Color. My Community of Women of Color has nourished my abilities to consistently grow personally and professionally through various stages in my life—and through the different roles I embody as a mother, sister, wife, daughter, learner, scholar, and practitioner. My Community of Women of Color has been critical in elevating my own *conocimiento* as a *mujer*, student, scholar, and practitioner. They have also taught me through *consejos* and *experiencia* that we can transgress Western binaries and white, patriarchal norms; they are social constructs and we transgress these binaries the moment we identify them and decide not to abide by them. Granted, transgressing Western binaries and white, patriarchal norms can be bodymindspirit draining and depleting.

Simultaneously, however, transgressing of the boundaries and norms that attempt to constrain us is empowering; *la lucha* is powerful. Communities of Women of Color are significant in the lives of Latinas in academia, because in these communities we are vulnerable in times of drain and depletion, we gather ammunition through community, and we work together in transformative ways to redesign the fabric of our environments into one that incorporates our bodymindspirit selves.

Participants in this study described similar transformative experiences within their Communities of Women of Color. Having a Community of Women of Color meant having trusting relationships—relationships through which women could learn and grow in authentic and bodymindspirit ways regardless of white, patriarchal, racist, gendered, and sexist environments and events. Solidarity within Communities of Women of Color created opportunities for women to develop their sense of purpose, contribute to the uplift of fellow Latinas and People of Color, and disrupt white, patriarchal norms within academic settings. Communities of Women of Color were bastions of strength—places of legitimization and validation for their experiences as *mujeres*. Communities of Women of Color contributed to participants' *poder y valor* no matter the *luchas* they fought and thrived through. In fact, participants' communities of women were there to encourage their mutual *luchas* as they endeavored to achieve their personal, professional, academic, and bodymindspirit aspirations. *En comunidad todo es posible y la lucha siempre continua; la lucha es el poder y la fortaleza* (In community all is possible, and the struggle/fight continues always; the struggle/fight is the power and the strength.).

Appendix A Recruitment Email

SUBJECT LINE: Seeking Participants for Research Study with Latinas in Academia

Dear Colleague,

I hope this email finds you well.

I am reaching out to see if you would be willing to disseminate the study information below to your colleagues or students whom fit the criteria.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me at jjr79@pitt.edu or 786-863-7113.

Thank you in advance for your help,

Jenesis J. Ramirez, M.S.Ed
Ph.D. Student, Administrative and Policy Studies Department
University of Pittsburgh School of Education
Gates Millennium Scholar

Dear [Name of prospective participant],

My name is Jenesis J. Ramirez and I am a current doctoral candidate at University of Pittsburgh. I am currently seeking participants for my dissertation. The purpose of this research study is to examine Latinas in academia's communities of women—the communities of women that they are part of and in which they cultivate knowledge, support, growth and empowerment.

Community of women does not have to be a formal or cohesive group, although it can be. For example, the community of women may be composed of individual women with whom you share a relationship that inspires and motivates you as a Latina woman and/or academic scholar. The relationships you share with these women make you feel supported and empowered; with these women you cultivate different forms of knowledge and wisdom. Women in your community may or may not be part of academia. The women in your community may or may not know each other, but you know all of them. For this reason, the community of women is defined as your community of women.

In order to participate you must:

1. Identify as Latina
2. Identify as female
3. Currently be a faculty member, practitioner, or graduate student at a college or university

4. Have a community of women that supports you
5. Have an understanding and appreciation for your own spirituality
6. Believe in gender, racial, ethnic and sexual equity for minoritized people

Participation in this study involves:

1. Filling out a criterion survey
2. Filling out a short demographic questionnaire
3. Participating in a short preliminary, conversational meeting via Skype, FaceTime, voice phone call, or in-person
4. Participating in three, 60-90 minute interviews via Skype, FaceTime, voice phone call, or in-person. Questions will focus on your education, current work, and your community of women. All interviews will be audio-recorded.
5. Identifying an artifact (e.g. drawings, figurines, photographs, poems, songs, journal entries, written reflections, etc.)

If you meet the above requirements and are interested in participating in my study, please email me to confirm eligibility. If you choose to participate, you will receive monetary compensation at the end of each interview. Please know that your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to leave the study at any time. Your identity will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used in order to protect your privacy.

