

Negotiating Voice, Purpose, and Family Ties: Three Latinas Making Difficult Decisions

About College

BY

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THESIS

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Dedicated to the three young women
who honored me with
their stories.
¡Adelante Mujeres!

From *The House On Mango Street*
by
Sandra Cisneros
“The Three Sisters”

What’s your name, the cat-eyed one asked.

Esperanza, I said.

Esperanza, the old blue-veined one repeated in a high thin voice. Esperanza...a good good name....

...She’s special.

Yes, she’ll go very far...

... Esperanza. The one with marble hands called me aside....When you leave you must remember always to come back, she said.

What?

When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can’t erase what you know. You can’t forget who you are.

Then I didn’t know what to say. It was as if she could read my mind, as if she knew what I had wished for, and I felt ashamed for having made such a selfish wish.

You must remember to come back. For the ones who cannot leave as easily as you. You will remember? She asked as if she was telling me. Yes, yes, I said a little confused.

Good, she said, rubbing my hands. Good. That’s all. You can go.

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“I'm working on a dream, though it can feel so far away
I'm working on a dream, and our love will make it real someday”

-Bruce Springsteen

At the start of my doctoral program, I heard someone say that writing the dissertation is an extremely lonely experience. Perhaps there is some truth to these words. Yes the experience of facing blank pages on a computer screen day after day, locked away in an office or library for hours, struggling to make sense of pages and pages of data, sifting through stacks of articles and books, can be quite lonely. But there is a powerful force that gives one the courage, the energy and the determination necessary to face the many blank pages day after day and finally arrive on the other end of this long and arduous journey. For me that force was the collective love, support and encouragement I received from the following people.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>PAGE</u>
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Turning Toward the Phenomenon.....	1
1.2 Background and Context.....	4
1.3 Purpose of the Study.....	9
2. TOWARD A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	11
2.1 The Latina/o Schooling Experience.....	11
2.2 Schooling Challenges Faced by Latinas.....	14
2.3 Choosing A College.....	17
2.4 Chicana Feminist Thought.....	20
2.5 Single-Sex and Catholic Schooling.....	26
2.6 Reflections on the Literature.....	33
3. METHODOLOGY.....	35
3.1 Qualitative Research.....	36
3.2 Methodology and Epistemology.....	37
3.2.1 Phenomenology.....	38
3.2.2 Chicana Feminist Epistemology.....	43
3.3 Chicana Feminist Research.....	45
3.3.1 Personal Background, Biases and Assumptions.....	49
3.4 The Research Design.....	51
3.4.1 Description of Site and Key Participants.....	51
3.4.2 Collection of Data.....	53
3.4.3 Data Analysis.....	54
3.5 Results and Conclusions.....	57
4. LISTENING TO THEIR VOICES.....	58
4.1 Introductions.....	58
4.2 Jasmin.....	60
4.2.1 Identity.....	60
4.2.2 Attending Holy Trinity.....	63
4.2.3 Choosing A College.....	66
4.2.4 Reflections on Jasmin.....	79
4.3 Lulu.....	81
4.3.1 Identity.....	81
4.3.2 Attending Holy Trinity.....	88
4.3.3 Choosing A College.....	95
4.3.4 Reflections on Lulu.....	99
4.4 Jordan.....	101
4.4.1 Identity.....	102
4.4.2 Choosing A College.....	108

4.4.3	Attending Holy Trinity.....	111
4.4.4	Reflections on Jordan.....	122
5.	INTERPRETING THEIR INTERPRETATIONS.....	123
5.1	Contextualizing the Experience.....	123
5.2	Latina Teachers as Possible Selves.....	128
5.2.1	Alumnae Teachers Make a Difference.....	128
5.2.2	Teachers From the Community Understand the Struggles and Challenges.....	129
5.2.3	Latina Teachers as Role Models.....	131
5.2.4	Creating a “Homeplace”.....	132
5.2.5	Latina Teachers Seen as Successful Border Crossers.....	134
5.3	Empowering Latinas in an All Female Learning Environment.....	138
5.3.1	No Boys Means Greater Opportunities.....	138
5.3.2	Gender As Curriculum – Or Not?.....	140
5.3.3	Latina Everyday Lives Represented Outside of the Classroom.....	144
5.3.4	Spirituality Experienced in the Comfort of Sisters.....	146
5.4	Community Service Provides a Purpose.....	148
5.4.1	Constructing Counter Narratives of Service.....	148
5.4.2	Social Justice Through Service.....	152
5.4.3	Finding a Purpose Through Service.....	153
5.5	Family Is Central When Deciding About College.....	154
5.5.1	Latino Parent Involvement Means More Than Just Help With Homework.....	154
5.5.2	Family <i>Consejos</i> Influence Decisions.....	158
5.5.3	Family Financial Concerns Influence College Choices.....	160
5.5.4	Family Ties and Gender Role Constructions Make Leaving Home Difficult.....	161
6.	CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	163
6.1	Conclusions.....	163
6.2	Limitations and Recommendations.....	173
	REFERENCES.....	178
	APPENDICES.....	192
	Appendix A.....	192
	Appendix B.....	194
	Appendix C.....	197
	VITA.....	198

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Turning Toward the Phenomenon

‘Pero Sister es mi hijita (But Sister, she’s my little girl)’ – this is what the parents will usually say to me when they come in to talk to me about where their daughter is planning to go to college. You know Mónica it’s a struggle to try to get them to understand that their daughter is no longer a little girl. She’s a young woman now with dreams and aspirations of her own, but they are so afraid of what will happen to her if she leaves home.

These were Sister Marta’s¹ words to me the first day I met her. As the principal of Holy Trinity (HT) High School, a small all girl Catholic high school located in a predominantly Mexican neighborhood of Los Angeles, she has counseled many of the Latino parents whose daughters are nearing graduation and getting ready to embark on their college careers. Some of the girls have long dreamt of attending a school in some far away town or city because they want to have that “real college experience” they perhaps have constructed from various media sources or from listening to the stories of others. Unfortunately, the media tends to portray college life often in one-dimensional representations that depict students (mostly white middle class and/or affluent) engaged in wild partying, rampant drug use, and/or risky sexual behavior. Being that many of the parents at HT are immigrants who have little or no knowledge of what college life is really like in the United States, if they do not access counter stories that can provide more diverse accounts of the college experience, some may have serious concerns about their daughter’s welfare and safety if she goes off to school.

Accompanying these fears, are worries about what impact their daughter’s absence will have on family life at home. Many of the girls who attend Holy Trinity have several responsibilities at home. They contribute greatly to the family’s well being. Some work part time to help out with finances, while others are entrusted with caring for younger siblings or

¹ Pseudonyms are used for all participants and places associated with the study.

elders. And even when they are not depended on for these types of contributions to the family, some of the parents are simply reluctant to let their daughter leave home alone, especially when she is just eighteen.

Some Latinas, like those who attend Holy Trinity, will often weigh family responsibilities, expectations and emotional ties before deciding if and which college will allow them to further their social, intellectual and often spiritual development without causing them to fracture family and community ties. For some, the desire to make their families proud is tangled up with feelings of guilt for the emotional and often times financial strain their post secondary choices may place on the family.

As I listened to Sister Marta express concern that parents might be limiting their daughters' choices and opportunities, I was reminded of my own experiences as a young Chicana growing up also in Los Angeles and trying to decide what was the best path for me after high school. I also had the privilege of attending a small all girl Catholic high school. I, like the girls of Holy Trinity, was able to interact more closely with peers who shared similar aspirations and goals and it allowed for greater access to the kind of knowledge and information needed in order to achieve those goals. This privilege, however, came with a price. While it put many of my classmates and me on academic trajectories previously unknown to the members of our families, many of us underwent psychological scarring. As the doors to opportunities opened up for us, we were forced to make difficult choices that often conflicted with the varying demands and responsibilities of family and home life.

Although the majority of the girls who attended my high school were Latinas, our teachers, the majority of whom were white middle-class females or Irish nuns, never acknowledged these cultural influences in our college decision making process. As I look back

on it now, I realize that at my high school, teachers, administrators and counselors did not fully understand just how intertwined constructions of ourselves as women were with our Latino culture and our socio-economic status. They set out to educate young women, without recognizing that they were educating young women of color, many from working class families, and many living in homes where English was not the dominant language. These experiences and memories are what turned me toward the phenomenon I explore through this study.

Located in a large Los Angeles Mexican neighborhood, Holy Trinity has been educating young women in the community for over a hundred years. Currently there are just over three hundred girls enrolled, most of whom are from Latino families. Each year, HT graduates between seventy and eighty girls. The class of 2010 consisted of seventy graduates, of which thirty-seven were going on to four-year colleges and universities. Most of the girls chose schools in California. Only one opted to attend an out of state school located on the east coast. Sister Marta informed me that several more girls were accepted to four-year schools, however they decided to attend a community college for two years and then transfer because this was the more economically viable option for them and their families.

Holy Trinity has a small faculty and staff, the majority of whom are women that run the school. People who work at the school wear many hats and often teachers will serve as administrators and vice-versa. Several of the teachers are graduates of the school and/or live in the surrounding communities. Sister Marta, a Latina herself and fully bilingual, recognizes this as an asset for the school. She explained to me how having Latina teachers, *mujeres* who grew up in and understood the neighborhoods the girls come from, allowed for greater communication and trust between both groups.

At a time when demographic data reveal that Latinas/os² have the lowest high school and college completion rate of any major ethnic group (Gándara & Contreras, 2009) and much of the literature on Latina/o education up to now has focused on issues of failure, it is important to uncover those factors that influence positive schooling outcomes and examine the coping strategies and survival mechanisms employed by those Latinas that do succeed. Moreover, it is important to understand the ways in which schools that do produce academically successful Latinas, acknowledge the unique cultural aspects of their lives as daughters, granddaughters, sisters, nieces, friends and students. More must be done to create educational environments that will not only ensure higher success rates among Latinas, but also foster the kind of identity constructions that will allow them to negotiate conflicting notions of gender and gender role expectations so as to empower them with valuable skills for making tough decisions about their futures.

1.2 **Background and Context**

According to the American Association of University Women's study on Latinas, half of the Latinas/os in the United States between the ages of 16 to 24 have a high school diploma (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Latinas/(os) are also less likely of to go on to college and earn a degree. Many of them, especially those from low-income communities, have parents with low education levels and little or no knowledge of what it takes to get to college (Kao & Tienda, 1998). Latinas(os) are also more likely to attend schools that are located in poor urban communities. These schools tend to be overcrowded, structurally deteriorating, plagued by violence, and staffed by inadequately prepared teachers. Often these teachers will have negative

² Much of the literature consulted addresses Latinas(os) as a group without specific reference to the various subgroups contained within the term. As such I use the term Latina/o throughout except in cases when a specific subgroup (i.e. youth of Mexican descent) is the focus of the discussion. When discussing youth of Mexican descent the terms Mexican American or Chicana/o may be used interchangeably.

stereotypical images of Latina(o) students and maintain beliefs that these students are ultimately uneducable. The overall message students receive is that their teachers do not care about them (Valenzuela, 1999).

Latinas, specifically, more than any other group are at a greater risk for dropping out of high school and becoming pregnant, and once they leave school, they are the least likely to return (The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008; Dehlendorf, Marchi, Vittinghoff & Braveman, 2009). Latinas also report feeling unsafe on their campuses and are more frequently the victims of racial insults and sexual harassment (Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Orenstein, 1994). They are less likely to be called on in class by teachers and while some report receiving encouragement from individual teachers, little information is given to them about college. Yet, despite these barriers, Latinas tend to have higher educational and career aspirations than their Latino male counterparts or any other female minority group (Ginorio & Huston, 2001).

During the critical developmental years of adolescence, Latinas will look for “possible selves” (Gándara, 1995; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; López, 2003) among the various role models in their immediate environment. For working class Latina(o) youth, these role models can be somewhat limited. This can help explain why at an early age, second generation Latinas begin to understand the oppressive nature of their lived experiences that are constructed around race and gender (López, 2003). The bifurcated worlds in which these girls exist are constantly at odds. They confront on a daily basis conflicting notions of gender and gender role expectations (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006) all the while trying to negotiate traditional values and cultural practices with those of the U.S. mainstream. Academic demands conflict with family demands, the culture of the home is not represented nor is it validated in school, and community values often

contradict the emphasis on individualism and competition prevalent in U.S. school culture.

These conflicts are ever more present when young Latinas are faced with choices about their post secondary pursuits. Without careful guidance that accounts for and respects the values and beliefs of the families and communities to which these girls belong, psychic scarring can occur. Much of the research that focuses on the schooling successes of Latinas emphasizes the importance of schools creating a context in which conflicting concepts can be reconciled. Eugene García (2001) explains, “Although it is possible for students to navigate borders with apparent success, these transitions can incur personal and psychic costs invisible to teachers and others. Moreover, borders can become impenetrable barriers when the psychosocial consequences of adaptation become too great” (p. 106).

A good deal of the blame for the academic failure of Latina(o) students has also fallen on the family. Contrary to a commonly circulated myth, Latino parents value education and encourage their children to pursue it as a way of overcoming socio-economic oppressive conditions (Pizarro, 2005). Ayala (2006) explains how mothers especially will encourage their daughters to continue their education so as to avoid later dependence on males. Nonetheless, many young Latinas(os), especially those from low-income, urban communities, have parents with low education levels and little or no knowledge of what it takes to get to college. Many of these parents, therefore, cannot help their children successfully navigate a system they are unfamiliar with, nor can they fully understand the college experience.

Schools can foster positive interactions between teachers and students, students and peers, and between the school and the community, so as to ensure Latina(o) students various entry points to the kind of relevant and useful information that will not only advance them academically, but also help them bridge the culture, values and mores of the home and

community, with those of the school. Moreover, schools must be more proactive in acquainting parents and families with the culture of the school and university. As Pizarro (2005) suggests, Latina(o) students need mentoring that goes beyond academic pursuits. Up to now, most schools have not been successful in achieving this.

Bias in schools against girls, regardless of ethnicity, has been well documented over the years (American Association of University Women, 1991 & 1998; Orenstein, 1994; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Around the ages of 12 and 15 many girls suffer a “developmental loss” of voice due in large part to their experiences in school. Girls are called on less than boys in class, as male aggressiveness is rewarded with more attention from teachers, and sexual harassment against girls is likely to go unchecked by school personnel. By this age, most girls recognize their status in society as second to their male peers. They are keenly aware of the messages put forth by mainstream media and other sources that much of their worth is dependent on their physical appearance (Harris, 1993). Latinas are at a greater risk for experiencing this loss of self-esteem and this loss can translate into school failure (Ginorio & Huston, 2001, Orenstein, 1994).

With the loosening of Title IX regulations, more and more school districts around the country are examining the research on single sex learning environments as they consider the legal options and potential educational benefits of separating boys and girls in school. The separating of the sexes for the purpose of learning has been practiced for centuries and in some societies, it predates coeducation (Diaz, 2006). As such, scholars have been curious as to the effects of single-sex education on academic achievement. While some have looked at single sex schools and colleges (Lee, 2002), others have examined specifically single sex learning environments (i.e. classrooms) within larger coeducational facilities (Datnow & Conchas, 2001).

Much of the research done on female single sex schooling has focused on Catholic or private schools. Due to the “elite” status of many private single sex schools and the high tuitions, these are not commonly found in the inner city. For working class minority families living in large cities seeking an alternative to public schools, or specifically desiring a single sex learning environment for their children, Catholic schools have historically been their only option (Louie & Holdaway, 2009).

Scholars have documented the ways in which Catholic schools (both single-sex and coeducational) have historically benefited low-income minorities, specifically African American and Latinas/os (Bryk, Lee and Holland, 1993; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Greeley, 1982; Riordan, 2002). All traditional measures of academic achievement, grades, test scores, time spent on homework, and college-going aspirations, have been higher for low-income minorities in Catholic schools (Bryk, Lee and Holland, 1993; Greeley, 1982). Latinas who attend single-sex Catholic high schools (SSCHS) have a higher probability of graduating and going on to college than their peers in public schools (Benaveniste, Carnoy & Rothstein, 2003). All agree (Bryk, Lee and Holland, 1993; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Greeley, 1982; Riordan, 2002) that the strong emphasis SSCHSs place on academics is key in the overall achievement of low-income minorities. Because most SSCHSs tend to be college-preparatory academies, almost all who attend are enrolled in rigorous and challenging academic courses (Mael, 1998; Marsh, 1991) thus diminishing the negative effects of “tracking” that plague minority students in most urban public high schools (Oakes, 1985). The fact that all students are enrolled in similar courses, also allows for the development of an “academic identity” among all. Students establish peer networks that provide access to important resources and funds of knowledge that in turn support and help them in “decoding” (Gándara, O’Hare, & Gutiérrez, 2004) the schooling system.

While the academic benefits for low-income minorities in SSCHSs have been thoroughly researched and documented, Pizarro (2005) and García (2001) argue, that Latina(o) students require more than just access to important and influential resources within the school in order to succeed. Clearly, these scholars understand that success for Latina(o) students, especially those from low-income communities, is defined in broader terms than simply academic achievement, and access to higher education. It implies an ability to move across and within various borders, (i.e. gender, culture, class, language) while maintaining a firm sense of self. If schools are to be successful in educating and preparing urban Latina(o) youth for the future, they must appreciate the importance of this task and have a vision for assisting students in achieving it.

1.3 **Purpose of the Study**

Given the difficulties many young Latinas face as they prepare for a future after high school, I am curious as to how a mostly all female learning environment impacts their choices and decisions. As previously noted, low-income minorities have enjoyed significant academic successes in Catholic schools. Catholic high schools boast having a rigorous college prep curriculum, helping to make students more competitive during the college admission process, and they also tend to be smaller, allowing for more attention from teachers. Given the opportunities a smaller school provides, I want to know how students and teachers alike take advantage of these, and what, if any, efforts are made to critically examine conventional notions of gender and traditional gender role expectations. What, if anything, is lost for the girls in this process? And what does the school do to help them cope with the loss? I am also interested to see if and how gender, race and class are dealt with in the curriculum, in the philosophy of the

school and in the kinds of interactions that take place among students, faculty and administrators, families, and the surrounding community.

Primarily through a series of interviews with three Latinas, graduates of the Class of 2010 of Holy Trinity Catholic High School, I was able to gain a greater understanding of how these girls have constructed gender identities and the resources they rely on to help them navigate and negotiate potentially conflicting notions of gender as they made key decisions about their post secondary academic careers. The semi-structured open ended interview format I utilized provided the flexibility to converse and share stories of struggle, confusion, empowerment, and hope as we explored together the “paths” (both in and out of school) that have led them to their current conceptualizations of themselves as Latinas - connected and committed to both family and community, but nonetheless wanting to make their individual voices heard. Finally, we examined the role Holy Trinity has played in helping them develop their sense of self in order to make meaningful decisions about college.

2. TOWARD A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: A BRIEF REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“To this day I’m not sure where I found the strength to leave the source, the mother, disengage from my family, *mi tierra, mi gente*...I had to leave home so I could find myself, find my own intrinsic nature buried under the personality that had been imposed on me.”

Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987, p.16

2.1 The Latina/o Schooling Experience

Much has been written in regard to the educational experiences of Latina/o students. Researchers have looked at the issue of schooling in the lives of this group of students, in an attempt to understand why, despite certain common underlying socio-cultural characteristics, only a few effectively navigate the complex and problematic spaces of schooling, while the greater majority does not. Much of the literature on Latino schooling has focused more on issues of failure brought about by the systemic and structural problems inherent in public schools (Valencia, 2002a). Current demographic data show Latina/os (the majority of whom are of Mexican-descent) as the largest and fastest growing ethnic minority group in the country. Latina/o children now make up 18.5% of U.S. public school enrollment overall, with more than a quarter of this population attending schools in the nation’s inner cities (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In California, Latina(o) student enrollment is 50% (California Department of Education, 2010) and in Los Angeles, Latinos comprise more than 70% of the total enrollment of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) (Burciage, Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2010). Despite their increase in number, Mexican youth continue to have the lowest high school and college completion rate of any other major ethnic group (Burciage, Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2010; Gándara, 1995; Gibson, Gándara, & Koyama, 2005; Pizarro, 2005; Valencia, 2002a., 2002b.). Valencia (2002a.), citing a study conducted by Orfield and colleagues, points out that

Latinas/os have now replaced Blacks as the most segregated population in schools. Latina/os are also more likely to attend schools that are located in poor urban communities.

In the last decade, researchers (Burciage, Perez Huber & Solorzano, 2010; Flores-González, 2002; Pearl, 2002; Pizarro, 2005; Valencia, 2002b.; Ybarra & López, 2004) have turned their attention to systemic problems that disengage Latino students from the learning process. Low expectations of Latina/o students relegate them to the margins of the schooling experience. Ability grouping (i.e. tracking; see also Oakes, 1985), academic remediation, and a lack of access to programs and courses that prepare students for college, have all been identified as significant contributors to the continuous underachievement of Chicanas/os/Latinas/os, especially in California, along the K-College educational pipeline (Oakes, Mendoza & Silver, 2004; Solorzano & Solorzano, 1995). Nationwide, around 70% of Latinas/os are in classes that will not prepare them for college (Ginorio & Huston, 2001).

In the LAUSD, the largest public school district in California and the second largest in the nation, Latina/o students make up 70% of the total enrollment, yet they are only 49% of the district wide AP enrollment. Conversely, White students constitute a minority within the district at only 12% of its total enrollment, yet they make up 22% of the district's total AP enrollment (Solorzano & Ornelas, 2004). According to Solorzano and Ornelas (2004), Latina/o students in California (along with their African American peers, also underrepresented in AP courses) attend "schools within schools". By limiting or denying access to rigorous academic curriculum through tracking practices and by not working to create environments that reflect the cultural values and experiences of the students, in order to actively engage and orient them in the schooling process, U.S. public schools systematically manufacture failure (Stanton-Salazar, 2001) among Latina/o students and limit their options for post-secondary education.

Antonia Darder (1991) explains, that most often it is students of color, especially those who are bicultural and bilingual, who are blamed for the present problems of public schooling. When it comes to these students, schools approach their education from a deficit model. Schools entrusted with educating minority students follow what Freire (1970) calls a banking model of “depositing” a knowledge that is perceived to be universal and “value free” into the “empty” “deficient” minds of these children with the “wrong culture”. Moreover, the schooling process, in an attempt to assimilate bilingual and bicultural students, strips them of their cultural and historical identities (Valenzuela, 1999); identities that are grounded in the lived experiences of their everyday lives (Delgado-Bernal, 2006; Pizarro, 2005). Giroux (as cited in Darder, 1991) argues that schools must recognize that knowledge and culture are dynamic, historical and dialectical and therefore contextual in nature.

Various theories have been posited to try to explain the generational “underachievement” of Latinas/os (Trueba, 1988). There are those who claim that the cultural and linguistic differences of Latina/o students, impede them from functioning successfully within a school culture that mirrors the language, values and behaviors of the mainstream culture. This cultural deficit model tends to place much of the responsibility for school failure on the individual, her family, and the communities to which these students belong, and it fails to recognize the structural and systemic problems inherent in educational institutions. Some speculate that Latina/o students, specifically Mexican Americans or Chicanas/os actively resist behaviors that they perceive as mainstream (Ogbu & Matute-Bianchi, 1986). According to these theorists, the active pursuit of academic endeavors is viewed as “selling out” or “acting white” despite whatever the possible gains may be. Still, there are others (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Blea, 1992; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Denner & Guzmán, 2006; Gándara, 1995; García, 2001; Ginorio &

Huston, 2001; Pizarro, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1998; Trueba, 1988; Valencia, 2002; Valenzuela, 1999) who argue that the issue is much more complex and in order to fully understand the schooling experiences of Latina/o students in the U.S., careful consideration must be given to a multitude of issues. Namely, attention must be also given to those Latina/o students who, despite adversity, do manage to successfully navigate academic minefields. During the last decade, literature examining the various factors that contribute to schooling successes for this group of students has increased (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Gibson, Gándara & Koyama, 2004; Pearl, 2002; Pizarro, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2004; Wortham, 2002). Notably, research in this area continues to stress the importance of looking at the schooling successes and failures of these students through a lens that recognizes how race, ethnicity, gender, language, and socio-economic status intersect in the formation of the individual's identity (Flores-González, 2002; López, 2003) and how this in turn affects her/his educational outcomes.

2.2 **Schooling Challenges Faced by Latinas**

The educational challenges faced by Latinas/os have been extensively examined and documented over the past few decades, however it is not until recently that scholars have begun turning their attention to the significant role gender plays in the educational outcomes of this group, specifically with regard to issues of college access and college choice (Ceja, 2006; Sy, 2006; Talvera-Bustillos, 2007; Zarate & Gallimore, 2005). While both Latinas and their male counterparts face numerous obstacles along the K-16 pipeline, Latinas face unique challenges possibly not present in the lives of other minority groups, male or female. Latinas confront on a daily basis conflicting notions of gender roles and gender role expectations, all the while trying

to negotiate traditional values and cultural practices with those of the U.S. mainstream (e.g. individualism and competition) taught to them in school (Denner & Guzmán, 2006; Wortham, 2002). These conflicts become more present as these girls enter middle school. For many Latinas the transition to middle and secondary school can be daunting as they are expected to assume greater responsibility for the direction their education will take. Choosing academically rigorous courses, seeking out guidance and advice from key school personnel, and for many, assuming greater responsibilities within their families, all can derail many Latinas from an academic trajectory that leads to enrollment in a four year college.

While it is widely recognized that influential adults are often key players in helping minority students achieve academically, it has also been documented that these kinds of significant relationships are not easily established, especially in the larger, over crowded inner city schools which many minority students attend (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). Structural and organizational constraints inherent in schools can lead to feelings of alienation or distrust of key personnel, therefore inhibiting relationships that can offer minority students valuable information.

Understanding help seeking, network-building, and persistence in school among low-status youth requires that we not shy away from the complexities of how resources flow within educational institutions—particularly, how they systematically flow away from those individuals most in need of them. Again, the visible flow of resources from agents to students is largely governed by the invisible flow of subterranean institutional currents. (Stanton-Salazar, 2001, p.208)

Given this understanding of help seeking behaviors among minority youth, it is fair to assume that when the onus is placed on the student to seek out the necessary help and

information for making sound decisions about their academic pursuits and post-secondary education, few are ever successful. Latinas, in particular, are the least likely to seek out help (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Therefore, it falls upon the schools to provide the organizational and structural support for positive transformative relationships to flourish between students, faculty and staff, families and the surrounding community. Smaller schools with lesser enrollment can most likely accomplish this more easily.

Zarate and Gallimore (2005), using data from the Latino Home School Project, a 15-year longitudinal study, found that there were significant differences in the relationships with key school personnel between those girls who attended college and those who did not. Relationships with college counselors benefited those girls who enrolled in college, citing explanations and advice about course choices and requirements as significant factors in their post secondary choices. Those girls who did not enroll in college reported receiving little if any information or advice about college. Similarly, Barajas and Pierce (2001) found teachers to play a significant role as “cultural translators”, helping Latinas navigate the unfamiliar territory of the academic pipeline.

Along with the challenges of seeking out and receiving valuable information regarding post-secondary educational options, Latinas struggle with the impact their choices about college will have on their families. Among other major ethnic groups, Latinas are less likely to enroll in 4-year colleges right out of high school, and of those that do, few actually attain a degree (Ceja, 2006; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; Pérez Huber, Huidor, Malagón, Sánchez, & Solorzano, 2006). Sy (2006) surveyed 117 Latinas in their first year of college in an effort to understand the influence of family and work responsibilities on the transition to college. Though she and others (Gándara, 1995; Ceja, 2006; Vásquez, 2002) contend that the family connectedness experienced

by most Latinas/os can be a protective factor for females during their adolescent years and while they are navigating the transition to college, this connectedness can often provide additional stress for the daughters of Latino families due to *marianismo*, which “emphasizes the self sacrificing role of females and highlights the females’ role as family caretaker” (Sy, 2006, p.369). Sy found that the depth of the relationship between mothers and daughters in Latino families was a significant variable in determining the degree to which young Latinas felt obligated to comply with family demands. If the relationship between both was strong and requests came primarily from the mothers, then the daughters were more compelled to accommodate them.

Though much of Sy’s study focused on Latinas assisting their families in the role of “language brokers” (as translators for parents with limited English proficiency), it provides valuable insight into the pressures many Latinas deal with during their college years. For those who live at home or close to home while attending college, these pressures can be even greater. Family needs and demands can weigh heavily on the sense of responsibility many of these young women feel. For the few Latinas who manage to successfully navigate the K-12 education pipeline and get accepted to a four year college, balancing family and school demands can become overwhelming. Without adequate support, many are at risk for dropping out.

2.3 **Choosing a College**

Recently, some scholars (Ceja, 2006; Talavera-Bustillo, 2007) have turned their attention to the processes involved in choosing a college among young Latinas. Ceja (2006) examined the role of protective agents (i.e. parents and siblings) during the college choice process of 20 Chicana seniors attending a large urban high school in California. He found that parents were

able to play a limited role in providing their daughters with useful information for selecting a college to attend. For some, siblings were found to be more active in providing support and guidance in the college choice process.

Referencing the college choice model introduced by Hossler & Gallagher (1987), which proposes three stages to the process: 1) predisposition, 2) search and 3) choice, Ceja (2006) focuses on the third stage and the role parental educational levels, expectation and encouragement play in helping Latinas pick a college. Key during the predisposition stage is parental encouragement, which has been shown to have a positive relationship with a child's decision to go to college. However, Ceja argues that for minorities, parental encouragement may diminish in influence during the latter phases. Due to unfamiliarity with the college selection and admission process, most parents were unable to assist their daughters. Some had siblings either in college or who had attended and could share knowledge and information. Nonetheless, the role of the parent in this process was minimal.

Talavera-Bustillo (2007) has also considered the college choice process experienced by a group of young Chicanas from southern California. She looked at 30 women, half of which were enrolled in a four-year college or university and the other half in a community college. All shared four key characteristics: 1) they were Chicana; 2) they were 1st generation college enrollees; 3) they were of low socioeconomic status; and 4) they had graduated from a California high school (in Los Angeles county) in 1997. Among the young women who were enrolled in a community college, Talavera-Bustillo found that most had arrived at the predisposition phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) late in their high school careers. For many there was limited time to prepare for college and therefore they entered the choice phase (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987) after they graduated from high school. Talavera-Bustillo also found that within this group of

women, many reported waiting for information about college to be offered to them by high school staff, rather than actively seeking it out themselves.

The Chicanas in Talavera-Bustillo (2007) enrolled in four-year colleges or universities, were found to have entered the predisposition phase by their sophomore year and were more actively able to acquire valuable information throughout their high school careers. They were in the search phase of the college choice process by their senior year and reported that their college going aspirations were supported by high school faculty and staff, their peers, and parents, especially their mothers. Peer networks were especially noted as playing a significant role in providing information, assistance, and checking up on each other during the process. Both Ceja (2006) and Talavera-Bustillo (2007) highlight the importance of social capital in the college choice process of young Chicanas. According to Stanton-Salazar (2004), social capital is “...understood roughly as those ‘connections’ to individuals and to networks that can provide access to resources and forms of support that facilitate the accomplishment of goals...[it] explain[s] how educational achievement and attainment are closely associated with access to supportive relationships and networks.” (pp. 18-19). For the young women in these studies, access to valuable information regarding college was made available to them through interactions with key institutional (teachers and staff) as well as protective (family and community) agents (Stanton-Salazar, 1997). These networks were also able to encourage and reinforce the decisions the women made about college.

While the literature focuses specifically on Chicanas, little consideration is actually given to gender identity, nor to how gender intersects with race and class, to influence the college choice process for these young women. There is no mention in these studies of where young Latinas choose to attend college. Do they select a college or university close to home, or do they

venture away from home for their post-secondary schooling? How gender is constructed and negotiated in the home and/or at school and how these constructions inform a young Latina's concept of self, are significant factors in the college choice process. Given the findings of previous studies (Ceja, 2006; Delgado Bernal, 2006; Gándara, 1995; Rodriguez, 1994; Sy, 2006; Vásquez, 2002) Chicanas/Latinas tend to experience closer ties with family and are expected more than their male counterparts, to help take care of the family. These expectations are closely tied to notions of gender and long held beliefs about gender roles prevalent in Latino culture. More research is needed to understand how these constructions serve to shape the identities these young women assume, how identity in turn influences the college choice process for Chicana/Latinas, and how these choices are then negotiated with parents and family who rely on their daughters for various forms of assistance and support (Sy, 2006).

2.4 **Chicana Feminist Thought**

Much of the research on Latinas who have achieved success in schools (Delgado-Bernal, 2006; Gándara, 1995; Wortham, 2002) illustrates how this has happened as a result of these women successfully balancing what Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) calls a "border identity". The "borderlands" Anzaldúa writes of, are the spaces that many Chicanas/Latinas or *mestizas* (term meaning a woman of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry) occupy. As women of color in educational institutions, Chicanas/Latinas are forced at almost every moment of the day to reconcile values and ideas taught in school, with opposing or contradictory cultural lessons experienced outside of the school walls. This results in what Anzaldúa (1987) refers to as a *choque* (a crash or shock). "Because I, a *mestiza*, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time, *alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro, me*

zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio. Estoy norteadada por todas las voces que me hablan simultáneamente” (“...soul between two worlds, three, four, my head whirls with contradictions. I am disoriented by all of the voices speaking at me simultaneously”) (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 377). Anzaldúa (1990) states that “[i]nternal strife results in insecurity and indecisiveness. The *mestiza*’s dual or multiple personality is plagued by psychic restlessness” (p. 377). This restlessness becomes doubly painful as the *mestiza* attempts to articulate it to others who do not share this experience and she must decide which language she can do it in. For Anzaldúa, to embrace the *mestiza* within is to embrace the struggle that is inherent in the word. It is to acknowledge the conflicts that are outcomes of a bilingual, bicultural, multilingual, multicultural existence. Moreover, if the Latina or Chicana cannot acknowledge these conflicts in her life, she cannot arrive at *concientización*, and her life becomes a series of reactions. However, if she accepts her *mestizaje* and embraces it, the Chicana/Latina arrives at a consciousness that becomes a way of life, motivated by action. Anzaldúa cautions however, that this can be a painful process, but it is precisely from this pain that women can extract and conceptualize a pedagogy whose aim is to eradicate old systems that reproduce and foster oppression. To come out on the other end of the subject-object duality is a movement towards what Anzaldúa describes is a more humanistic explanation of and approach to the world we live in.

Jeanette Rodríguez (1994), in her study of how *mestizas* in the U.S. find empowerment through devotion to *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, explains that “[f]or Chicanas, internal colonization coupled with racism produces an even deeper sense of marginality in Anglo-dominated society. In addition to sharing the consequences of being a colonized people as are the men in their culture, they also suffer from the oppression of being women, with the added burden of internal

oppression by a cultural heritage that tends to be dominated by males and that insists on rigid role expectations.” (Rodríguez, 1994, p. 70) Rodríguez goes on to explain that Mexican Americans define themselves in relation to others. Chicanas/Latinas especially cannot separate themselves from their realities as someone’s sister, daughter, mother or even friend.

“Independence at the cost of giving up the cultural value of interdependence and relationship to others is simply not a Mexican American goal. The same is true for self-reliance and self-worth; personality is defined by the community of which the individual is a part. Identity is defined in relationship to others; not to belong to a group is not to exist.” (p.77; See also Valdés, 1996)

Because the Chicana/Latina lives essentially two lives, she takes her cues from two conflicting sets of values and world-views. At school and outside of the home or community she must learn to live the “Anglo-way” in order to survive. This is especially true of those Chicanas/Latinas who pursue post-secondary education. The challenge to maintain one’s cultural expressions and values becomes greater as the Chicana/Latina becomes immersed in the detached, objective, and individualistic experience of schooling. Blea (1992) sums up the experiences of many first generation college going Latinas of her generation recalling that “[m]any engaged in a struggle between what was taught at home and what was taught in school, for their mothers were of a different generation, a different country, a different historical period.” (p. 53)

Delgado Bernal (2006) in her analysis of Chicana college students draws from Anzaldua’s concept of a *mestiza* consciousness and the work of other Chicana feminists in order to culturally locate the unique resources that Chicanas utilize to succeed in college. These young women draw on what Delgado Bernal calls “pedagogies of the home”. These are the cultural assets Chicanas employ in order to overcome the obstacles and barriers that have historically impeded previous generations of Chicancas from succeeding academically. Delgado Bernal

places these assets into four categories that she explains are central to Anzaldúa's definition of *mestiza*/borderland consciousness: biculturalism, bilingualism, commitment to community and family, and spirituality. According to Delgado Bernal this *mestiza consciousness* is a "consciousness that straddles cultures, races, languages, nations, sexualities, and spiritualities – that is, living with ambivalence while balancing opposing powers" (p. 117). These "pedagogies of the home" develop out of the practices and ways of knowing that are common in the communities to which these girls belong. Delgado Bernal points out that these unique bicultural/bilingual epistemologies have thus far been ignored in much of the literature written about Chicana schooling experiences.

From the interviews conducted with 32 Chicana college students, Delgado Bernal (2006) was able to tap into the funds of knowledge that the students brought with them to their college experience. Through the telling of life histories, Delgado Bernal concluded that the epistemological lenses of Chicanas are significantly shaped by the practices and strategies for living observed in the homes and communities where these women come from. She contends that Chicanas learn at home how to move in and out of various cultural, linguistic, and spiritual spaces, suggesting that educators rethink the biculturalism and bilingualism of Chicana/o students in order to recognize these characteristics as assets rather than deficits. Nonetheless, Delgado Bernal's research focuses on the experiences of young women in the early stages of their college careers and she operationalizes Anzaldúa's notion of *mestiza* consciousness in order to understand and give value to the communal resources young Chicanas draw from in order to confront oppression in educational institutions. Further research is needed that can expand Delgado Bernal's concept of pedagogies of the home to include ways in which young Latinas utilize these resources to define self and negotiate gender role expectations that possibly limit

their education and career choices after high school.