There is little risk involved in this study. The major potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but we will do everything possible to protect your privacy. To reduce the likelihood of a breach of confidentiality, the researcher has been thoroughly trained to maintain your privacy.

Other than compensation for your time, there are no guaranteed benefits for participating other. Participating may be beneficial for you, on a personal level, to process through your experiences. The researcher is trained to be good listeners and will validate you as a person. This study may benefit society with increased knowledge about how to support Latinas' journeys in academia.

If you have any further questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out to me at jjr79@pitt.edu or 786-863-7113.

Thank you in advance for your help,

Jenesis J. Ramirez, M.S.Ed
Ph.D. Student, Administrative and Policy Studies Department
University of Pittsburgh School of Education
Gates Millennium Scholar

Appendix B Criterion Survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey in preparation for our interview together. Below are a few definitions that may be helpful as you answer the questions:

Community of women does not have to be a formal or cohesive group, although it can be. For example, the community of women may be composed of individual women with whom you share a relationship that inspires and motivates you as a Latina woman and/or academic scholar. The relationships you share with these women make you feel supported and empowered; with these women you cultivate different forms of knowledge and wisdom. Women in your community may or may not be part of academia. The women in your community may or may not know each other, but you know all of them. For this reason, the community of women is defined as your community of women

Bodymindspirit may be an unfamiliar term. Lara (2002) defines bodymindspirit as the opposite of “the western mind/body split”; bodymindspirit is the “the wisdom of the whole self” such that you are aware of a connection between body, mind, and spirit (p. 435).

Spirituality can be defined in multiple, and personal ways. The following are three ways in which Latina scholars have described spirituality:

Spirituality is a “sense of transcendence beyond the self” that supports the process toward liberation from oppression, including but not limited to institutional structures of oppression, and is separate and different from religion (Comas-Díaz, 2008, p. 13).

Spirituality is “something we do; it is part of creating culture and the production of meaning” (Lara & Facio, 2014).

Spirituality evolves throughout our lifetimes and “is the way I understand my position in the world in relation to larger existential questions about the meaning of life and death” (Elenes, 2014).

1. What are your race and ethnicity?
2. What is your sex?
3. What is your gender?
4. When making professional decisions I rely on: (Mark the following items with a level of importance: 1 = very important, 2 = important, 4 = sometimes important, 3 = not important. You may use the same level of importance for more than one or all items.)

- a. Intuition
- b. Spiritual wisdom
- c. Bodymindspirit knowledge
- d. Research
- e. Community of women
- f. Other

If you rely on “Other” sources please describe below.

5. When making personal life decisions I rely on: (Mark the following items with a level of importance: 1 = very important, 2 = important, 4 = sometimes important, 3 = not important. You may use the same level of importance for more than one or all items.)

- a. Intuition
- b. Spiritual wisdom
- c. Bodymindspirit knowledge
- d. Research
- e. Community of women
- f. Other

If you rely on “Other” sources please describe below.

6. In what ways do you currently focus on or advocate for racially, ethnically, and/or sexually minoritized persons through any of the following? Select all that apply.

- a. Your research
- b. Your practice
- c. Community work
- d. Volunteer work
- e. Your writing
- f. Activism
- g. Other

If you chose “Other”, please list the activity in which you focus on or advocate for racially, ethnically or sexually minoritized persons:

7. How important is your community of women in your daily life?

- Very Important
- Important
- Not important
- I do not have a community of women.

Appendix C Demographic Questionnaire

Name:

Please select a pseudonym to be used in all research study documents:

Please list an email address at which you can be contacted:

Please list a phone number at which you can be contacted:

What is the name of your current institution?

If you are a faculty member or practitioner:

What is your current professional title?

How long have you been at your current institution?

If you are a doctoral student:

What are the titles of your department and program?

What year of study are you in?

Appendix D Informed Consent Form



University of Pittsburgh
Dept of Administrative & Policy Studies

5907 Wesley W. Posvar Hall
230 South Bouquet Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15260
786-863-7113

CONSENT TO ACT AS A SUBJECT IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Latinas in Academia and Their Communities of Women

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Jenesis J. Ramirez
5907 Wesley W. Posvar Hall, Pittsburgh, PA 15260
Phone: 786-863-7113
E-mail: jjr79@pitt.edu

SOURCE OF SUPPORT: Department of Administrative & Policy Studies

Why is this study being done?