Delgado Bernal (2006) also points out that for the young Chicanas she interviewed, the commitment to academic endeavors were not simply motivated by individual interests. These young women recognized that they also served as role models for their communities and families. The notion of “giving back” is a reoccurring theme among Chicana/Latinas who attain academic and professional success (see also Gándara, 1995) and it reflects the strong influences of their communal and familial experiences. For many young Latinas their educational journey is a collaborative one. As such, the commitment of young Chicanas/Latinas to “give back” propels them toward greater successes. Barajas and Pierce (2001) in researching young Latina college students in the mid-west who were participating in a mentoring program for local high schools, found that many of the young women they interviewed, referred to having experienced discrimination, as a motivator for wanting to get involved with the mentoring program. They expressed a desire to show others like them, that success was possible.

Wortham’s (2002) investigation of high school age Latinas/os in a small rural New Haven town illustrates how young Latinas who are able to balance their home identity with a “school girl” identity to enjoy greater academic opportunities and successes. The young women discussed in Wortham were able to adopt the academic culture modeled by their Anglo female peers in order to navigate the schooling process with more ease. At the same time, these girls maintained close ties to their families and complied with the gender role expectations of their communities. Moreover, Wortham points out that these young women were able to recognize the correlation between school success and better employment opportunities. They saw that by finishing high school they had “real” prospects for finding work in the “professional” sector of the town and they were encouraged by their mothers to do well in school as a means towards

independence. Similarly, Gándara's (1995) interviews with Latinas holding advanced degrees (JD, MD, PhD), make mention of the role mothers play in influencing the academic pursuits of their daughters, especially working mothers. The women in these examples were able to recognize the correlation between the "possible selves" they identified with and the independence that was attainable by way of furthering their education.

What is evident in the literature is that for many of the young women discussed, success was attained not in spite of their strong identification with their culture, but rather because of it. Denner and Guzmán (2006) in the introduction to their edited volume, *Latina girls: Voices of adolescent strength in the United States*, echo this notion, stating:

Many [Latinas] come from households and communities where limited resources, fear of crime, and physically demanding work create daily stress and health problems. However, the girls in these chapters are more prepared than many to confront life's challenges because they are actively engaged in transforming systems of oppression and creating their own language of well being (p. 5).

According to Maxine Greene (1978) we interpret our world based on the knowledge we acquire from our culture. In male dominated society, "...the dominant modes of ordering and categorizing experiences of private as well as public life have been functions of largely male perspectives..." (Greene, 1978, p. 214). Greene recognizes that women have agency in the collective. That is to say that through social interaction, and active engagement in critical discourse that challenges women to confront their own constructions of reality, which themselves stem from distorted male interpretations of the world, women can regain touch with their lived worlds and begin to change their circumstances. Schools need to provide young Latinas with opportunities to tap into valuable pedagogies of the home that can be used to

critically examine the historical, political, socio-cultural storied constructions of gender, race, class, and sexuality that shape their everyday experiences and inform their current understandings and conceptions of self, so as to better equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary for confronting and transforming oppressive conditions found in various institutions.

2.5 **Single-Sex and Catholic Schooling**

Historically, for many Latino families, inner city Catholic schools have provided another way for their children to “have a chance” at succeeding academically and going on to college. They perceive these schools to be safer, smaller (therefore allowing for more teacher student interactions), and able to offer more equitable access to a rigorous college prep curriculum (Louie & Holdaway, 2009). Many are also attracted to the single-sex aspect of most of these schools, perceiving this to reduce the possible distractions of a co-educational environment (Riordan, 1985). While much has been written regarding the benefits of Catholic schooling for minority children from the inner city (AAUW, 1998; Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Greely, 1982; Irvine & Foster, 1996; Riordan, 1994), as well as the advantages of single sex learning environments, especially for minority girls (Haag, 2002; Lee, 2002; Streitmatter, 1999), there is a scarcity of research that critically examines the ways in which gender, race/ethnicity and class are constructed within the structural, organizational and curricular (both sanctioned and hidden) models of inner city single-sex Catholic high schools (SSCHS).

Catholic education has a long history of serving immigrant communities in the large urban centers of the United States. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and early part of the twentieth century, as large numbers of immigrants arrived in the U.S. from South, Central and Eastern Europe and established large immigrant communities in U.S. cities, these groups

also found themselves facing discrimination along ethnic, racial, linguistic and religious lines.

Many, who were Catholic, established parish schools in an attempt to resist the perceived assimilationist agenda of local public schools (Louie & Holdaway, 2009). During the latter part of the twentieth century however, as a new wave of immigrants arrived in U.S. urban centers from Asia and Latin America, the faces of the children attending Catholic schools began to also change (Riordan, 2000). Catholic school enrollment was becoming much more culturally diverse. In the last thirty years, several scholars (Benson, Yeager, Wood, Guerra & Manno, 1986; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Greeley, 1982; Irvine & Foster, 1996; Lee, 2002; Martin, 1996; O'Keefe & Murphy, 2000) have turned their attention to the growing number of ethnic minority (specifically African American and Latino) students enrolling in Catholic schools, especially those located in the nation's inner-cities. Within much of this research, conclusions have been drawn regarding the positive schooling outcomes experienced by minorities attending Catholic schools.

Bryk and colleagues (1993) provide a comprehensive study of Catholic schools in the U.S., describing at length the learning environments in these institutions that address some of the special needs of young Chicana/Latinas as discussed above. They concluded that overall, single-sex Catholic secondary schools demonstrated significantly more positive educational outcomes than even coeducational Catholic high schools, especially for girls. These findings support earlier research by Lee and Bryk (1986) which concluded that in terms of academic achievement, educational aspirations, sex-role stereotyping, and academic attitudes and behaviors, students in single-sex schools, especially girls, enjoyed greater success. Their findings were supported by evidence that girls who attended single-sex schools were more likely to associate with academically oriented peers and express interest in a variety content areas including math. Haag

(2002) found that girls who attend single-sex schools are more inclined to select advanced math and science classes, perceiving these to be less masculine.

Still, there are those who remain skeptical of the claims made by scholars whose studies have found single-sex educational settings to be more favorable learning environments for particular groups. LePore and Warren (1996) in studying the achievement test scores and social psychological measures of students in single-sex Catholic high schools found no significant difference between the performance on these assessments of girls attending SSCHS from those attending coeducational settings. LePore and Warren consider the demographic shifts that have taken place in SSCHS enrollment since the time of the landmark studies of Bryk and colleagues (1993), Coleman and colleagues (1982) and Greely (1982), to be a plausible reason for the differences in their findings from these other studies. While the overall enrollment in SSCHS dropped during the late 80's and early 90's, the enrollment of non-white students increased during this period. LePore and Warren (1996) propose further researcher is needed to explore how these changes in SSCHS enrollment have influenced efficacy and achievement.

Single-sex Catholic high schools are usually found in large metropolitan centers (Greene & O'Keefe, 2004). Minority students who attend these schools tend to come from the same poor/working class urban neighborhoods as their peers who attend local public high schools. The major difference between these two groups is the financial sacrifice undertaken by the parents of those who attend Catholic schools. According to Riordan (2002) for parents to make such sacrifices is indicative of the family's "pro-academic" mind-set, and a key factor leading to the success of minorities in these schools. However, Riordan's supposition does not consider that for many parents in low-income Chicano/Latino neighborhoods, a primary concern is the safety of their children in school and this has been posited as a stronger determining factor in the

selection of Catholic schools for many of these families (Benaveniste, Carnoy & Rothstein, 2003; Louie & Holdaway, 2009). Nonetheless, the research indicates there are several appealing characteristics of Catholic high schools, especially those that are single-sex, that lead minority parents to make whatever necessary sacrifices in order to send their children to these schools.

One attractive feature of single-sex Catholic high schools that has been highlighted throughout the research is school size. SSCHS tend to be smaller in terms of enrollment (Greene & O'Keefe, 2004), therefore providing a feeling of community among students, teachers and other school personnel. Because these schools are smaller, administrators have fewer bureaucratic distractions and can focus more of their time and attention on educational matters (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Riordan, 2002). According to Riordan (1985) these unique organizational features of SSCHS also help to diminish the possible negative influences of "youth culture". The distractions and pressures of the youth culture commonly found in co-educational schools, some of which have been shown to have damaging effects on the self-esteem of adolescent girls, are largely absent in SSCHS.

For Chicana/Latina students the more intimate environment of the smaller SSCHS provides greater opportunities for close interaction with teachers. All female Catholic high schools tend to have a greater number of female teachers who can serve as positive role models for girls. The teachers interviewed by Bryk and colleagues (1993) expressed concerns not only for the educational outcomes of their students, but also for their development as a whole person. This could possibly explain why girls in SSCHS are more likely to report that they feel teachers care about them. Harris (1993) highlights the correlation that exists between positive female teacher/female student relationships and high academic aspirations and achievement. Girls in

single-sex learning environments are more likely to exhibit higher self-esteem as they experience greater opportunities for demonstrating and developing their abilities by becoming more actively engaged in the classroom and assuming greater leadership roles in school (Streitmatter, 1999; Vail, 2002).

Nevertheless, while there is substantial research, which posits the overall academic and social benefits of single-sex learning environments, more research is necessary in the area of identity development among minority girls from low-income communities within single-sex schools. As stated earlier, Chicano/Latino scholars (García, 2001; Pizarro, 2005) caution that success among Chicana(o)/Latina(o) students cannot be defined solely in academic terms (i.e. test scores, grades, graduation rates, college admission). Consideration must be given to developing within these students the ability to move across various border identities with as minimal psychological scarring as possible.

Also noted earlier is research which supports the assertion that Chicanas(os)/Latinas(os) who have achieved “success”, both academically as well as professionally, have done so as a result of demonstrating a strong cultural identity. Diaz (2006) in researching Latinas in New York who enrolled in various single-sex school settings found that not all single-sex environments provided these young Latinas with a strong sense of self. Some of the girls Diaz interviewed who attended a prestigious all girl academy, with a large minority enrollment, reported feeling conflicted about their identity as Latinas. As Diaz (2006) explains, “The Young Women’s Leadership School (TYWLS), and other such academies that have sprung up in its wake, offer a handful of minority girls the opportunity of a single sex education, and then proceed to isolate them not just from the opposite sex but also from their home, community, and cultural group” (p. 56). Diaz found the girls who attended this prestigious school to be the most

assimilated of her sample. Although TYWLS's goal may be to provide young urban minority women the educational opportunities that have eluded them in other school settings, it seems to be engaging in subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) practices that position the cultures of the girls as oppositional to opportunities for success.

The unique educational settings of SSCHS, should provide young Latinas the opportunity to explore and expand their intellectual capacities and gain the confidence they needed to aspire to higher educational and career goals, without stripping them of their cultural identity. As stated earlier, a prime feature of these all female schools is that they tend to be run mostly by women and employ high numbers of female teachers. Female teachers can serve as role models for young women and help broaden concepts of "possible selves" they can aspire to. However, simply having a large number of female teachers does not ensure a sexist free learning environment. Single-sex schools simply by nature of their all female enrollment, are not guaranteed to be free of institutionalized sexist attitudes and/or practices (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; LePore & Warren, 1996). If single-sex schools genuinely aspire to becoming sites of transformation from sexism, then teachers who work in these schools must consciously make an effort to challenge privileged patriarchal knowledge and sexist learning environments. Maxine Green (1978) challenges female teachers to be reflective and self-actualized if they are to encourage female students to take the risk of "choosing themselves". She cautions teachers to be aware of the reproduction of oppressive gender roles that takes place in schools. Greene also challenges women teachers to re-conceive teaching so as to transform pedagogy. Weiler (1988), borrowing from critical and social reproduction theory also recognizes the reproduction of gender oppression that takes place in schools. She calls upon teachers and students to engage in meaningful discourse for the purpose of understanding and transforming the unjust forces that

act upon their lives. Like many other feminist theorists, Weiler understands that true feminist pedagogy is grounded in the struggles of everyday life, and can therefore be transformative and counter hegemonic. Unfortunately, despite the transformative opportunities that a mostly female faculty can produce in all girl Catholic high schools, special attention to gender issues are rarely evident in either the curriculum or pedagogical practices of the classroom of these schools (AAUW, 1998; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993).

Single-sex Catholic high schools experience great flexibility in how they are administered, and in what and how they teach. These schools are at greater liberty to explore alternative and innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Because of this flexibility these schools can incorporate into their curriculum and organizational practices, critical discourses focused on education that is transformative. However, Bryk and colleagues (1993) found that because the majority of Catholic high schools consider themselves college-preparatory institutions, many still employ conventional pedagogical practices and seldom explore, within the curriculum, topics and themes that veer away from the traditional “canon” of academia. Unless these schools put forth gender and racial equity as a primary goal, they like any other schooling system, run the risk of perpetuating subtractive schooling practices (Valenzuela, 1999) and maintaining traditional beliefs regarding gender roles (Datnow & Conchas, 2001).

The American Association of University Women (1998) contends that no learning environment can claim to be free of sexism regardless of a school’s demographics. Moreover, even when schools make concerted efforts to ensure gender equity, sexism within the larger society can undermine these efforts (Datnow & Hubbard, 2002). López (2003) contends, “differing outlooks and life perspectives on education arise not because men and women are ‘essentially’ different but rather because of the different race-gender experiences they have

undergone throughout their lives” (p. 6).

Bearing in mind that gender, race, and class are all socially constructed identity markers that minority students negotiate on a daily basis, schools that can engage these young people in a critical examination of said notions can better equip them with the language and skills necessary for making decisions about their future that will reflect and recognize the values and traditions of their families and communities, while empowering them to challenge and negotiate those which may limit their full potential.

2.6 **Reflections on the Literature**

The classrooms of America’s schools pose many challenges for Latina/o students. Not only do these students have to vie for the attention and respect of their teachers, but they must also make meaning out of learning situations that are often dehumanizing and culturally irrelevant. Every day, as they step on to their school campuses, Latinas/os are inscribed with the various identities of “good” student, “bad” student, minority, female, underachiever, at risk, potential drop out, and they must do their best to navigate this identity minefield. Without meaningful support, few ever manage to successfully adopt identities that will propel them forward in their educational pursuits. Sadly, too many end up falling through the cracks.

For young Latinas the challenges are even greater, as are the risks. The contradictions they must deal with on a daily basis make it increasingly difficult for these young women to complete high school without adequate assistance and support. However, some do manage to successfully navigate the K-12 education pipeline, but even academically successful Latinas struggle with decisions about their post-secondary lives, given the strong familial ties that exist in their communities. Family needs and expectations can weigh heavily on these young women

as they struggle to do well in high school, and still be “good daughters”. During the college choice process and even once they have moved on to college, the needs of their families remain a priority and trying to balance family needs and expectations with a developing sense of self can be daunting. If they do not develop early the life strategies necessary to skillfully navigate conflicting cultural spaces and identities, many run the risk of abandoning their post-secondary educational aspirations.

While much of the literature discussed addresses the various factors that contribute to the success and failure of Latinas in high school, little examines the unique characteristics and behaviors these young women adopt to assist them in navigating the sometimes conflicting demands of school and home life. Much of what has been written qualitatively about the academic achievements of Chicanas/Latinas has focused on college age women. Current research on high school age Chicana/o/Latina/o students gives little attention to issues associated with gender. The literature reviewed on college choice among Chicanas, focuses attention on the role of parental aspirations, support and guidance in this process, but does not consider negotiations of gender identity between young Latinas and their families that also influence the choice process. This study intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of this process so as to bring to the center of educational inquiry the lived experiences of these young women while providing a window into how identity constructions shape their dreams for the future.

3. METHODOLOGY

“Theory, then, is a set of knowledges. Some of these knowledges have been kept from us—entry into some professions and academia denied us...it is *vital* that we occupy theorizing space...By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space.”

Gloria Anzaldúa, 1990 (as quoted in Yosso, 2005)

My purpose for this research project was to explore how young Latinas in choosing a path for themselves after high school, negotiate and reconcile communal knowledge and collective goals (i.e. family needs and responsibilities) while attending an all girl, (almost all Latina) Catholic high school in Los Angeles. For this purpose, I chose inquiry tools that would allow me to uncover, interpret, reflect on, and tell stories about the lives of young Latinas in a method mindful of our status as women of color in a society where knowledge, for the most part, is still legitimized through Western patriarchal reasoning. As a Chicana³ researcher, my aim is to participate in research that moves the experiences and voices of Latinas from the margins to the center of scholarly discourse, by doing more than just asking questions about their lives, but more importantly by utilizing a woman centered methodology that would frame the manner in which questions are asked, responses are interpreted and narratives are recounted.

³ The term Chicana(o) is sometimes used to mean persons of Mexican descent, however it is more commonly recognized as a politically charged term used by persons who identify with a history of struggle and resistance. For this reason I use it when discussing myself and scholars who self identify as Chicana(o). Only one of the young women in my study, identifies as Chicana. Another girl considers herself Salvadoran-American, but she also, like the third girl in the study, uses Hispanic and/or Latina interchangeably. I use the term Latina when discussing all three participants as a group, and/or when discussing women of Latin American descent in general (this includes those that are immigrant and U.S. native born).

3.1 **Qualitative Research**

According to Glesne (1999), "...we are attracted to and shape research problems that match our personal view of seeing and understanding the world" (p. 8). I agree. I do not believe in a "Truth" (with a capital T) but instead subscribe to the notion of many truths that are shaped by one's standpoint (Collins, 1991). That is to say, I read the world, experience it and interpret it based on where I locate myself at the intersections of my gender, race, social class, language, and sexuality. As a researcher I must acknowledge, reflect on, and report how my personal locations serve to frame, shape and continuously "interrupt" the inquiry process. Research that is conducted within a qualitative paradigm offers the researcher the flexibility and space to explore a phenomenon without the pretense of objectivity. Within the qualitative design I am expected to make known my culturally situated biases and consider how these shape the way I interpret the phenomenon I am investigating and vice versa. The same holds true for the participants of the research project. Within qualitative research, their cultural locations and the impact of these on how the participants interpret their realities are also made explicit.

As Denzin and Lincoln (1994) explain:

[Q]ualitative research: is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case study, personal experience, introspective, life story, interview, observational, historical, interactional, and visual texts that describe routine and problematic moments and meaning in individuals lives. (p.2)

This description of qualitative inquiry, speaks to important aspects of the study I have conducted. The concern for process and the making of meaning by participants are essential features of a phenomenological study in which a Chicana feminist epistemology (Delgado Bernal, 1998) is used to legitimize the knowledge constructions and ways of knowing that are central to the identity of the three Latinas whose voices are fore fronted in this study.

3.2 **Methodology and Epistemology**

Within a qualitative paradigm, researchers situate the design of an inquiry project within a theoretical framework that guides the methodology. Sandra Harding (1987) defines methodology as "...a theory and analysis of how research does or should proceed; it includes accounts of how 'the general structure of theory finds its application in particular scientific disciplines'"(p.3). The research study reported in these pages began with the desire to explore how young Latinas attending an all girl Catholic high school in a large urban center experienced this kind of learning environment, and also if the unique setting of their school had any impact on their decisions about college. Additionally, because I too am a Latina and a graduate of an all girl Catholic high school, I wanted to acknowledge these similarities, recognize where my experiences deviate from those of the girls, and explore how my own experiences shape my interpretations. "In order to make a beginning, the phenomenologist must ask: What human experience do I feel called upon to make topical for my investigation?" (van Manen, 1990. p.41) Because I felt "called upon" to explore a phenomenon that I am familiar with, I believe phenomenology was the most appropriate methodological choice for exploring this experience.