To examine how Latinas in academia cultivate knowledge, support, growth and empowerment within their communities of women.

Who is being asked to take part in this study?

Latina faculty members, practitioners, and doctoral students who are willing to talk about their experiences within their communities of women.

What are the procedures of this study?

1. Filling out a criterion survey
2. Participating in a short preliminary, conversational meeting via Skype, FaceTime, voice phone call, or in-person
3. Filling out a short demographic questionnaire
4. Participating in three, 60-90 minute interviews via Skype, FaceTime, voice phone call, or in-person. Questions will focus on your education, current work, and your community of women. All interviews will be audio-recorded.
5. Identifying an artifact (e.g. drawings, figurines, photographs, poems, songs, journal entries, written reflections, etc.)

What are the possible risks and discomforts of this study?

There is little risk involved in this study. The major potential risk is a breach of confidentiality, but we will do everything possible to protect your privacy. To reduce the likelihood of a breach of confidentiality, each participant will choose a pseudonym with will keep her identity confidential. Furthermore, the researcher has been thoroughly trained to maintain your privacy.

Will I benefit from taking part in this study?

There are no guaranteed benefits for participating. It may also be beneficial for you, on a personal level, to process through your experiences. This study may benefit society with increased knowledge about how to support Latinas' journeys in academia.

How much will I be paid if I complete this study?

You will receive a \$15 gift card (similar to a Visa card) for each interview completed.

Will anyone know that I am taking part in this study?

All records pertaining to your involvement in this study will be kept confidential and any data that include your identity will be stored in locked files or encrypted on the principal investigator's computer. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications of this research. Your research data may be shared with investigators conducting similar research; however, this information will be shared in a de-identified manner (without identifiers).

If the investigators learn that you or someone with whom you are involved is in serious danger or potential harm, they will need to inform, as required by Pennsylvania law, the appropriate agencies. In unusual cases, the investigators may be required to release identifiable information (which may include your identifiable medical information) related to your participation in this research study in response to an order from a court of law.

It is possible that authorized representatives from the University of Pittsburgh Research Conduct and Compliance Office (including the University of Pittsburgh IRB) may review your data for the purpose of monitoring the conduct of this study.

Is my participation in this study voluntary?

Yes, your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may refuse to take part in it, or you may stop participating at any time. If you choose to withdraw from this study, all data collected prior to the date of withdrawal will be continued to be used, unless you request we destroy it.

Your decision will not affect your relationship with the University of Pittsburgh or the university in which you work and/or study.

How can I get more information about this study?

If you have any further questions about this research study, you may contact the principal investigator listed at the beginning of this consent form. If you have any questions about your

rights as a research subject, please contact the Human Subjects Protection Advocate at the University of Pittsburgh IRB Office, 1.866.212.2668.

If you are eligible, you will be contacted to participate in the full study.

Do you agree that you have read this information, have had any questions you had about the study answered, and accept to participate in the research study?

Appendix E Interview Protocol One

1. Before we get into the questions around the topic of this study, can you tell me about what you do at the university? What are your professional or scholarly roles?
2. To better understand how you got to be at this position in academia, can you share with me your educational background?

Transitioning into more personal questions that are more closely related to the purpose of the study,

3. Starting from when you were a child, can you tell me the story of your growth and evolution as a Latina woman?

Probes:

- a. Where have you been, compared to where are you now in terms of how you understand yourself as a Latina woman?
 - b. Tell me the story of how you came to understand the meaning of your gender. What does your gender mean to you now?
 - c. Who were you growing up?
 - d. Who are the most important people in your life?
 - e. What makes you who you are?
4. Tell me the story of how you came to understand your culture and ethnicity.

Probes:

- a. What does your culture and ethnicity mean to you now?
 - b. Who were the people who influenced, or who do influence, your understandings?
5. What does bodymindspirit mean to you? [If you do not connect with this term, what does spirituality mean to you?]

Probes:

- a. How has your bodymindspirit evolved throughout your life?
- b. Who were the people who influenced, or who do influence, your understandings of bodymindspirit?

I have asked lots of questions. Thank you so much for sharing your story with me. Is there anything else you think is important to understanding you, which I have missed? Is there anything my questions did not get at that you want to share with me?