3.2.1 **Phenomenology**

Van Manen (1990) situates phenomenology within the realm of human science research as a way of questioning the world and our place in it. “And since to *know* the world is profoundly to *be* in the world in a certain way, the act of researching – questioning – theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better, to become the world” (p.5). He goes on to highlight key features of phenomenological research citing them as: a) the study of lived experience; b) the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness; c) the study of essence; d) the description of experiential meanings as we live them; e) the human scientific study of phenomena; e) the attentive practice of thoughtfulness; f) a search for what it means to be human; g) a poetizing activity.

Van Manen (1990) does not offer a particular set of tools or *methods* for conducting phenomenological inquiry, but he does argue there exists a “tradition” or set of guides and recommendations “that neither simply rejects or ignores tradition, nor slavishly follows or kneels in front of it” (p. 30). He proposes the following structure “as a dynamic interplay among six research activities” (p.30):

- 1) turning to the phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- 2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- 3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- 4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- 5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- 6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

As I set out to investigate how the three young women of my study “lived” the experience of attending an all girl Catholic high school and how they engaged this experience in helping them make difficult choices about college, I looked to the above recommended structure to guide my inquiry activities, but allowed myself the flexibility to reinterpret some of these guidelines and relied more heavily on some more than others to shape the study.

1) Turning to the nature of lived experience

“It is always a project of someone: a real person, who, in the context of particular individual, social, and historical life circumstances, sets out to make sense of a certain aspect of human existence.” (van Manen, 1990, p.31)

As a Chicana who grew up in a working class *barrio* of Los Angeles, I have always been mindful of the privileges a private Catholic education afforded me. I cannot make the claim that it is solely a result of this privileged education that I now find myself in the process of completing a doctoral degree, nor can I be certain that if I had not attended private schools, my educational trajectory would have lead me down a different path. But I do know from working in the field of education for more than twenty years and studying it for almost as long, my K-12 schooling experiences provided advantages that made academic success more accessible. What I had not considered, however, is how these experiences shaped my identity and my view of the world. Rather than try to piece together my own memories as a way of trying to answer my question, I decided to explore this phenomenon with the help of young Latinas who were presently *living* the experience of attending an all girl Catholic high school (as I had) and were now making difficult decisions about their futures. As they shared with me their experiences, I was able to reflect on and compare these to my own.

2) Investigating experience as we live it

“Being experienced is a wisdom of the practice of living which results from having lived life deeply. In doing phenomenological research this practical wisdom is sought in the understanding of the nature of lived experience itself.” (van Manen, 1990, p.32)

In this research I examine how three Latinas *live* the challenges and contradictions of their gender, social class and race during a significant time in their lives. They have graduated high school, are eighteen, and struggling to find a path for themselves in life while wrestling with family commitments and expectations. Although it has been more than twenty-five years since I graduated from high school, as a Latina I recognize the challenges these girls are facing now are not only “of this moment”. If one is committed to family, as these three young women are, and that close relationship remains a constant in their lives, then the struggles they are facing now will resurface throughout their lives. During the second year of my doctoral program, my mother lost her only two sisters (with whom she was very close) within a span of five months. I am an only child and as such I felt it was my duty to return home. I was done with course work and was beginning the research phase of the program. My mother, then in her late seventies, was living alone and I decided I could move back home to help her cope during a difficult emotional time in her life. I returned to LA, moved in with my mother and went to work full time. Almost seven years later, I am still trying to complete my degree. As I listened to the girls, wrestling with their desire to go out and make their mark on the world while still being “good daughters”, I empathized and secretly wished I had a solution to offer them that would make this dilemma disappear forever from their lives. Unfortunately, after forty-three years, I still had not found one. I wondered if perhaps they might teach *me* how to better *live* with this challenge.

3) Reflecting on essential themes

“[P]henomenological research consists of reflectively bringing into nearness that which tends to be obscure, that which tends to evade the intelligibility of our natural attitude of everyday life.” (van Manen, 1990, p.32)

Through careful reading and rereading of interview transcripts and field notes, I coded data under three general topics at first: identity construction, schooling experiences, and issues associated with choosing a college and I use these topics to organize each participant's chapter. Within these general topics I looked for emerging themes from the three interviews and my field notes, and then cross-referenced the themes across the topics. What emerged were four overarching themes that seemed to be represented in each of the three girls' *lived* experiences: 1) There are several Latinas teaching at Holy Trinity High School who are either graduates of the school, or grew up in the surrounding community. These teachers served not only as role models for the girls, but were also able to help them negotiate conflicting notions of gender and traditional gender role expectations as they made decisions about college. 2) Attending a single-sex high school where the majority of the girls are Latinas, was an empowering experience that allowed the girls to develop their voice and self-confidence in preparation for their college careers. 3) Participation in community service activities provided the girls with an awareness of social issues and helped them identify a purpose for their higher education. 4) Family ties and expectations factored heavily in which college the girls finally selected.

4) The art of writing and rewriting

“So phenomenology is the application of *logos* (language and thoughtfulness) to a phenomenon (an aspect of lived experience), to what shows itself precisely as it shows itself.” (van Manen, 1990, p.33)

Conventional research paradigms require, or at least expect the researcher to provide some attempt at interpretation and analysis of data collected during the inquiry project. The line between providing insightful analysis of a phenomenon and presenting a clear and distinct representation of it as “it shows itself”, is extremely thin and I stumbled along it repeatedly as I tried to find a balance.

5) Maintaining a strong and oriented relation

“To be strong in our orientation means that we will not settle for superficialities and falsities.”

(van Manen, 1990, p.33)

Along with trying to employ thoughtful language in writing up this research, maintaining a strong orientation was equally challenging. Van Manen cautions the phenomenological researcher to avoid getting sidetracked with “narcissistic reflections or self-indulgent preoccupations” or with falling “back onto taxonomic concepts” (p.33). Sharing with the participants of this research a similar background in terms of gender, ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, and schooling history, I struggled in trying to “bracket out” my own assumptions and the beliefs that stem from these similarities. Perhaps in some instances I was more successful than in others.

6) Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole

“[O]ne needs to constantly measure the overall design of the study/text against the significance that the parts must play in the total textual structure.” (van Manen, 1990, p.33)

Van Manen points out that phenomenology is an extremely demanding form of research. Attempting to maintain a balance that thoughtfully considers the various “parts” of this study and how they contribute to a more complete revealing of the phenomenon in its totality has been a daunting task. I reflected on those scholarly contributions that have laid the foundation for the

questions I explore in this study: What factors contribute to Latina school failure and success?; What role do different learning environments play in their success or failure; How do Latinas negotiate borderland identities?; And what factors influence their college decision making process? As I presented the narratives of participants, I endeavored to do so with these questions in mind. In forming my own interpretations of the participants' responses, my aim was to do so in a manner that honored their voices and their stories. But even the most mindful efforts cannot provide a completely "pure" representation of the *lived experiences* of another. My ultimate goal was to provide a space where the unique *lived experiences* of three young Latinas on their way to college, are offered as legitimized knowledge worthy of discussion and consideration.

Phenomenology offers the researcher tools for exploring an event - a happening - an experience, as it occurs within a specific context of time, space, or geographic location. Van Manen (1990) argues that to *know* the world is to *be* in the world (p.5), and I agree. Knowledge is subjective, and *how* one knows the world is usually determined by *how* and *who* one is in the world. I wanted to explore the lived experiences of Latinas situated within a particular geopolitical and socioeconomic reality, who have developed a particular consciousness, pieced together by similar gendered and racialized interactions with the material world. A Chicana feminist epistemology provided me the lens to do this in a manner mindful of how I, along with these young women, construct knowledge about the worlds in which we live.

3.2.2 **Chicana Feminist Epistemology**

According to Harding (1987) an epistemology "...is a theory of knowledge. It answers questions about who can be a 'knower' (can women); what tests beliefs must pass in order to be legitimated as knowledge (only tests against men's experiences and observations?); what kinds

of things can be known (can “subjective truths” count as knowledge?), and so forth” (p.3).

Feminist researchers have argued that one’s epistemological stance significantly shapes not only the manner in which one engages the inquiry project, but also what the researcher determines counts for data and how these are interpreted and reported (Naples, 2003, p.3).

While feminist researchers have long concerned themselves with legitimating the knowledge and lived realities of women, feminists of color (Collins, 1991; hooks, 1984; Hurtado, 1989; 1998; Sandoval, 2000) have been critical of presenting the experiences of women as universal. Within these critiques has been a call for recognizing the unique subjugation of women of color brought on by the intersections of race, class, gender, and for some, language, as well as an expressed need for employing theoretical frameworks that account for the ways in which women of color navigate and negotiate these conflicting identities. Chicana feminists will often turn to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa as a foundation for the development of such frameworks.

Anzaldúa’s (1987) concepts of borderland identities and *mestiza* consciousness have been cited extensively by scholars in various disciplines because they provide a way of explaining the fracturing of self that is experienced by those of us who must navigate in and out conflicting cultural spaces. Anzaldúa maintains that borderland identities are a source of strength for marginalized groups and endow them with what she calls a “sixth sense for survival” (Delgado Bernal, 1998). Her work is of particular significance to this project in that the young women represented here confront conflict and contradictions on a daily basis as they move in and out of the academic context of the school and the communal context of the home, where their individual and personal aspirations may not always be priority number one.

Drawing on the work of Anzaldúa and of other feminists of color (Collins, 1986, 1991; hooks, 1989; Hurtado, 1989, 1996; as cited in Delgado Bernal, 1998), Delgado Bernal extends their notions of “endarkened” epistemologies, which recognize the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation in the study of women’s lives, to include what she calls a Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE). She argues that within educational research, traditional mainstream scholarship and liberal feminist scholarship have failed to provide useful paradigms for studying the lives of working class Chicanas.

...[A] Chicana epistemology must be concerned with the knowledge about Chicanas - about who generates an understanding of their experiences, and how this knowledge is legitimized or not legitimized. It questions objectivity, a universal foundation of knowledge, and the Western dichotomies of mind versus body, subject versus object, objective truth versus subjective emotion, and male versus female. In this sense, a Chicana epistemology maintains connections to indigenous roots by embracing dualities that are necessary and complementary qualities, and by challenging dichotomies that offer opposition without reconciliation. (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p.4)

I assume a Chicana feminist epistemological stance within a phenomenological research design with the hope of providing a nuanced look into the lives of young Latina high school students and the struggles they bravely confront in their everyday lives as they map out their futures.

3.3 **Chicana Feminist Research**

Shulamit Reinharz (1992) maintains that we use feminist methods because the knowledge we seek requires it. She contends that the goal of feminist research is to: 1) document the lives

of women; 2) understand the experiences of women from their own point of view; and 3) conceptualize women's behavior as an expression of social context. I believe a Chicana feminist epistemology (CFE) encompasses these goals of feminist research, but also recognizes the unique "social context" of Chicanas'/Latinas' lives, which include issues of immigration, migration, generational status, bilingualism, limited English proficiency, and the contradictions of Catholicism (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

As a Chicana researcher studying a phenomenon that closely resembles my own lived experiences, I work within a Chicana epistemological framework to uncover the more nuanced stories of the young women participating in this study, that traditional and even liberal feminist methodology may inhibit. Liberal feminism could not provide for me an appropriate lens to thoughtfully and reflectively explore the conflicts that exist within many young Chicanas/Latinas as they struggle to open up paths for themselves after high school, while trying not to damage the strong family ties that have served as sources of strength for them. A CFE recognizes the ways in which institutional and cultural structures (i.e. the family) constrain and/or enable different groups of women (Delgado Bernal, 1998). While the pursuit of higher education is recognized as an opportunity for enhancing one's life, for Latinas, it may also mean challenging family and community constructions of gender and the responsibilities and obligations that may go hand in hand with these constructions. Thus, "[I]t is important to remember that Chicana[/Latina] students experience school from multiple dimensions, including their skin color, gender, class, and English-language proficiency." (Delgado Bernal, 1998, p.5)

Strauss and Corbin (1990; as cited in Delgado Bernal, 1998) claim that researchers develop a "theoretical sensitivity" to data, that stems from four sources: 1) personal experience, 2) existing literature, 3) professional experience, as well as 4) the analytical process itself.

Claiming that personal experience also includes collective experiences and community memory, and stressing the importance of participant involvement in the data analysis process, Delgado Bernal (1998) extends the concept of “theoretical sensitivity” to fit within a Chicana feminist epistemology, and calls this expanded version “cultural intuition” (p.7). I relied on this cultural intuition to guide my methodological choices for this study, as well as my interpretations of the data.

According to Reinharz (1992), “Making the invisible visible, bringing the margin to center, rendering the trivial important, putting the spotlight on women as competent actors, understanding women as subjects in their own right rather than objects for men – all continue to be elements of feminist research” (p. 248). She identifies ten themes commonly found in studies claiming a feminist standpoint:

1. Feminism is a perspective, not a research method.
2. Feminists use a multiplicity of research methods.
3. Feminist research involves an ongoing criticism of non-feminist scholarship.
4. Feminist research is guided by feminist theory.
5. Feminist research may be trans-disciplinary.
6. Feminist research aims to create social change.
7. Feminist research strives to represent human diversity.
8. Feminist research frequently includes the researcher as a person.
9. Feminist research frequently attempts to develop special relations with the people studied (in interactive research).
10. Feminist research frequently defines a special relation with the reader.(p.240)

This study touches upon all of these themes to some extent. It is guided by a Chicana feminist epistemology as it explores the lives of young women from their point of view, using their voices to co-create with them meaning about their experiences as they prepared to confront life after high school. My goal here was to call attention to the unique challenges faced by young Latinas who are in the process of developing a gender identity that will allow them the freedom to pursue their personal goals, but also provide them the dexterity to continuously move back and forth, as well as in and out of various border identities. In essence, I wanted to uncover the resources they employ to negotiate these developing identities with the more traditional family expectations that result from generational as well as cultural differences.

The fact that I am also a graduate of an all girl Catholic high school and the first in my family to graduate from college is recognized and made explicit throughout the study. Obviously, these experiences have biased my research interests, concerns and approaches. From the methods I chose to the way in which I report my findings, all reflect my standpoint as a Chicana, from a working class family, and educated in the Catholic schools of Los Angeles. Phenomenology requires that the researcher “bracket” her/his knowledge of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). A Chicana feminist epistemology recognizes the Chicana researcher’s “cultural intuition” (Delgado Bernal, 1998) as a legitimate and useful resource for exploring the phenomenon. In the following section I attempt to “bracket” those experiences that inform my beliefs and assumptions about the phenomenon and also present these as the foundation for my “cultural intuition”.

3.3.1 **Personal Background, Biases and Assumptions**

My desire to explore the experiences of Latinas attending all girl Catholic high school, stemmed mostly from personal reflections and the questions that emerged from those reflections. Having been the first in my family to attend college away from home, I remember the loneliness and frustration I felt navigating this new territory. I also remember trying to convince my grandmother, (who helped raise me and with whom my mother and I had lived since my birth) why I wanted to move away from home to attend school. Growing up in Ciudad Juarez (on the border between Mexico and the U.S.), the eldest of six children, my grandmother was relied upon to help care for her younger siblings after her father left them and my great-grandmother had to work to support the family. She never attended school in Mexico and therefore had a limited understanding of the education system in any context. Only three of her eight children got as far as a high school diploma in the U.S. All of these factors contributed to her reluctant acceptance of my choice to leave home to attend college. And it was this reluctance that contributed greatly to guilt I felt at leaving my mother and grandmother alone as I went off to study.

My mother, the first of three to graduate from high school, shared with me her desire to attend college, but explained that family obligations sent her to work after graduation from high school, and once employed and earning decent money, it was difficult to find the time and energy to go back to school. For these reasons she was extremely encouraging and made clear her intention to provide whatever financial assistance was needed for me to attend the college of my choice. Still, I was her only child and I knew whatever decision I made, it would be a burden on both my mother and grandmother. Moreover, my mother would be left behind to “hear it” constantly from my grandmother about how my decision to go away to school was affecting all

aspects of their lives, especially their finances.

My story exemplifies how socio-economic, generational issues and cultural issues come to bear on the choices young Latinas make about their lives after high school. The U.S. culture I grew up in was quite different from the culture my grandmother grew up in Juarez. She was not able to go to school and her expectations of who I should be as a young woman of Mexican descent, were quite different from the messages I received, growing up in the U.S., about women's independence. At the time I was not able to contextualize our different experiences. At my high school we were simply encouraged to pursue higher education without any discussion about how our choices would impact our relationships with our families.

I was accepted to the University of California at Berkeley, a reputable campus, my first choice, and a school, counselors and teachers reminded me, "one does not turn down". Still, I was the only child of a single mother (whose decision to never marry was greatly influenced by a sense of obligation to care for two aging and ailing parents), co-raised by a grandmother with no formal education, and living in a Los Angeles neighborhood where few young people go on to college, much less to a place like Berkeley. I went, but I carried with me the legacy of my mother and grandmother and it occupied all corners of my consciousness every minute of every day. My relationship with my grandmother was never quite the same, and because she died during the time I was at school, I never had the opportunity to mend what was fractured by my departure.

I, like the young women in this study, attended an all girl Catholic high school where teachers encouraged me as a young woman to develop my mind and make the most of all opportunities afforded me. However, I was never told how to pursue my own goals and aspirations while still considering the needs and expectations of those around me. Nor were

explicit attempts made by my high school to help me negotiate differing cultural constructions of gender and gender role expectations. It was assumed that family and community would be “on board” for whatever choices I made regarding my post-secondary education.

I have read much of the literature on Latina(o) success and failure and I have seen the statistics. While some of the research in the area has been in the form of in depth qualitative studies that look to tell a story beyond just the numbers, I have not found much that focuses on high school age girls. My decision to explore the lives of these young women during a significant time in their lives is also due in large part to a responsibility I feel as a Chicana researcher, afforded a certain level of privilege by the institution that will be granting me this degree, to not only help move these voices from the margin to the center, but to do so in a manner in which the complexities of the phenomenon are considered as well as uncovered. Accordingly, my choice to draw on a Chicana feminist epistemology to guide this phenomenological study is intentional, motivated by my own gendered experiences and the ontological and epistemological assumptions that have emerged from those experiences.

3.4 **The Research Design**

3.4.1 **Description of Site and Key Participants**

This study focuses on three Latina graduates of an all girl Catholic high school in a predominantly Latino working class community in Los Angeles. I chose this particular high school as the site for this study because of its unique location and setting. This community has long been home to Latino families, some with roots that go back several generations. However, for the past thirty years there has been a steady flow of immigrants moving in and out of this community, most of them from Mexico but some from other parts of Central America as well.

Consequently, the majority of the girls who attend Holy Trinity High School are Latinas. I was curious to see if and how this unique context would be addressed in the schooling experiences of the girls I interviewed.