Do you have any questions about the study or about myself? I would be happy to share my

responses.

*Before we conclude I would like you to bring an artifact/s to our next meeting. In the second and third interviews I will ask you to talk about the artifact, the story behind it and what it means to you. The artifact may be an object in the form of any object collected or produced by the participant. For example you may own drawings, figurines, photographs or other object that represent your community of women. The artifact may be a journal entry or a written reflection that you have already written about or related to your community of women. The most important part of this artifact identification process is that it should be an object that you **already** own **because** it represents your community of women, your bodymindspirit, and/or your funds of knowledge. In other words, I don't want you to go home and search for artifacts that you can connect to these aspects of yourself for the first times because it is part of this study. Rather, the artifact should already hold meaning for you—since before participating in this study.*

The only exception to this is if you feel compelled to write a narrative in which you describe a scenario and the roles of women in your community. You may, for example, write biographies about the roles of women in your community of women. If these options just don't work or make sense for you, what do you feel is another way in which you would like to represent your community of women?

Appendix F Interview Protocol Two

As you know this study is about Latinas' in academia's communities of women—women who are meaningful to our lives and journeys in indispensable ways. For the purpose of this study I define community of women as an informal group. The community of women does not have to be cohesive group, but rather a set of women who support you. The women may or may not know each other, but you know all of them. Essentially, the community of women is your community of women who have or do offer you support, encouragement, and a tangible or intangible space for you to be all that you are—to grow, thrive, laugh, cry, and struggle. However, you may define it differently and I want to hear all about your community of women, whether this community is similar to what I defined or completely different.

1. How do you define your community of women? What does that mean?
2. Take a moment to imagine your community women in your mind's eye. When you are ready to begin, tell me the story of your community of women?

Probes:

- a. This can be daunting there may be a few or there may be many. You can go in chronologically order if that makes sense to you, from oldest meaningful relationship with a woman to most recent. You can approach the question, however, in whichever way makes most sense to you.
 - b. How was your community of women born?
 - c. How did it grow and evolve over time?
 - d. Put more simply, describe your community of women.
 - e. What is your community of women like?
3. Tell me about the women in your community of women? Who are they? How and why are they meaningful to you?

Probes:

- a. Describe at least three women.
 - b. Name these meaningful women.
 - c. How did you get to know them?
 - d. Who are they?
4. Tell me more about what your community of women means to your life.

Probes:

- a. What does your community of women mean to you within your role in academia?
- b. What does your community of women mean to you beyond academia?
- c. How did it come to have this meaning?

d. Tell me about how the interactions with and the presence of your community of women come to have these effects.

5. Can you describe the ethnic or racial makeup of the women in your community?

Probe:

a. What are your thoughts on that makeup; what does it mean to you?

6. How has your community of women influenced how you see yourself? What you do?

Probes:

a. Your identities as a woman, Latina, mother, activist, academic, researcher, etc.

b. Your sense of purpose?

7. How has your community of women affected your bodymindspirit growth?

8. In what ways does your community of women give you knowledge or wisdom?

Probe:

a. How does your community of women affect how you interpret the world?

9. Tell me about the artifact you chose.

I have asked lots of questions. Thank you so much for sharing your story with me. Is there anything else you think is important to understanding your experiences in your community of women, which I have missed? Is there anything my questions did not get at that you want to share with me?

Do you have any questions about the study or about myself? I would be happy to share my responses.

Appendix G Interview Protocol Three

1. How do your relationships with women in your community continue to be meaningful in your life?

Probes:

- a. How have these relationships evolved over time?
 - b. How are these relationships still powerful?
 - c. Maybe some are no longer meaningful, how come?
2. What is your role in your community of women?
Probe:
 - a. What do you mean or represent in your community of women?
 3. Why is having a community of women important to you as a Latina in academia?
 4. What would life be like in academia and beyond, without your community of women?
 5. Since we last spoke, did you have any other thoughts about the artifact you shared?

Appendix H Sample Data Analysis: Categories, Themes, and Coded Data

Table 2. Sample of Data Analysis: Categories, Themes, and Coded Data

	Alma	Amelia	Carmen	Conchita	Lucero	Marlen	Melissa	Tina
How Latinas make meaning of their communities of women								
Theme 1: Common race, common values (<i>epistemological solidarity</i>)	<p>“The white woman [in our cohort] would play the [academic] game. She knew academia. She knew how to do it well. She had the cultural capital, and she had the language, and she had the whole package. It felt like she would over perform in class, at the expense of making us look bad. [So] I couldn’t connect with her on any level, beyond academic,</p>	<p>“I have connected with women of color because we share common experiences like often being first-generation to attend college or coming from a low-income background. These identities are salient to me everyday. [My connections with white women] just haven’t been the same because of some instances in class where white privilege would show up. Even when it’s called out, it’s perpetuated or dismissed.”</p>	<p>“They’re open to diversity and they believe diversity’s important. I think that’s a big deal for me because there’s a lot of women that have all the other traits, but don’t understand diversity, don’t understand why differences are important and I think they do believe that because they understand it.”</p>	<p>“The dynamic I feel with Dr. Lopez and [the other women of color on the research team] is more like a family type of community. It’s something that I hadn’t had since back home [in Mexico]. I think it has to do with the culture. Americans are not like that (so family oriented).”</p>	<p>“I would say most of them are women of color. Even if they’re not women of color, I feel like they have a more nuanced understanding of race and racism, and I can have conversations with them.”</p>	<p>“I think that there are other common denominators such as values and guiding principles that can be just as powerful as race or ethnicity...like the conviction that teaching matters and that teaching is a calling. It is a way to serve and advance really noble goals. We are helping people [faculty] shape people [students]. We all want to help faculty be empathic, kind,</p>	<p>“All of the women in my communities are women of color, except Kayla (advisor in the doctoral program). I think we all have similar ideas and values that we hold near and dear to us. Specifically the women I met through the doctoral program, including my mentors, [are all] racial and social justice [oriented]. Kayla was very vocal about it (racial justice and social justice)—</p>	<p>“Obviously, with other Latinas, I have an immediate affinity. We just connect. I try to keep an open mind about things. To me, if you are a good person and want to come into my life, I’m open to that. There are people who invite me to speak all the time, and a lot of them are white. I’m going there tomorrow, and I’m totally fine with that. We respect each other at a professional level, but they embrace my work, and that means a great deal.”</p>

because I was just so violated by the way that she would perform academia, and how it was so individualistic.”

and tolerant. At work we are brought together with a deep sense of social justice. We want to be warriors for equity.”

even for being a white woman. She wasn't just an ally, she was an advocate.”

Funds of knowledge

Theme 1: Academic, emotional, and/or professional support/advice/wisdom

“After that, I think the three of us, we realized no one's going look out for us, so we got to have each other's backs. We were kind of intentional about it, but through that, we also developed a real friendship.”

“We (Stella and I) have our own one-on one-side chat and because we went through the coursework together, being able to go on that journey with one another is completely critical. I think it's really those words of affirmation and encouragement that make it especially meaningful for me. I mean supporting me academically [and beyond]...helping to practice a presentation with me, or setting aside time to study with one another because we knew that we needed that accountability. In times where I hadn't reached my

“We have a Women of Color group that meets every month. We go to lunch together, so we just connected with each other to support each other because we're at a predominantly white institution. There are not many Women of Color in high level positions here, so we get together and just talk about life, talk about our goals, talk about school, talk about work, talk about our personal lives, and that keeps us going.

“I know I can call her (Cora) whenever I need. She knows when I need a break and when I need to relax. She forces me to leave the house even when I don't want to leave. We've gone to the theater. We've gone to L.A. We've gone exercising. I think I'm sane because of her...She's always there. She's like three doors away

“One of them...had a baby in September. We got like three weeks into the school year, and her anxiety level was so high about how she was going to manage, after the birth of the baby, to finish the semester. In that moment, after class, we were just—right now; there are no papers due. You have nothing to do. Just go home and rest and deliver this baby this week, and then we'll think about

“We worked on a high profile project for over one year. One of us was the point person and she had invested countless of her hours at home and at work. She was losing sleep to get it done. Then, due to a political battle, [the project] was taken away from us and it was very demoralizing for her. So we rallied around her and made sure that she realized that this wasn't her fault. We helped her celebrate everything that

The women in my career who I met through my job are important because I bounce career ideas off of them. I am able to learn from them what it means to be a leader...how to navigate some of the political waters at my institution, which is critical in any position that [I'm] ever going to be in. You need to know people who know the system, who know how it works, and who have good relationships with other people