I first contacted Sister Marta, the school's principal, by phone and asked if I could come in to discuss the project. She expressed an interest and invited me to visit the school and some of the classes informally while I awaited IRB approval from my university. I did and was able to informally engage with some of the teachers at the school and I also attend some special events. By the time the study was approved, the school year was ending and so Sister Marta and I discussed the possibility of interviewing the girls after graduation. She provided me with a list of seven girls from the graduating class who were accepted to a four-year college or university. I attempted to contact all of the girls on the list by phone, but was not able to reach all of them. I made contact with five of the seven and explained that I was interested in interviewing them for a study regarding their college decision-making process. Three girls called me back saying they were interested in meeting with me to learn more about the study. All three agreed to participate and signed the appropriate IRB forms. However after our initial interview, one of the girls realized her summer work schedule would continue to interfere with the schedule we had set up for interviews. She had to back out of the study. The other two girls were able to meet regularly for interviews. After I had conducted two interviews with one of the girls, I received a phone call from another girl whose name was on the original list, but whom I had not been able to reach by phone. She said her friend referred her to me and was willing to meet to hear more about the study. She expressed interest and eventually agreed to participate as well. These are the three girls whose stories and lived experiences fill the pages of this dissertation.

3.4.2 **Collection of Data**

Reinharz (1992), along with other feminist scholars, recognizes that feminist research is not defined solely by its interest in women as “subjects” of study, but rather is informed and shaped by the ways in which women interact with their worlds and with each other. As such, the feminist research project acknowledges the need for intimacy. However, this intimacy has to be carefully negotiated. Interviews provide access to people’s lives through their own words and thus open up a space for intimacy to develop. The interview, in feminist research, is a type of conversation in which the researcher and the participant negotiate trust and understanding. “...[I]nterviewing draws on skills in the traditional feminine role – a passive, receptive, open, understanding approach” (Kathy Charmaz quoted in Reinharz, 1992, p. 20). The interview process allows participants to be actively involved in constructing data about their lives.

In order to fore front the voices of the young women in this study, I chose to conduct semi-structured, open ended interviews with each participant that often took the shape of *platicas* or conversations in which questions often developed through the interview. This less structured format allowed me to explore issues that emerged from conversations with the participants, which I had not anticipated or previously considered, but were nonetheless relevant to the phenomenon.

Interviews took place at the community center located at a park near the girls’ high school which the girls were all familiar with as it was the place they held practice for some of their sport teams. The director of the park allowed us to use a small office space that was private so that the participants could answer questions freely and in a relaxed environment. With the hope of gaining a more in depth look at the lived experiences of these young women, I combined feminist interview methods with Seidman’s (1998) phenomenological in-depth interviewing

model.

Seidman's (1998) model involves conducting a series of separate interviews with each participant, with the goal of contextualizing the phenomenon being explored. "The first interview establishes the context of the participants' experience. The second allows participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context in which it occurs. And the third encourages the participants to reflect on the meaning their experience holds for them" (p. 17). Seidman recommends following a 90-minute time frame for the interviews, but recognizes some factors, such as the age of participants, may require altering the time allotment. What is key is deciding upon the time frame before the process begins. Interviews should also be spaced within 3 days to a week from each other so as to allow participants time to process thoughts and ideas about the first interview without losing a connection to the next (Seidman, 1998). Considering the distinct manner in which Chicanas/Latinas engage in "talk" about their lives, I allowed for some flexibility in the time frame of each interview, as well as in the spacing of them. Interviews were tape recorded with the permission of the participants and then later transcribed.

3.4.3 **Data Analysis**

A feminist perspective on data analysis includes many components such as understanding women in their social contexts and using women's language and behavior to understand the relation between self and context...It includes the use of feminist theory to analyze data as well as flexibility and creativity in format. (Reinharz, 1992, p.71)

There is a dialectical relationship between data collection and data analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), which requires a consistent examination of the data as it is being collected,

which then gives way to ongoing reflection on the part of the researcher. This allows the researcher to make adjustments and return to the field or to the participants for further clarification. By consistently reviewing and reflecting on the data, I was able to look for themes and concepts as they emerged, thus allowing me to make adjustments to the study as needed. Because I was conducting phenomenological research through the lens of a Chicana feminist epistemology, I considered my own knowledge and experience with the phenomenon. As a Chicana graduate of an all girl Catholic high school, who struggled through her decision to attend college 400 hundred miles from the LA *barrio* she grew up in, I made every effort to “get at” the essence of this experience, without essentializing it. Blea (1995) reminds us, “...social behavior is given social meaning by those closest to it, and that meaning is defined by cultural norms that sanction or unsanction behavior” (p.63). As a Chicana researcher I am always conscious of how knowledge about Chicanas(os)/Latinas(os) is sometimes constructed and sanctioned by people outside of these communities, often leading to misrepresentations and/or misinterpretations of behaviors and cultural norms that are unfamiliar.

Recognizing how complex a task this is, van Manen (1990) acknowledges that meaning is multi-dimensional and multi-layered. Therefore, those engaged in human science research must consider the phenomenon of interest in terms of meaning units, structures of meaning, or themes. The researcher then engages in reflecting on and analyzing themes emerging from the phenomenon. Moreover, van Manen (1990) argues that themes are what give order and control to the research project. The Chicana feminist researcher brings to the organizing and analyzing process her own cultural intuition, shaped by relevant personal and professional experiences along with her exposure to literature about the phenomenon (Delgado Bernal, 1998).

Equally important to the Chicana feminist research project is the inclusion of participants in the analysis or meaning making process. I provided each girl with written drafts of my initial findings and asked them to provide feedback as to the accuracy of my depictions and interpretations, allowing them to interject ideas and thoughts about the story that was unfolding. By including the girls in the analyzing process, I hoped to echo more accurately the concepts and themes that emerged from their stories.

Various strategies are available to the qualitative researcher to use as organizing and analyzing tools. Creswell (2007) puts forth the general strategies utilized in different qualitative research approaches. Among these are: the coding of data, combining codes in broader categories or themes, and making comparisons of these. Versions of these processes were used in this study, as the data required it. More significant is the model offered by Creswell (2007) for incorporating these various strategies into the phenomenological study. He suggests six general phases for analyzing and representing data within qualitative research. These are: 1) data managing; 2) reading, memoing; 3) describing; 4) classifying; 5) interpreting; and 6) representing, visualizing. Accordingly, within phenomenology these phases require: 1) creating and organizing files for data; 2) reading through text, making margin notes, forming initial codes; 3) describing personal experiences, describing the essences of the phenomenon; 4) developing significant statements, grouping statements in meaning units; 5) developing a textural description, developing a structural description; and 6) presenting the narration of the “essence” of the experience. This model served as a guide for organizing and analyzing the data for this particular study.

3.5 **Results and Conclusions**

Reinharz (1992) points out that feminist researchers must continuously seek new and alternative ways of reporting findings and conclusions that reflect women's language and epistemologies. The text created by the feminist researcher should entice the reader to enter into a dialectical relationship with it and allow for continuous (re)interpretation.

In many ways, writing research is akin to telling a story. Within phenomenology, the story revolves around a group as it experiences a particular phenomenon. Interviews help the researcher pull together the various stories within the larger story. Theory helps the researcher frame the story and gives it purpose. Rhetoric style gives it shape, accessibility, and very often validity as well. In keeping with phenomenological methodology guided by a Chicana feminist epistemology, the stories that emerged from my inquiry take the shape of narratives that include the voices of my participants along side of my own. By structuring my report this way I hope to provide a compelling account of the lives of these young women and the ways in which they bravely negotiate conflicting border identities.

I am not attempting to put forward sweeping claims about Latinas or their educational needs, but rather I offer just a glance into the schooling experiences and lived realities of these three young women. The "beauty" of feminist research is that it allows for an in depth look into the lives of a few, giving way to richer and deeper analysis of the phenomenon under consideration. By foregrounding the voices, ideas, beliefs and survival strategies of three young Latinas, I hope to arouse further curiosity and stimulate greater discussion around issues of identity construction, schooling, and achievement in the lives of other Chicanas/Latinas whose lived experiences are still under researched.

4. LISTENING TO THEIR VOICES

4.1 **Introductions**

I first met Jasmin and Lulu in person at a lunch date I set up at a Mexican restaurant not too far from Holy Trinity High School. I had already spoken to both girls briefly on the phone to introduce myself and explain my intentions for the study. They each expressed interest and agreed to meet for lunch.

Jasmin and Lulu arrived minutes from each other at the restaurant. I was feeling a little nervous so I tried to cover it up by talking about my experiences growing up in the neighborhood. I thought it might make them more comfortable to know that I too had grown up in this part of Los Angeles and that I also attended a small Catholic elementary school just down the street from where we were having lunch. I shared that most of the girls from my elementary school usually attended Holy Trinity. I wanted very much to also go to that school, but my mother, on the recommendation of the principal, sent me to a different all girl Catholic high school in a community that was jokingly referred to as the place where “middle class Mexicans lived”. My high school was quite different from Holy Trinity. Many of the students were Latinas, but we also had a large group of Asian and White students as well. Unlike HT, most of the teachers at my high school were White as were the sisters who ran the school.

During lunch, I did most of the talking as I shared my own experiences in college, hoping this might put both girls at ease to know that I too struggled in trying to convince certain family members, namely my grandmother, that leaving home to attend college was a good thing. I admitted to the girls that once I had arrived at my campus some four hundred miles from home, I had a terrible time adjusting to life on a campus of over 40,000 people, most of whom did not share my background. I revealed that I left the campus after my first semester and considered

not returning, but due to some logistical matters I was forced to re-enroll a year later.

As I continued telling my story I realized my intentions had gone beyond trying to establish a relationship between myself the researcher and they the participants, and had moved into a space where I was trying to warn them of the impending challenges they would be facing in college. I had assumed a role of advisor, teacher, counselor, friend, in an effort to prepare them for these challenges. I shared with the girls the emotion I felt at their graduation a few weeks earlier. Not really knowing any of the seventy young women graduating, I nonetheless was moved as their principal read off their names and announced what colleges they would be attending as they stepped up to receive their diplomas. I could not help but feel pride and hope as I wondered what impact they would have on the world. While sharing my personal story with Jasmin and Lulu, I realized that I was trying to spare them the struggles many Chicana(o)/Latina(o) students report facing as they step on to university campuses where their cultural/communal knowledge may not be valued or represented. I was making several assumptions about them and how they would each experience university life before even asking one question.

After lunch, I explained the study in more detail and I “recited” the IRB script, assuring them of all their rights. I gave them each a letter of consent along with a courtesy letter for their parents in Spanish with much of the same information, and we agreed I would hear back from them within a week with their decision. Neither girl had any questions, but as we parted ways Jasmin said to me “I’m really excited”. I responded with a big smile, shook her hand and simply said “Me too”.

4.2 Jasmin

“Maybe it wouldn’t have been the same if guys were there because the teachers wouldn’t be the same because they wouldn’t offer as much attention. Maybe the vibe from teachers would’ve been different and maybe I wouldn’t have been as comfortable.”

For Jasmin, being “comfortable” is extremely important. Throughout our conversations, comfort always took center stage as what she valued most in any experience, especially at school. The small, private, Catholic, almost all female environment of her high school provided the comfort she needed in order to reach her full potential. My initial impression of Jasmin was that she was quiet, somewhat shy and reserved. I wasn’t quite sure if she would feel comfortable opening up to a complete stranger about her family, her schooling experiences and her aspirations about college.

4.2.1 Identity: “I’m Chicana. I don’t know it sounds more prideful.”

As I got to know Jasmin over the course of the next few months, I came to understand her parting comment to me after our initial lunch meeting. Jasmin identified as a Chicana.

“I feel like it expresses more in terms of the kind of person I want to be. And also living here in the United States, I feel like it also expresses that I’m here for a reason and I want to be successful. And the kind of values that I’ve grown up with and the expectations that my parents had for me...I think also it sounds more prideful because it’s more specific. I feel like that term is more specific than to say Hispanic or Latina, since those terms are also used to group all people from Latin America.”

She had come to fully understand the term when she attended the Chicano Youth Leadership Conference (CYLC), a yearly conference for Chicana(o)/Latina(o) high school students from the Los Angeles area, hosted by legendary Chicano educator Sal Castro. Castro

first became renowned for his involvement with high school students during the East Los Angeles Walkouts of 1968.⁴ The principal at Holy Trinity (HT), Sr. Marta, encouraged her and another classmate to attend.

Jasmin had never heard of the “Walkouts” of 1968 until she attended the CYLC and it left a profound impact on her.

“...[T]hey [at the conference] make clear that things like that aren’t really told, but there’s just so much that can be told...they touched on the problems we face with discrimination...and the things we can do...and most importantly that our parents don’t come from rich backgrounds...like going to college...the fact that we’re here and they’re [parents] here sacrificing for us.”

When Jasmin returned to school after attending the conference, she and her classmate shared with their U.S. History teacher their experience as well as their frustration with the absence of such stories from the “sanctioned” curriculum. Their teacher, a Mexican American woman from the surrounding neighborhood, agreed with them and allowed the girls to make a presentation to the class. When it came time to complete a final project for the class, Jasmin chose to write about the “Walkouts” and the CYLC.

Identifying as a Chicana is about more than just pride for Jasmin. She recognizes struggle as part of her history and identity. Her parents are both immigrants from a state in central Mexico, and while she recognizes that a large number of immigrants do come from

⁴ Castro was then a teacher at Lincoln High School and supported students who walked off several East Los Angeles high school and junior high school campuses. Among the many demands of the students, were bilingual education, the hiring of more Chicana(o) teachers and the inclusion of the history and contributions of Chicanas(os) within the curriculum. Castro along with eleven other leaders of the movement were arrested and indicted on conspiracy charges, which were later dropped. Castro was suspended from his teaching duties, but was later reinstated after several parents, students and community members held a sit in at the headquarters of the Los Angeles Unified School District. Since then Castro has been hosting the youth leadership conference which Jasmin attended the summer before her senior year.

Mexico, it bothers her that the focus of the immigration debate tends to be only on Latinos, all of whom are assumed to be Mexican.

“It’s important to be specific because...when you think of immigration you think about Latinos in general. You know you don’t think about Asians, you don’t think about people from other countries. And I like to be specific also because how do you define people that are Hispanic that aren’t exactly Mexican American...like you know they’re from El Salvador – many immigrants are from Latin America, they are not all Mexican. I agree with the fact that Hispanics are one. We have things in common but in cases like these, I feel more comfortable saying Mexican American, Chicana than to just group us all together.”

Jasmin’s response demonstrates her appreciation for the cultural expressions shared by Latinos (i.e. language, strong family ties, religion) but it also speaks to a desire for U.S. society to recognize that as the Chicana daughter of Mexican immigrants, she embodies a unique cultural experience that connects her to the history she became aware of while attending the CYLC. She was born and raised on land that once belonged to Mexico, her parents’ homeland, and the dialectical space she inhabits is inherently one of conflict and contradictions. Nonetheless, Jasmin’s strong sense of self (i.e. “I’m a Chicana”) seems to be helping her navigate some of the conflict. For all of the reasons discussed above, I understood Jasmin’s statement to me at the start of this project. She was excited to tell her story because she feels a deep sense of pride as a member of the Chicana(o)/Latina(o) family and perhaps she perceived her participation in this project as an opportunity to share that pride with a larger audience. When asked what role her particular high school played in developing her identity, she had much to say regarding her teachers, her extra curricular activities and the absence of boys from her classes.

4.2.2 **Attending Holy Trinity: “It’s not that I didn’t have support from my parents, but just the comfort wasn’t the same as it was in school.”**

In discussing the experience of attending an all girl Catholic high school, with an almost all female, mostly Latina faculty, Jasmin shared the messages she received in several of her classes from these teachers. One in particular, Ms. Castillo (the above mentioned U.S. History teacher) seemed to have had a profound impact on her students as all three participants in this study often recalled her classes with great fondness.

“...[M]y history teacher, I know she’s like very into feminism...and she would bring up the roles of women and stuff like that...they [teachers] would always push the fact that we’re girls and Latinas and the location in which we’re in, you know, it’s not middle class, it’s a poor neighborhood – so they were always pushing us to get out of there and go to school and make the best out of ourselves.”

As I pressed for her understanding of feminism, she replied:

“Ummm [long pause] it’s not just having pride in being a woman but more like believing and understanding that you can do much more than what society expects you to do...like not letting men impact us in a way where we feel like we can’t do much because that’s their job...yeah just having that pride in yourself and knowing that you’re not less than men.”

When Jasmin mentioned that her teachers encouraged the girls at Holy Trinity to “get out” of their location and “make something of themselves”, I questioned whether this message was similar to the one students of color who attend inner-city schools often receive from white middle class teachers who are not from the same communities; that their neighborhoods are bad places and they need to permanently separate themselves from these communities in order to succeed in life. I asked Jasmin if she understood this to mean that she should “get out of her

community and never look back”.

“Oh no! I guess [it means] like look at our background and look at the limited opportunities our parents had, the opportunities they lacked and the ones that we have now. ‘Get out’ as in like [pauses] don’t get comfortable. Like want to do something more...make it big and whatever you dream of, go after it because you can do it. Just because you’re a woman doesn’t mean you can’t.”

Clearly, there was some discussion during her four years at HT about the history and role of women in society and according to Jasmin, the message was intended to empower the girls attending the school. Still I was curious as to whether or not this message of empowerment stressed individual mobility with little or no attention as to how they might use their successes to help transform their communities. As Jasmin spoke of her experiences with the service project she participated in as a requirement for graduation, I learned how this project brought many of the girls face to face with issues of social justice. During the holiday season, she and some of her classmates went to the Cathedral in downtown LA to help deliver gifts to struggling families in the surrounding communities.

“Yeah I included that experience in my personal statement because it was important to me that most of those people that we delivered to were Hispanic; were Latinos, and I had never seen such small apartments – like smaller than my living room. And just the things that they would ask for you know...like their faces when they would see their bike, when I had many bikes in my childhood – and [long pause] I don’t know...the reactions of the parents were filled with mixed emotions. They were always so grateful. I can imagine how bad they must feel because they can’t give their children such gifts and see that type of joy so often. But the small room – it was this single mom with, I guess he was like a five year old child, and with everything

that she had and what they didn't have – I don't know – it touched me, and it felt so good to help them. Like public health [her intended major in college] changes conditions in the way people are living..."

In this retelling of her experience with the service project, the dialectal, non-monolithic space Jasmin lives within is revealed. In an earlier statement she recalls teachers at HT pointing out that the school is located in a poor/working class neighborhood, similar to the ones Jasmin and her classmates have grown up in. Nevertheless, as students in a private school, the girls at HT enjoy a privilege unknown to most of the kids in their families and neighborhoods. Jasmin's parents are immigrants with only a grade school education, and both work in blue collar and service sector jobs, yet she recalls enjoying certain advantages throughout her life (e.g. a room of her own, having more than one bicycle as a child, and attending a private school). Her long pause in the above quote followed simply by "I don't know..." tells of the contradictions and conflict those of us who come from these neighborhoods live with/in. Jasmin was most moved by the fact that most of the families she delivered gifts to were not that different than her own family except somehow her parents had managed to achieve some level of economic stability.

While "being comfortable" is something that Jasmin values, clearly the service project experience took her out of her comfort zone and forced her to confront her own privilege and choose how she would use it to alter the living conditions of the families she encountered. She asserts that this experience solidified her choice in a major as she believes a degree in Public Health will start her on a path toward changing those circumstances in her community she perceives as unjust.

"Like I said, the community service is what influenced me to want to help others and want to ensure rights for people. Because I grew up in this area, I would like to help this area

improve, you know? I mean I don't want to go out of it. I know that other cities have the same problems, but knowing that this is what influenced me, I have this motivation to change the stuff I see. I want to do it here and work for that.”

4.2.3 **Choosing a College: “When I do look at it, at what encourages me, what influences me – it’s my family.”**

To some extent, Jasmin understands her privilege, though she never uses this term when describing it. Instead she recognizes the many opportunities she has been given, mostly by her parents. As mentioned earlier, both her parents emigrated from Mexico as young adults, and while they have acquired some English, Spanish is still the dominant language at home. Jasmin, the eldest of two girls (though she has step-siblings from her father’s previous relationship), was born when her mother was just seventeen. Both her parents have worked outside of the home since Jasmin was a young child, and consequently, when she was just nine years old, she stepped in as a baby sitter for her new little sister whenever her parents had to work. As a result, Jasmin learned responsibility at a young age, and this is source of some pride for her.

“...I have a lot of responsibilities at home too. You know? As soon as my sister was born, when I was around 9 or 10, she was also a big responsibility for me. I guess for my mom, since she learned how to do those things when she was young, [referring to her mom, as the eldest of 11 siblings, having to care for them] I guess she thought it was important for me to do it too.”

She considers herself very independent, feeling that she has had a significant role in raising her sister, and herself to some extent.

“The major reason why I’ve always been appreciative of what my parents have done for

me is because they've always worked and [because] of that I've always been on my own. I've babysat and I've been independent and you know I'd tell my parents what I had to when there was time. And also I guess I didn't want my sister to go through that, considering the fact that I was always on my own. I would've loved to have a big sister as close to me as possible." (The close relationship Jasmin shares with her little sister was a reoccurring theme throughout our conversations, and the significant role it played in influencing her decision as to where she would go to college will be discussed later on.)

Nonetheless, she fully acknowledges the sacrifices and struggles her parents have endured to give her and her sister many of the opportunities they did not have.

"When I do look at it, at what encourages me, what influences me – it's my family, it *is* my parents because I know how much they've done and how proud it would make them. I know how important this is to them [referring to going to college]. I know how important it is to them and how important it should be to me because they didn't have those opportunities."

The issue of privilege proved to be contentious for Jasmin as it was difficult to draw definitive lines between who is privileged and who is not. This was especially evident when the issue of race, ethnicity and language arose. I decided to explore this issue with her a bit more.

"So do you think as a Chicana, your challenges in life, your struggles – do you think they're different from let's say a black woman of 18 who is going in to college, or let's say an Irish Catholic woman of 18 also getting ready to go to college? Do you think your experiences, your challenges, your struggles are the same or are they different just based on race or ethnicity?"

"I think they're a lot different...when people blame things on immigrants or when they talk about immigration, automatically they think – Latinos. [Inaudible] they blame it on us. I

think it's like that because there are different ethnicities that immigrate to this country but they don't put too much attention on them. Like African American discrimination, I feel like it doesn't even exist anymore and shouldn't because when you look at African American families, they're mostly English speaking. There aren't many things that make them different to Whites, compared to some Hispanic families. You know most of them don't speak a different language. You know their roots – they go way back. Like with my family - my parents mostly speak Spanish. They've gone through a lot more in order to get to where they are today. They've dealt with a lot more in this country, with trying to get a job. I feel it's a lot more difficult than it is for [pause] I feel like we go through a lot more difficulties than other ethnicities. Like I said, - an African American, if they are an immigrant, they most likely know English, you know – they can get along better. For Hispanics there's a lot more discrimination when they don't know how to speak the language. They don't respect them because they feel they don't belong here.”

As I probed Jasmin on the issue of language, her response reveals how, for her, the ability to speak English intersects with privilege.

“So the language is a big issue?”

“Yeah and I see it more like with different races – they're more likely not to be first generation college students. You know I feel like their parents are English speaking. They're probably well off. They probably have gone to college or you know -they can. They were most likely expected to go to college but not in the same way I was. Like for me it was because I wanted to get my family away from – you know [them] not being middle class. Just knowing that my parents didn't live that and didn't have those experiences. You know – those are my motivations. For them [English speakers who are not working class] it's just kind of like – well if they were expected [to go to college] it's because their family went through it. You know –

it's normal for them to go to college. But for me it's not. It's not normal, but at the same time it *was* expected [of me] but for different reasons.”

Jasmin is conflicted about her privilege. She equates the ability to speak and understand English with higher socio-economic status, but also with currency. Because she, unlike her parents, is fluent in English, she now has the currency necessary to enter those institutions of power that her parents were unable to access. She sees this as an opportunity to change not only her own circumstances but her family's and her community's as well. This sets her apart from the “real” privileged class who, according to her, take their privilege for granted. She does not, and her decision to go to college involves more than just a desire to improve her own life. As she embarks on this next venture, she carries on her shoulders her family and her community.

Despite the well circulated myth that Latino families do not value education, Jasmin's story challenges this misinterpretation of Latino culture and the family structure. Many U.S. public school teachers (most of whom are white, middle class, and female) will often claim that Latinos prioritize family over the educational needs of the individual children. Research tells a different story (López, 2001; Valencia & Black, 2002). But parent involvement and “valuing” education tend to be defined by dominant Western cultural values. Individualism is central to the American myth of meritocracy and personal success. The directive to “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” permeates narratives of achievement in American consciousness. As a result, communities who structure their survival on communal successes rather than individual ones are often viewed as primitive or “backwards”. For young Latinas growing up in these communities while attending U.S. schools that promote individualism, success can be rife with conflict. Jasmin's discussion of the play *Simply María or the American Dream* by Chicana playwright and author Josefina López (1992), reveals how she and her classmates could identify with the

main character's struggles as she, María, tries to pursue her dream of going to college, while not wanting to alienate herself from her family.

“Oh I liked it [referring to the play]. Not just the way they talked [referring to the code switching from Spanish to English that López writes with], it was familiar – it was like funny. We spent a lot of time also with the story. Like how her parents came to this country and they told her ‘you know this your opportunity to shine, your opportunity to do whatever you want, and then when she wanted to, they didn’t want her to go away, they didn’t want her to go away to college. And she was growing up with that, and she didn’t know what to do, you know, she didn’t understand her role. She was questioning her role as a woman in the society.’”

“Did you identify with her?”

“Yeah in the way that as a child they tell you ‘do whatever you want’. I was always told ‘never back down on it [going to college] and college itself was never a question for me...college is just like me going from 8th grade into high school. It feels like it just keeps going, it doesn’t feel like an option to me...I guess because I grew up with the fact that my family, my parents and their brothers and sisters are coming to this country to give their kids different opportunities, I guess that was all I knew. Just listening to different people whose parents did go to college, maybe they don’t see it as such a big...”

“They take it for granted...”

“Yeah! Like ‘Oh my parents they have money. They can afford me taking a trip for a while’. I didn’t look at it like that...I guess college is an option [for them] but I’m glad I didn’t grow up with that...I’m not going to say oh well yeah maybe I can think about it twice. I didn’t. It was very strong in me. I’m going to college.”

Jasmin's conviction to attend college is not about individual success and mobility. Her statement that her parents and their siblings came to the U.S. to give their children different opportunities, speaks volumes of what has motivated Jasmin to pursue a college degree. For her, there is no other choice; to not take full advantage of the opportunity her parents gave her by struggling financially to send her to a private Catholic school would be like dishonoring them. Nonetheless, like María in the play, Jasmin experienced a similar conflict when it came time to decide what colleges she would apply to and then once accepted, would she move far away or stay close to home.

When we discussed the schools she applied to and what influenced her final choices, Jasmin shared that at one time when she considered being an architect, she did some research on programs at various out of state universities. One school in particular was in Boston. I asked what about the school appealed to her.

"...I like the fact that they were far and I would be on my own and I would be independent. Well I have always been independent growing up...it sounded interesting and I guess also because since I was little and it was something that was always in the back of my mind – going far and having the real college experience. But when it got closer, that's when it came to the point of like – 'Are you sure you want to leave?' You know with my sister – it got more personal. I guess before I could think about that stuff...but then when you have to make the real decision..."

Jasmin did end up applying to a few out of state schools. She was accepted to a less prestigious state school in the southwest and when I asked why she turned it down, she replied:

"Because it was far and I didn't think it was worth it...I never got my financial aid package, and just knowing the out of state fees – I considered that and the fact that it wasn't

something that I looked forward to...I applied to it because it was easy and they waived the fees...just because it was easy I applied to it.”

Although when she was younger, Jasmin imaged herself attending a school far away so as to have that “real college experience”, it seems that the sole experience of going far away was not enough. In order for her to consider leaving home, it had to be “worth it”. Of the in state schools she applied to, a small private Catholic college in northern California was her first choice. Unfortunately, there were some problems with her financial aid application and as a result, she was not given the full package that some of her other classmates received. Since it was a private school, Jasmin was aware of the higher tuition costs and did not want her parents to have to pay anything. She explained that they had sacrificed enough sending her to Catholic school since the elementary grades and now they needed to concentrate their finances on her sister’s education. This was a common response from all the girls interviewed. None wanted their parents to be burdened financially. All three girls wanted to pay for college independently of their parents.

“[A]t first I wasn’t going to accept all of my loans but then I just ended up doing it because...the situation my parents are in right now...I told them, well I’ll just accept the loans for now, and you can get back on your feet.”

Along with not wanting to burden her parents with the cost of her higher education, Jasmin also considered the responsibility she shared in raising her younger sister, and distance from home became another determining factor in deciding which college to attend.

“My first choice was [a private Catholic school in northern California]. I just had problems with my financial aid...but that was my first choice. Even then it was hard on my parents because it was far, so considering [the out of state southwest college] – it wasn’t going to

be worth it...Initially when I wanted to do architecture I did plan on going out of state because I was interested in good schools...like in Boston. I hadn't really talked to my parents about that because it wasn't like my senior year and it wasn't official like this is what I wanted to study. But yeah for the most part, going out of state and going far was a big issue..."

"In what ways?"

"I'm going to say mostly because of my younger sibling; because you know my parents work a lot and like I told you, she was born when I was 9 and I had the responsibility – I took care of her and it made her dependent on me. And you know we've been close like that, and I guess it would be a big change and a lot harder on my parents if I were to leave and go far – you know helping with homework and stuff like that especially since my parents are mostly Spanish speaking. I'm going to say it was mostly because of having a younger sibling and having to be there for her."

"So it wasn't your parents saying 'no you can't go far away'?"

"Well yeah it was, but it was because of that, because 'you have your sister, your sister needs your help' and stuff like that. I guess also because my cousins didn't go out of state and they're still getting an education and they'd [parents] be like 'why? – I'm sure you can find a good school here'...they knew that I could get a good education here and I shouldn't have to go far."

I asked Jasmin if she thought her parents would have changed their mind if she had received a good financial aid package from the northern California college and she believed they would have come around. She also stated that she would have gone. Unfortunately (or fortunately) the decision was made for her. She did not receive a substantial enough aid package to be able to attend the school without burdening her parents, and so she chose a small private

college in southern California about forty minutes from the Los Angeles neighborhood where Jasmin lives, even though she was also accepted in two southern California campuses of the University of California (UC).

“So why did you choose [this school]?”

“Because of the money... Yeah, I actually didn’t get any financial aid package from [the two UC schools]... Because of that and it was already like May 1st and I had to choose so I went with that... I knew that [the small private southern California college] would give me more money and I’d be a lot better off and it’s closer.”

“So what made you decide to live on campus as opposed to commuting?”

“Well I always wanted to... and you know to be at home all the time and also to be going to school – I just don’t like it at all. I just didn’t want to be dealing with two – it’s like having two different lives. Like being at home and not just hearing what’s going on but having those responsibilities – those big responsibilities – then I’d rather be at school most of the time. I wanted to be involved in school. I want it to be a real college experience – like I’ve always imagined since elementary school... Yea, my cousins... well they live on campus and they just come home on the weekends. So they [her parents] kind of see it as that’s a good way to work it out – just come home on the weekends or when you could.”

Initially Jasmin envisioned herself living in a different state, far from home. But as the time approached for her to make a decision about what school she would attend, the notion of leaving home and her younger sister became a hard reality for her to reconcile. If she ventured too far away from home, she would be leaving her parents in a difficult situation since they depend so much on her to help care for her sister. She also struggled with the fact that because her parents were not fluent in English or fully familiar with the schooling system in the US, her

sister might have a harder time in school. Jasmin and her family seemed to have found a comfortable compromise in the small school just a forty-minute drive from home.

Being that Holy Trinity is a small all girl Catholic high school, with an almost all female faculty, the majority of whom are Latinas from the neighborhood, I was curious if and how attending this particular school helped Jasmin negotiate some of these difficult choices and decisions about her higher education. She shared with me her experiences with the retreats that each class participates in as a means for spiritual growth.

“I know spiritually a lot happened in the retreat experiences and in my leadership role with these. I know college was something I talked about. I talked about my sister and wanting to be that influence on her...like I told you ever since she was born it’s been me. My parents always relied on me...I guess the retreat experiences helped us let go and stay open and accepting the sacrifices and accepting the fact that it’s going to be challenging at times...Just the ability to like be in a community – you know we talked about it – to help each other out. I know that helped a lot, because being a small school we’re all so close to each other and we tell each other everything. And the help was always there even with the teachers...because at home they [her classmates] don’t have that. I guess they don’t have those experiences because they’re at home and those are the problems that they have with their brothers and their parents. I know our senior class got much closer after that.”

Faith and Catholicism play a central role in Jasmin’s life. For this reason, this particular high school provided her with a sense of comfort that, as mentioned earlier, is important in order for Jasmin to thrive. Although it had not been central to the questions I was asking, nonetheless she often introduced faith into the conversation.

“I think the main reason why I bring it up a lot is because that’s where I get the comfort. I told you like at home I was very independent and when I was younger, it’s not that I didn’t have support from my parents, but just the comfort wasn’t the same as it was in school. I’m not used to having something to say – like where I’m open to my parents – so like I’m on my own. If I needed something I would tell them, like if something was wrong – yeah I would tell them, but not to the point where I would tell them everything. So you know just having that comfort. At times it would be at a point where it didn’t feel right telling them and just knowing that at those retreats and in that environment – it was just comfortable. Yea I felt I could express myself very differently than at home; much more differently.”

Jasmin’s comments, while expressing her ability to find a “comfortable” space at school to share her thoughts, ideas and struggles, also speak to a conflict addressed earlier. Young Latinas struggle to make sense of life in two different worlds. The culture of the home often times does not match the culture of the school. Or the curriculum of the school does not reflect or value the knowledge and history of the home community. These young women need a “safe” place where they can “try on” and “try out” various identities, while still valuing, respecting and honoring the culture of the home. Jasmin seemed to find that “safe place” at Holy Trinity.

I asked Jasmin if she thought it was common for most young people, regardless of ethnicity, social class or language, to struggle with communicating with their parents. “Well yeah. Like especially with my mom. Well she didn’t grow up like that. Like she had expectations [placed on her]. I bet there wasn’t any time to just sit and talk you know, like at dinnertime. So that’s with her. My dad, like I said he is more understanding, but because he is hard working I could understand why he wouldn’t have time for it, but it’s not because –it’s just normal.”

“So you think there are families where parents talk to their kids?”

“Well yeah, but definitely not in mine.”

“What do you think those families look like? What allows for that to happen in a family?”

“I don’t know. I don’t want to say because they work maybe less than our parents or because they have more time, but I don’t blame my parents because I know that if it wasn’t for them I wouldn’t have gone to Holy Trinity. They try their best to give us what is within their reach so that we can have a better future.”

Again, Jasmin recognizes her parents’ sacrifices and indirectly points to the intersections of race, class and to some extent language, as possible explanations for why “our” parents are not able to communicate as openly with their children. Working class families, have less time to spend together. Many Latinos are working class, immigrant and non-English speaking. This however does not determine the value placed on education. One can infer from her statement that Jasmin is saying “they worked so hard (and thus were not always available to talk) so that I could have the education Holy Trinity afforded me”.

I asked her specifically what value she placed on attending an all girl school.

“Well I think the values wouldn’t have been the same...Even at retreats – I know that at [the coeducational Catholic high school across town], I had a friend who went there and...she told me that where they slept [during the retreat] it was like a big hall and they just slept on the floor with the men there in the same room...there was not like the personal comforting that you get from women because they’re your best friends. The area we slept in is what I remember most because without the teachers around at night, we were really able to talk about what was on our minds...I know with our classes, like the books we would’ve read, even if we did read the

same ones as we did, you know with the boys being there I probably would've gotten their perspective on the book and maybe my idea of not wanting to be controlled [from a conversation about the novel *The Handmaid's Tale*] might have been different because they would've been there and they would've said 'well he [a character in the novel] did this because of this and that, and that's the way it's suppose to be.'

"And you don't think that would've been helpful to you to have their perspective?"

"Probably – yeah because I mean we're graduating and we're going out in to the real world and there's men; women are not the only ones in the world. We have to find a way to compromise and find a way for the men to be happy and the women to be happy. I know in a way it would've helped, but I like leaving Holy Trinity with the idea of me being powerful, you know having that power over myself..."

Jasmin pointed out some of the disadvantages of attending an all girl school that taught her something about how women are valued in society. She played soccer but Holy Trinity does not have a soccer field so the team has to practice off campus.

"...like whenever we would hear that other high schools did have a soccer field, our coach would tell us 'you know it's because they have a guy's team that they have to have that'... Yeah just knowing that society doesn't value it because we're girl sports."

"And you feel that opened your eyes?"

"Well yeah! I noticed and I didn't think that was right."

The almost all female environment seemed to empower Jasmin. I shared with her some of the current research that opposes single-sex schooling and asked her what she might reply to the critics.

“Well I wouldn’t agree with them because like I said, in my case it did help me a lot. I like knowing that I know myself a lot better than I would have with men there...I probably wouldn’t have read those books and I probably wouldn’t have realized those things...I think it helped me a lot because like they say you can’t love another without first loving yourself. You’re more important. You’re suppose to know yourself before you can...so you can respect yourself...I think it’s helpful because it helps them [girls] become persons first – before worrying about men...just knowing our own expectations, our history and what we have to conquer.”

4.2.4 **Reflections on Jasmin**

From a very young age Jasmin assumed great responsibilities within her family. Having to care for a younger sibling at the age of nine is a charge most children are not burdened with. But most children do not have parents who are immigrants with limited English skills, who must work long hours, sometimes at more than one job, to give their family the best possible life. This, however, is Jasmin’s reality and she speaks of it with great pride and deep insight. It is what gives her strength.

Having to help her parents care for her younger sister allowed for a close relationship to develop between the two girls and it is precisely this relationship that bears heavy on Jasmin’s mind as she looks ahead to the next four years when she will be living away from home while attending college. She knows that her choice to live on campus does present some challenges for her parents in terms of her sister’s care while they work, nonetheless Jasmin is strong in her resolve that the choices she is making now will benefit her family in the long run. She like her two classmates does not see going to college as something she is doing solely for herself. Jasmin

is determined to graduate from college and pursue a career that will not only help to uplift her family, but her community as well. Jasmin has great pride in her family and her community as well. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that at eighteen Jasmin already identified as a Chicana, embracing the history of struggle that is associated with the term. Her strong identification with her cultural heritage is evidence that Chicana(o)/Latina(o) students who proudly embrace their biculturalism/bilingualism do achieve success.

4.3 Lulu

“‘Comfort is the enemy of growth.’ I really like that quote because it was how I felt. I wanted to go out of my comfort zone and see what the world had to offer outside of LA.”