My friend...the attorney, she's also a tremendous intellectual partner for me. At this stage, we're all talking about retirement and, “How did you do it and what did you have to do and how are you managing your finances?” Like I tell my friends, nobody prepares you for this stage of life. There's no course. You have to figure things out, and it takes time.

targeted deadline for a particular piece of my dissertation, [Stella would remind me] to continue to move at my own pace and that as long as I keep moving forward, that's all that matters."

from me [in the office]. When something bad happens, I can just go to her office and close the door and yell. I feel like you need somebody like that in grad school."

the rest later. Don't quit. Don't do anything. Just do one week at a time, one day at a time. What do you need? You tell us what you need. We will be there for you. We will supply it for you. If you need helping getting through readings, if you need notes, we'll get them to you. Whatever it is that you need, we will help you with. In that way, we've done that for each other."

she had accomplished despite the outcome."

throughout the network... They speak on my behalf. They affirm my role [and] the work that I'm doing. They reinforce the importance of my presence, which is essential. They have seen my own personal strengths. They give me the guidance and the tools [for] how to approach other people in the network.

Bodymindspirit

Theme 1: Encouraging self-care

“My community of women in this program has always talked about self-care, and how you need to take care of yourself, and take care of your body. My community of women has created an awareness that I didn’t have before...”

“In the PhD women of color [group] we had...conversations about needing to take care of all aspects of ourselves. We would realize we’re working too hard, and sometimes people would start to get sick. Eventually, it would hit us all. We’d realize, if we’d taken time to rejuvenate our spirit, or the emotional aspect of our wellbeing, [we’d be healthier]. We often could point out how we need all of these different aspects [body, mind, and spirit] to really be in alignment with one another [in order to] truly be well and to be healthy and to really push and put our best foot forward.”

“For me, it (bodymindspirit) means thinking about what I’ve done, thinking about the balance of my life, and how stress has affected me. I can talk to any of the women in my communities about it (balance and stress) and feel supported [because] they feel the same way and we [trust in each other]...”

“When I’m doing exercise there’s this thing that happens where my mind is actually with me for a second and the world disappears and it’s just me. My mind is relaxing and my spirit relaxed. I feel like not only my body’s healing, but I’m literally detoxing my spirit...”

“[After my mom died,] I had a very hard time stilling my mind and my body so I started going to yoga. I just felt like I needed a peaceful place to reflect, not just about her passing, but about what it meant in terms of my feelings about my professional goals and how maybe they’d gone a little awry. I spent a lot of time doing yoga and thinking about those things, and thinking about what I wanted. I really had to find peace with the things that I have decided and also peace with whether or not in making those decisions I

“We also spend a lot of time talking about our own lives and our spouses and our children, and our children come to the office. I think everybody knows everybody’s kids and husbands. So, we haven’t put up any of those work life boundaries, because I think we think that there’s an artificiality to that and realize how important it is to come into a community and to know that you are safe and supported all day.”

“I think the people who have been the most influential on that (bodymindspirit) have been my sorority sisters and my academic *hermanas*. One of my academic *hermanas* is divorced [so she offers me some relationship wisdom based on her experiences.] [She asks me] what I’m doing to nurture myself, [both] apart from my relationship and within my relationship. [She asks] how I’m making time for me. [She reminds me to] take time for myself.”

“I think in my community, again, I’m at a different stage than your life. We’ve grown. They’re in their 60s. Some people are starting their 70s. I think we have a spiritual dimension, and that’s another area of the community that I think is very important...[We’ve grown] in terms of being careful thinkers, being judicious with our words, knowing that we have to get along with people, knowing that there’s a larger pattern that the more we try to control, the less we control it, and that we need to step back when there’s chaos and see chaos sometimes as a friend, as a way that we’re being taught a lesson. If we don’t learn the lesson of that chaotic situation, we’re doomed to repeat the problem...It’s not

had
disappointed
my mom. That
really called
for a different
spiritual
approach for
invoking my
mom in a
different
way.”

just the growing in
terms of being
intellectually
smart. I think that
that’s an important
part of it, but I
think we also need
to be intelligent as
social, emotional
and spiritual
human beings.”

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