These were the words Lulu said to me during our first interview. Like her classmate Jasmin, comfort was something she experienced during her four years at Holy Trinity, but for Lulu it was time to step out of that comfort zone and challenge herself to see what the world had to offer. Throughout our time together, I came to learn that Lulu is a risk taker and she labels herself “a dreamer” who is willing to do the work necessary to make her dreams come true.

As mentioned earlier, I met Lulu together with Jasmin at a lunch meeting I set up to explain the purpose of the study to both girls. I had also spoken to Lulu before our meeting on the telephone to introduce myself and to possibly recruit her to participate. During both the phone conversation and lunch meeting I found Lulu to be extremely polite and well mannered. There was a certain maturity to her that impressed me. She contacted me within a few days of our lunch meeting to inform me that she wanted to participate in the study and because it was summer, she was open to whatever scheduling requests I had for our interviews. We agreed to meet every other week for three interviews.

4.3.1 **Identity: “You can’t be overly independent and overly superior to other people. You have to find an even balance.”**

Lulu’s parents are from El Salvador. For this reason, when asked how she identifies herself in terms of her ethnicity, she replied:

“I guess I would have to say half Salvadoran, because that’s where my parents are from and half here.”

“Here...America?”

“Uh huh...Have you ever heard of the play *The American Dream*? (This is another name for the previously mentioned play *Simply Maria* by Josefina López.)...She [a character in the play] said – ‘Mexico is in my heart but America is in my blood’. So I thought that was a good thing because your parents are always in your heart, but then when you grow up...it gets added on to you like the culture here combined with the culture of your parents. It’s a combination of both I would say.”

Lulu is proud of her Salvadoran heritage. She equates being Salvadoran with having strong family values and strong faith, being hard working and having to struggle.

“I know that with my parents and everybody, when I go over there, they’re very much into their faith and being Catholic...I know they have mass a lot and everyone goes. Everyone finds time to go...I really like that, because I thought that shows dedication. That’s one of the things I love of being Salvadoran. But the part I don’t like so much – well there’s a lot of poverty over there in El Salvador. So I can understand why my parents didn’t want to be there anymore, because they wanted a better life. But I see that there are a lot of hard working people there. There are a lot of hardships there and they’re trying to overcome them, and they’re very strong people as well. And I think the strength and the pride in being Salvadoran comes from having to struggle to be there and once they come over here they still want to have that pride – to be like ‘yes I am Salvadoran and yes there’s a bunch of hardships there, but I came here and I made it better’. So that’s the part I like about being Salvadoran.”

Lulu believes the emphasis Salvadorans place on the family is another positive aspect of her culture. When I asked her what she thought were some of the major differences between U.S. culture and Salvadoran culture she replied:

“I think family’s more attached. You know here in America most teenagers leave home by like 18 when they go off to college. There they stay at home until they get married. And I guess here more people are more independent and they like to leave home earlier. There family’s like closer, more together all the time.”

Pride in her combined heritage is something Lulu draws her strength and determination from in order to fulfill her dreams of going to college. Much of what motivates Lulu is her recognition of the hardships she knows her parents have had to endure. She recognizes that as immigrants her parents have sacrificed a great deal in order to give her and her younger sister many of the opportunities they were denied. Both her mother and father arrived in the United States as teenagers and went to work immediately. Her father today works as a gardener and her mother is a housekeeper. Both speak some English, but Spanish is still the primary language spoken at home.

Lulu has a close relationship with her parents, especially with her mother. Because her mother was forced to go to work at such an early age, Lulu informed me that her mother is her strongest motivator.

“She just inspires me. She wants me to have everything of my own. She tells me ‘go to college and have your own career. Have your own money, your own place and be able to maintain yourself before you go into a relationship and plan to get married so if it doesn’t work out you are not depending on your spouse’.”

Lulu’s mother’s advice is not uncommon. Latina mothers, many of whom married young, often out of necessity, and who started a family early did not have opportunities to pursue personal interests or aspirations; therefore they want their daughters to experience a level of independence they were denied. Still, many of these mothers, especially those who are

immigrants, may not know how to help their daughters break free from those conventional constructions of gender that are often oppressive. Often, though perhaps not consciously, Latina mothers will give their daughters contradictory messages about the role of women (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006). Lulu shared a story that illustrates this point perfectly.

“My mom is funny, because she wants me to be like independent and all that [but] the other day was really funny because I was home and my boyfriend was there too and she wanted me to clean and he told me ‘oh I’ll help you’ [and] she’s like ‘aren’t you embarrassed because he’s helping you?’ He has hands. I replied, He can help me. He can help me mop and sweep.”

In finding the “humor” in her mother’s contradictions, Lulu is able to acknowledge that her mother is conflicted about what kind of woman she wants her daughter to be. While she wants Lulu to be financially independent, at the same time she has not been able to break free of the “traditional sexist cultural norms” (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006, p.50) she herself was brought up with. The ability to maintain a family and a household are traditional indicators of femininity in many Latino families. While Latino families may want their daughters to be educated and have careers of their own nevertheless, the daughter is criticized and judged less feminine if she refuses or resists the expectation that she also be able to care for the home and the family. Lulu’s mother joked that her daughter should be embarrassed for expecting her boyfriend, a male, to participate in those household activities that are the domain of the females in the family. Lulu’s reply, insisting that her boyfriend was equally capable of holding a mop and a broom, affirms her refusal to comply with unequal gender expectations. With a brief retort – “He has hands. He can help me.” – Lulu is challenging her mother to rethink her understanding of women’s roles.

While she is proud of her Salvadoran roots, Lulu also acknowledges that the situation for women in her parents’ homeland has contributed to her mother’s notions of femininity and the

role women have in society. I asked her what she thought were some of the significant cultural differences in regards to gender role expectations between the U.S. and El Salvador.

“Um I think like in terms of marriage, well like who you get married to – they want who you marry to be like from a good family background to be sure that the man will be able to take care of the woman...I see too that men are viewed like superior to women.”

“When you say ‘superior’ what do you mean?”

“I mean like they have more rights. Like the women are the ones who have to serve the men and then the men don’t serve anything back. I think they think they make the money for you to live and that’s enough; they shouldn’t have to give anything else back.”

Although she has been in a relationship with her boyfriend for six months, Lulu does not seem to be too concerned about the prospects of marriage.

“I think that if it happens – if you find the one that you think is the one, then you should go ahead and get married and if you don’t then you should live your life and if you find yourself being happy that way, that’s fine.”

Lulu is pushing boundaries in other ways as well. Her decision to apply to colleges outside of the Los Angeles area caused her father to rethink his conception of his daughter. Lulu shared that her father did not believe she would move away to attend college.

“My dad, he didn’t believe I was going to move out...He’s like ‘no you’re probably just going to go to Northridge and you’re going to live here’. I guess he was saying I’m like a dreamer to want to move out. He wanted to see it to believe it I guess. That’s how I changed his view. I did really well in high school and it will help to pay for my tuition in college. So I guess he is like ‘oh yea she can move out and be independent’...because like my cousin, she wanted to move out as well, but she didn’t end up doing that. She wasn’t able to do so...So now that

everything is set, I just came back from orientation [up north], and I was telling him about it and he's like 'Just do what you want to do. You know what's right for you. Do what you love.'”

Lulu imparts this information with a sense of pride. Because of her grades in high school she received a full scholarship to a small private Catholic college in northern California. She was able to prove to her father she was determined to see her dream through. His comments, suggest he has found a new respect and trust for his daughter as he assures her, she knows best what is right for her.

Lulu draws much inspiration from another female source besides her mother. Her aunt (her father's sister) also grew up in El Salvador and had dreams of becoming a lawyer. According to Lulu, her aunt studied for a while in El Salvador but then when a recruiter from a Canadian factory came looking for workers, her aunt jumped at the opportunity to leave the oppressive conditions in El Salvador. Lulu sees her aunt as independent and living life on her own terms. During a conversation about the role of women in Salvadoran society, as she explained the unequal status of the sexes in her parents' home country she shared these thoughts and then later explained the source of her beliefs.

“I'm really about women being independent, so I mean there shouldn't be an imbalance. I think it works best if there's an even balance, because both men and women contribute to our society.”

“Where do you think you got those ideas from? Do you think you learned that from family...from your Salvadoran background?”

“I do have an aunt that lives in Canada. She is very much independent and she thinks of herself and she does what she wants and she doesn't let anyone get in her way. I saw her as a

role model to like do what I wanted...she's always willing to take risks. She was studying to be a lawyer and I think that's great. [Also], she always said she was going to move out and she was going to get a better life. And so she did that. She moved out in to the city and was living on her own and I think she was studying. And then she decided to move to Canada, and even though she's working in a factory, she moved there. She knew she had to know English to get better jobs, so she did that. She knew what she wanted and she knew what she had to do to get it, and she did. That's what motivates me."

Obviously her aunt's perceived freedom and independent spirit are appealing to Lulu and something she aspires to have, however her next comments once again demonstrate the conflicting messages young Latinas receive in their families regarding the role of women.

"But then my mom, she very much caters to my dad for everything and I admire my mom for that. That's where I guess I found like a balance. Because I know...you can't be overly independent and overly superior to other people. You have to find an even balance."

Lulu's struggle to reconcile the conflicting feminine representations of her mother and her aunt further illustrate the fractured gender identities Latinas often grow up with. On the one hand she longs to be the free spirit she perceives her aunt to be, while at the same time her expressions of her mother demonstrate her appreciation for those women who can take care of their family. Lulu does not value one over the other, but rather seeks to embody both models of women; perhaps in the same way she seeks to embody the two cultures she has grown up with. While she treasures many aspects of her Salvadoran culture, she also acknowledges opportunities available to her, as a woman living in the U.S. that she perceives are not available to most women in El Salvador.

“I think here they’re more open with women. There’s a lot of support for women getting those higher jobs. So that’s what I mean by opportunities, like to be in business – it’s not just a man’s job to be like a CEO and stuff like that. I don’t see that much over there [El Salvador]. [There] the woman stays home, cooks, cleans and takes care of the kids. So that’s how I see it differently and that’s why I see more opportunities here.”

“So do you think over there, women can still do that but it’s just harder?”

“Yeah, I think it’s like more accepted here. We don’t see it as a bad thing. They [in El Salvador] don’t celebrate it as much as we do here...like my aunt, she’s very independent and she’s very proud of that. I know my parents are very proud of her, but other people there [in El Salvador] they don’t like it. They don’t make much of it.”

4.3.2 **Attending Holy Trinity: “I wouldn’t pick another school because they did give me a good foundation for going to college.”**

From my conversations with Lulu I learned that her experience of attending an all girl Catholic high school in a predominantly Latina/o community helped to further her beliefs in gender equity and empowerment.

Lulu and her two classmates often shared stories of the teachers at Holy Trinity and how so many of them served as inspiration and role models. Since many of the teachers were themselves graduates of the school and had grown up in the surrounding neighborhoods (and some still live there), the girls could identify with these women whose histories they saw as akin to their own.

“They were very much into being independent women. Like they showed us the celebrations of the first woman astronaut, women in congress and everything. They’re very

much into women's independence and expressing yourself...my teachers – they *showed* us independence as well, kind of as role models.”

The girls often spoke of the high expectations these teachers had for them and how demanding their classes were. One teacher in particular made a profound impression on Lulu.

“She was my English teacher my senior year – it was AP [Advanced Placement] English. She would amaze us sometimes how much she would read a book and how much she would analyze it. I guess she amazed me because like she was an English major and how well she knew what she was doing and I guess I thought to myself whatever I do I want to do it well and I want to be able to inspire others to be better. She would inspire me to be a better writer and I thank her for that. Because of her I became a better writer.”

“Is she one of the graduates of that school?”

“Yes she is...[and] another thing is she travels a lot like to Europe and I think that's so cool and I have always wanted to do that. That's another part of her that inspired me.”

“She seems to have a passion for what she does.”

“Yeah, what she's passionate about – she follows it. And she was able to do a lot. So that very much inspired me.”

Another teacher that seems to be a favorite among the girls is the U.S. History teacher Ms. Castillo. Lulu credits Ms. Castillo with also helping to improve her writing skills. In their U.S. History class the girls were expected to do quite a bit of essay writing in preparation, they were often reminded, for the kind of writing they could expect to be doing in their college courses.

When asked how the school also reflected the ethnic and socio-economic demographics of the community it served, Lulu felt the curriculum and other activities associated with school

were not particularly representative of Latino culture, however she saw the ethnicity of the girls and their socio-economic realities recognized in other ways.

“They [teachers and administrators] did show the importance of helping out the community and your family. So that’s how I think they brought it in...it’s more like ‘you can find your independence...’”

“and still give back to your family and to your community.”

“Yes.”

As with Jasmin, the service projects Lulu was required to participate in as part of her high school curriculum also influenced her to want to give back to her community.

“The first one [service project] was at my old [elementary] school and I helped out with students there. And then in my sophomore year I went to help out at a recreational park. And that’s where I guess I started liking volunteering, because it was with little kids. It was always fun helping them out. Some of them are really smart. I was in amazement. I guess that’s what I like, helping them out and that’s how I decided I was going to volunteer with children – at some place with children. So the following year I helped at [local hospital]. I liked that because the children there are not in the best situation because they’re in the hospital and away from home. I guess their childhood is taken away from them...that’s why I liked the things I felt. I was making a difference. [I was] able to bring them some joy and some [of the] comfort that they have at home...This year I helped out at a school by my house; it’s like a kindergarten and first grade. That was really fun because it was an after school program, and the girl there, the employee that I was helping, she was like ‘oh I’m so stressed out, there’s a lot of kids’. I would try to help her and she would thank me because I always made her job a lot easier, because those kids are *crazy* [laughter]. They would run up to me [and say] ‘give me a hug’. It helped me

grow more because I now have more patience.”

Along with the service projects, Lulu found that her core courses also addressed issues of social justice. In her English class, students read poetry that dealt with themes of difference and discrimination. In her U.S. History class, the colonization of the Americas was a topic that resonated with Lulu as she took issue with the way Native Americans were stripped of their culture.

“I remember from history class when the Spanish came over here and they just took over the land and how they discriminated against them [native people] and how they thought it was their land and it really wasn’t. I think that was the most interesting for me; seeing how unfair it was for them to just take over the U.S. and all of the lands they took from the Native Americans and how that came to ruin their culture. And actually in religion class this year we talked about the reservations and how they’re [Native Americans] confined to those places.”

Lulu explained that she believes her sense of justice stems from her Catholic upbringing and the values associated with her faith.

“I guess I see that injustice is not just between women and men, but in all of society, like with African Americans – it’s an injustice. I never liked that. I always thought that was stupid; it shouldn’t be like that. We’re all the same in God’s eyes. That’s how I believe; that everyone is equal – I guess from being Catholic. We are all children of God, and we should all be seen equally. And I remember a quote, I forgot where I read it, it said ‘if God would have wanted me otherwise, He would have made me otherwise’. So God made us the way we are. Everybody should be accepted for the way they are. So that’s how I guess I see equality – not just for men and women, but in matters of race also.”

“So do you attribute some of that to your Catholic education?”

“I do because I guess it showed us how it’s not just you have to go church, but it was very much trying to see how God...that we’re all the same in God’s eyes. And I learned that from 6th grade to 12th grade.” (Lulu entered Catholic school in middle school. Before that she attended a public elementary school in her neighborhood.)

As well as being a place where she was able to explore issues of social justice and equality through her classes and service project, Lulu also described Holy Trinity as a place where young women had a voice.

“We are a Catholic school and we still had our religion classes...and there were opportunities to be involved in the church, so they did emphasize that. But they also promoted independence and leadership opportunities...they encouraged us to be involved in class and like to participate and they made us feel like our opinions did matter so we voiced them.”

Lulu explained that because Holy Trinity is a small school and most of the girls who attend are Latinas (either Mexican American or of Central American backgrounds), there is a sense of family at the school that lends to feelings of confidence and comfort.

“It felt comfortable, like most people were from a Latin background so they knew about the food and how our parents are regarding morality. We found that most of them are strict; like we have curfews and there are certain places they don’t want us to go. And knowing that the person that was next to you has gone through stuff that’s similar to you like struggling with money and everything – so I guess that’s the closeness that we found. Like we all have brown hair and look a little similar...so that’s why I found it like family.”

While the girls at Holy Trinity came from diverse Latin American backgrounds, it seems that they were unified by the cultural knowledge they shared in common rather than any

differences that resulted from their families' countries of origin.

"I think most of them [girls at HT] were Mexican and Salvadoran. I know some of them were mixed, but it didn't make a difference. Like I know one girl was from Belize, but it didn't really make a difference because we knew we were all Latina; that's how we always found a bond."

Lulu recognized that access was one of the most important advantages of attending Holy Trinity. At HT girls have access to teachers, to other peers, to clubs and to athletics. Although she concedes that these resources are available in other educational settings, access to them is easier at HT. When asked if there were certain things she was able to do at HT that perhaps she would not have been able to do at another school, say a public or coeducational school she replied:

"I don't think there really was. I think we had a lot of the things, like clubs and sports and we all had the opportunities, but I think it was easier to join them because it was a smaller school and it would be more comfortable to join. Like if it was a new sport for you, the girls would encourage you – 'it's okay, try it out'. So that's why it would be more comfortable. It was competitive but it was like they would give you a view like 'yeah compete with us so that you can show your talent'."

"How do you think it would've been different in another setting?"

"I guess because it would be bigger and I don't think there would've been as much care because if it were a bigger school there would be so many people wanting to join the club or join the sport, that you wouldn't have gotten the opportunity to join it."

Lulu's comments speak not only to the easier access to resources and extra curricular activities enjoyed by the girls at HT, but it also sheds light on the nature of the interactions that

take place as perceived by the students. According to Lulu, while participation in athletics still promotes competition, the fact that the girls encourage each other to “try out” regardless of their skill level demonstrates a kind of congeniality that exists among the students, allowing for girls who perhaps in another environment would be intimidated to join an athletic team; at HT they feel more comfortable taking risks.

The girls' willingness to take risks extended beyond just trying out for athletic teams. Lulu echoed some of Jasmin's feelings about how the absence of boys in the classroom allowed the girls to participate more openly in class.

“So what do you think would have been different if there were boys in your school? Let's say it would still be small, still Catholic but boys were allowed to attend – how do you think it would be?”

“Maybe there'd be more distractions I guess, but then again I think boys can add a lot to class. There are benefits – pros and cons to it. I never really have thought of how it would have been. I guess I have been happy with the all girls thing and so I didn't think about it very much but I know there would probably be more distractions. It wouldn't be as comfortable. Like with girls we feel more comfortable talking about whatever we want and I guess with boys around we wouldn't be as comfortable.”

The fact that Holy Trinity is a small, all girl Catholic high school allowed for a greater exchange of social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; 2001; 2004) to take place among the girls.

“Well at my school I had many resources and people that told me about AP classes and colleges...and they [other students] were all wanting to go to better schools, like really good schools. I don't know if I would've had that in a different school. That's why I really like it and I wouldn't pick another school because they did give me a good foundation for going to college.

4.3.3 **Choosing a College: “My family shapes my dreams to be successful in life.”**

Lulu applied to ten colleges and was admitted to nine. She applied to three University of California (UC) campuses, three private colleges and two campuses of the California State University (CSU) system. Five of the schools she applied to are in northern California. At first her parents were resistant to the idea of her moving away to attend school. Her father thought she could live at home and attend a Cal State campus about an hour drive from where she lives and just commute. Two of her cousins attend that same school.

In choosing a college, location and cost seemed to be the biggest factors Lulu considered. She, like her other two classmates, did not want to burden her parents with any more educational costs. She recognized the sacrifices they made to send her to Holy Trinity and she had a younger sister who would be attending the school soon. Lulu, on the advice of one of her cousins already in college, looked to find a way to pay for college herself. She had good grades in high school and this led to two of the nine schools that admitted her offering her a full scholarship for four years. One of the schools was a northern California UC campus and the other was a small private Catholic college, also in northern California. Lulu chose the latter.

“That one cousin she was always about not having to pay for education. She says ‘there is help out there – you shouldn’t have to make your parents pay for it’...that’s how she saw it. So that’s what she told me – go somewhere where your education is paid.”

“Is that one of the things that influenced your decision to attend [the small private Catholic college]?”

“It did - very much so because I didn’t want to make my parents pay because they had already paid for my high school [education] and so in a way I saw it as being independent – not having to rely on them as much. So that’s why I took it as well.”

Although Lulu received a “full ride” from one of the UC campuses as well, the private college she chose was more appealing to herself and her parents. Her parents liked the fact that she would be continuing with a Catholic education and that the school was small and there were three other girls from Holy Trinity who would also be attending in the fall. Her mother attended a special information meeting for students and parents hosted by HT and visited the campus as well.

“Yes my mom did [visit it] and she very much liked it and my dad liked it because I guess it is a Catholic school and so he liked the environment and one other thing they liked about it is that there are three other girls going up there with me so it’s like ‘oh she is not going to be alone; she is going to know somebody there’.”

Lulu was not accepted to her first choice – another northern California UC campus. She called it her “dream school” so I asked her if she *had* been admitted there but would not have been given a full scholarship – would she still have chosen that school instead of the private college.

“I thought about that too and I think I would have gone there [UC campus] but I wouldn’t have made my parents pay for everything. I would have just gotten a loan so I could pay it back later. But my parents very much liked [the private] school and I think that’s where they would have wanted me to go. They very much like the Catholic education and they know it’s a Jesuit school and they know that they help out the community a lot so that’s why they really liked it.”

Lulu’s remarks highlight her concern for her parents’ financial well being. She like her other classmates considered seriously the financial strains their educations were placing on their families and looked for ways to help if not eliminate the strain completely, at least alleviate it as much as possible. The private college Lulu chose to attend provided generous financial

packages to the girls of HT. (During a visit to HT I met the senior class valedictorian and she informed me that she had been accepted to both UC Berkeley and UCLA but chose the smaller private college Lulu is attending because they offered her a full scholarship as well.)

Lulu's parents may have finally accepted the fact that their eldest daughter is moving some 300 miles away to attend college, but they were not thrilled with idea when Lulu first began to discuss it with them.

"So what did your parents have to say when you told them that some of the schools you were applying to were far away?"

"They didn't really say much, because I knew they wanted me to stay close and that was their thing. They told me that if I would go to [a nearby CSU campus] I would have to stay home and I would just drive over there and I was absolutely like crazy because it's really far and I don't want to drive over there. They really wanted me to stay close by because they still wanted me to be at home at least the first year I guess. But I told them like no – I was going to apply to where I wanted to and we'd see how it went. So when they heard about [the private Catholic college] they liked that school and they were comfortable with that one and I think that's why they allowed me to go there...and they were okay with me going all the way up there. Even though I know they're still kinda scared about it. But they're letting me do it 'cause they like the part that it's a full ride and that it's Catholic, so all of those things outweighed them being scared about it. That's why they allowed me to do it."

It is interesting that Lulu sees her parents as "allowing" her to go to the private college. Earlier in her statement she seemed determined to apply to the schools of her choice and go wherever she was accepted. She chose to attend a school that not only would exempt her parents from having to pay for her education, but it is also the school that appealed to them the most.

She received a full ride from one of the large UC campuses in northern California, but Lulu chose the school her parents also liked.

For Lulu college has always equaled independence.

“I feel that’s what I always wanted, cause I always wanted to be independent...and that’s how I found it – moving to college. Because I felt I can still have a Salvadoran culture and take it with me somewhere else, and share it with some other people instead of being stuck in one place.”

Although Lulu believes family is one of the most cherished aspects of her Salvadoran culture, she views leaving home to attend college not as an abandoning of her family, but rather as a way of “taking care” of her family.

“I think my biggest goal in life is to make my parents proud and help them out, of course. That’s why I feel I can move out and do stuff like that, ‘cause I’m doing things to improve myself trying to find opportunities so I can be successful and then help them out. So they’re always in my mind, that’s how I keep them. Then I mix that in with opportunities like being here in America, like going to the university and trying to find a good job. That’s how I balance it out. It is like the motivation – like my family and my culture I bring it into the things I do here. I guess it’s like my drive; the thing that helps me get there.”

“Now do you think you got that from growing within the Salvadoran cultural experience of your parents, or do you think you got that more from living in the U.S., or is it a little bit of both?”

“I think it was the opportunities offered here in America and wanting to help out my family; the stories they told me of how hard they had to work back then and all of the sacrifices they made – like risking their lives to come over here. That’s why I guess what motivated me a

lot was to want to do stuff for them and make sure I am successful so I can give them a better life, so they don't have to work so much.”

Although Lulu has stated that she sees going to college as an opportunity to exercise her independence, she also sees it as a way of possibly changing her parents' status. Along with experiencing the world outside of Los Angeles, college is a means for bettering her life and in the process bettering her family's quality of life as well. For this reason Lulu gives herself “permission” to leave home. Her motives for leaving are not selfish. The opening paragraph of the personal statement she wrote for her college applications states this quite clearly.

“ *‘Todo es para usted mi hija, todo es para usted.’* These words mean that everything is for me. They were said by my mother and they are the words that are permanently within my mind. These few words have become my inspiration, my motivation, and they are the core of my determination. These words are what derive meaning to me and my family. They illustrate all of my parents' hard work and all the sweat and back aches they went through so that I could have the stepping stones to a successful future. With these words, my family shapes my dreams to be successful in life.”

4.3.4 **Reflections on Lulu**

Lulu has strived to prove to her parents that she can be independent. She recounted to me with great pride how hard she worked to get good grades in high school so as to hopefully get scholarship money to pay for college. By receiving a full ride to two colleges in Northern California she was able to demonstrate to her father that her resolve to go away to study was firm. Lulu, like her two classmates, struggles to make sense of the conflicting messages received at home regarding gender role expectations. She credits her mother with being her strongest

supporter, yet recognizes that her mother too is conflicted about the kind of women she wants her daughter to be. But Lulu is challenging both her parents to see her as the woman *she* dreams of being – independent yet grateful and loyal to her family. While she admires her Salvadoran aunt's independence and adventurous spirit, she also appreciates the care her mother gives to her family.

Lulu is thankful for the opportunities her high school gave her to develop her voice and find a balance between the pride she feels for her Salvadoran heritage and the gratitude she feels for living in a country that provides several opportunities to her as a woman. Though she very much wants to be perceived as independently minded, even she looked for a way to assuage her parents' concerns about her moving away to school. She chose the school they approved of and that provided them with a sense of comfort.

4.4 **Jordan**

“I would like to leave and learn everything I can then come back to help – help make it better.”

Jordan is about helping people. She is happiest when she is contributing to make the world around her a little better. This was my impression the first time I met Jordan. Like the other girls in the study, Holy Trinity’s principal Sister Marta referred me to Jordan. I had spoken to her briefly on the phone to introduce myself and briefly explain the purpose of the study. We agreed to meet a couple of days later at a café she recommended close to her house. She mentioned it was a favorite spot amongst several of her HT teachers, whom she was well acquainted with as Jordan is the kind of student teachers dream of; she is that rare student who truly loves being at school studying, practicing with her athletic teams, or simply helping out in whatever capacity she can. On the day of our first meeting she was coming from Holy Trinity where she had been helping out all morning. It was already mid July, a month after her graduation, and she was still spending much of her free time at her former high school. As I spent more time getting to know Jordan, I learned that Jordan draws great satisfaction from serving others.

During that first meeting I was immediately impressed by Jordan’s self-confidence. She struck me as having a deep wisdom not commonly found in someone of her age. I would soon learn that her wisdom was born of remarkable resilience and strength that comes from growing up in a community that struggles. We talked about the neighborhood and I shared with her about my time growing up in the area and the journey that brought me back there to teach. She agreed that the community is often portrayed unfavorably in the media, causing outsiders to form negative stereotypes of the people who live there, but that despite various problems, it was still a great place to grow up in.

4.4.1 **Identity: “Hispanic...mainly because I was brought up with the Mexican culture**

Like her two classmates, Jordan’s parents are immigrants. Her parents are from Mexico. Her father, who passed away when Jordan was thirteen, was from an eastern coastal state and her mother is from central Mexico. Jordan’s mother only attended elementary school in Mexico and went to work as a teenager. She was about twenty when she came to the United States. Jordan’s father who was considerably older than her mother, most likely had a bit more formal education than her mother. Jordan was not absolutely certain of this but she remembers seeing a diploma of his hanging in the house. Jordan and her two older brothers were all born in the United States.

When I asked Jordan how she identified herself in terms of her ethnicity she replied:

“Hispanic...mainly because I was brought up with the Mexican culture. I’ve known that my whole life, so that’s what I identify with...like the whole family is also Mexican. So as long as I can remember, it was the Mexican culture and Mexican traditions – all the *pozole* every Sunday, the *Tres Reyes* every January. We just always had that culture and the celebrations – that Mexican culture.”

For Jordan, faith is also a central feature of her Mexican heritage.

“Growing up we had religion as a major part of our lives. That was always important. Every Sunday going to church – even the whole family – you would always hear of them, some going at six in the morning to a certain church or for big celebrations we would all meet up at one church together as a big family.”

As is common within some Mexican families, Jordan’s extended family network is large. She has several cousins and like in most large families, the generations begin to overlap. She explained that some of her female cousins are significantly older than she and so she refers to them as aunts. This is a common practice in Mexican families as the first generation of cousins

are referred to as *primas(os)/hermanas(os)* (cousins/siblings). I shared that several of my first cousins' kids call me *tía* (aunt). Jordan explained that for her this was another important aspect of Mexican culture – respect for elders.

“...[W]e treat them like elders – they know a lot of things. They’re wise and they say ‘Family is important no matter what. They’re always number one because they’ll always be there for you...family is the most important part of your life. Just always remember where you came from. Yes you might grow up and live in a White area and everything, but you know who your family is’.”

With these words I understood the confidence and self-assuredness Jordan exhibited at our first meeting. At that meeting she expressed a great sense of pride in her community that I admired and identified with. That pride came from the elders in her family who taught her to always value “where she came from.” However, the elders also provided Jordan with some conflicting messages regarding her role as a woman in the family, in the community and in society as a whole.

“How do you see the relationship between men and women in your particular family and in the Hispanic culture?”

“Just from my experience with the Hispanic culture, I can tell with my older aunts, you see the difference, like the males are more dominant, they control more things. With my younger aunts and their husbands you can see the difference, like everything is even and they both share responsibilities in the household. As opposed to the older ones, the husband makes the money, he keeps charge of everything and the wife just takes care of the kids.”

“Now those younger aunts were they born in Mexico or were they born here?”

“They were born here.”

“Do you think that has something to do with the fact that in their marriages it’s more equal or do you think it’s because of something else?”

“I think so, because in Mexico, like I know it’s the idea that men are supposed to take care of the household whereas here in the United States you know there’s that sense of freedom like you can do anything. I think the women are more likely to take responsibilities in the family.”

In Jordan’s home, the interactions between her parents seemed to closely mimic the traditional interactions between men and women that she associates as characteristically Mexican. Before his passing, Jordan’s father was the sole person in charge of the family’s finances, even though her mother also works. Her father’s passing has forced the family to make several adjustments that have impacted Jordan directly and will be discussed later. For many Latinas, our mothers’ lives provide us with our first glimpse into our possible futures. However, as we grow older and “bump up” against other worlds and other images of women that extend and expand our perceived potential, the “possible self” we fashioned from our mothers’ example is also broadened. Growing up witnessing her mother’s situation motivated Jordan to take advantage of the educational opportunities presented to her.

“You know you always hear people say ‘oh you get to high school and then you slack off and drop out’, but I was always working hard since the beginning. I knew – no I’m not going to do that. I’m going to work hard and finish all four years and go to college...my mom she didn’t have that education and she’s kind of like stuck in her job because she can’t go somewhere higher without an education. So I saw that and I don’t want to end up like that so I’m going to get that higher education and have more choices in life.”

Jordan, like Jasmin and Lulu, recalls her mother advising her to stay in school so as to achieve financial independence.

“[Mom will say,] ‘Maybe it’s not worth everything to be a housewife. Maybe you should go on to college and get your career’.”

Life in the U.S. for first generation immigrants is economically challenging and, though back home in their countries of origin it may not have been necessary for the women to work, in the U.S., the family’s economic survival is almost dependent on it. As such all of the girls’ mothers work outside of the home. But as was discussed in a previous chapter, although the mothers may work and are contributing to the household’s financial stability, they may still keep traditional beliefs regarding the division of labor within the home.

All three girls equate living in the United States with greater opportunities for them as women. They all recounted evidence from their families and communities that, for them, demonstrated the difference in attitudes towards women’s freedom and equality between their elder relatives who were born and raised in Latin America and the younger family members born and/or raised in the U.S. Latinas like myself and the three young women in this study continuously struggle to rewrite those traditional patriarchal scripts of subordination that we have inherited from our mothers all the while struggling to honor, respect and learn from those familial and community pedagogies that have provided us with strength and resilience to face other challenges.

Although Jordan’s mother has been the primary wage earner in the family since her husband’s passing, and she encourages her daughter to pursue higher education, she continues to stress to Jordan that the primary responsibility of maintaining the house belongs to the woman.

“Just like with the chores, I mean my mom would tell me to do something, I’d do it and then I’ll tell her, why can’t my brothers do it? ‘Because you’re the girl’. Well that doesn’t mean anything to me. One of my brothers he had a son, he dropped out of school and I’ll tell her – I’m the one going to school, I’m busy doing this, he’s not doing anything. ‘Well he’s busy, you’ll have to do it’ and that really bugs me – the differences like that. ‘You’re the female so you have to do all the house chores’.”

“Both your brothers live at home?”

“Yes they do.”

“So are they expected to do the dishes also?”

“They’ll tell me, ‘Jordan it’s time to do the dishes’ I’m like yeah, yeah later – you can do it.”

“Does your mom put that on them too?”

“Not really, she doesn’t really force them. She’ll mention it to them but she’ll nag me to do it. ‘Oh Steve, do the dishes’ but if he doesn’t do it she’ll leave it alone or she’ll keep constantly on me to do the dishes...Like she’ll understand if they don’t want to do it, but *I should* do it.”

“Because you’re the girl.” These are the words many of us Latinas have heard for most of our lives. Regardless of whatever other endeavors we may be involved with, the message remains the same, “because you are a woman you have twice the work”. I joked with Jordan how I too felt I had grown up with this phrase inscribed on my forehead. I explained how although my mother raised me alone without any financial or moral support from my father and how although she had struggled as a woman to gain respect and just compensation for her skills and abilities at her job, she too had not been able to “shake off” the “because you’re a girl” script. I

revealed to Jordan how angry I would get as a young woman (and still do) whenever we had family gatherings. The women would make all of the preparations and do all of the work (and still do) and my mom would say “Okay the men eat first.” In her job and in her role as a single mother she took one step forward, but with that one statement I always saw her as taking us both two steps back.

Despite Jordan’s resistance to these sexist expectations that unfortunately are still very much a part of Latino culture, like many of us, she still wants to be a good daughter. But because she refuses to compromise her interests and aspirations and continues to maintain a very active life, she is forcing her brothers to assume some of the responsibilities that traditionally would fall upon her as the only girl in the house. She revealed that out of necessity she and her brothers will often “trade off” some of these responsibilities in an effort to make life a little easier for their mother.

“Well, I know I have responsibilities at home. My mom’s working all day. She’s been working about 30 years so I know when she gets home...she’s tired so it’s like I know I don’t really want to do this but I could clean so she can rest on the weekends. So I’ll take that responsibility so she can relax a little bit. Or even with my brothers – I’ll say oh I’ll watch the baby so you can clean the living room. We’ll trade off on things and so like my oldest brother will say ‘Oh I’m going to bring these things for dinner so you can cook them so that my mom doesn’t have to go buy anything. So we’ll just trade off like that. And so now that I have a part time job, me and my brother will switch off – ‘Oh I’ll buy the ingredients you can cook it’. So we all take a little responsibility in the house.”

Jordan’s responsibilities in the home extend beyond just the “usual” chores she is expected to do. She informed me that since her father’s passing when she was just thirteen, she

has been for the most part in charge of paying the bills at home.

“...Like in my house I’m in charge of the finances. When my mom’s check comes in I take care of it. I pay the bills, I keep track of everything...When my dad passed away – well he used to do all of that and my brothers were – well it’s not that they were irresponsible but they wouldn’t pay attention, so I was like okay I’ll just learn and do it.”

4.4.2 Choosing a College: “So I think you have to choose your family or your better opportunity. Sometimes that’s a hard choice.”

The sense of responsibility Jordan has for her family weighed heavy on her mind as she made decisions about where she would attend college. From our first meeting I recognized in Jordan an adventurous spirit. She seemed ready to take on the world. She, like Lulu and Jasmin, wanted to attend a college outside of the Los Angeles area. Jordan had her sights on a school in San Francisco but conversations with family members and the situation at home caused her to rethink her choices.

“I was planning to go up north and I was talking to my aunts about it and [one] said ‘you’ll have to think about what’s going to happen to your mom, you know your older brother, he’s always working constantly, and so you know...he’s focused on that, your other brother has a son he’s focused on...you’re the only one for your mom right now so you’re going to have to...’ like they were telling me to think about that too, to take into consideration what I’m going to leave behind, how I’m going to leave everything behind – like how is everything going to stay.”

“And how do you feel about that?”

“Well, I feel that my brothers should take that responsibility. I’ve taken it for four years,

they can take the reigns a little bit.”

Jordan feels she has made a compromise by deciding to attend college very close to home. Nonetheless, she has plans to move out of her parents’ house possibly in her second year of college. She and another friend have discussed it and she appears to be quite determined to see these plans through.

“If anything I’m not moving up north. I’m still here in Los Angeles. I’ll come home and make sure everything is okay.”

She explained that her aunts’ words gave her pause and therefore by living at home for her first year of college she can help everyone with the transition for when she finally moves out.

“I hadn’t really thought of it that closely...at that conversation I was really thinking about it – well if I do just pack up and leave right now what’s going to happen? How is my mom going to continue to do everything? I’ll kind of be worried if I’m living up there like are my brothers doing everything? Is everything on time? Now at least I feel I can kind of prepare them – like you know this is when the bills arrive make sure you’re on track. I feel like I have more time to prepare them and myself – you know I’m not in charge anymore, leave it in their hands, and make sure that they’re capable of doing everything.”

It seems that her father’s death affected more than just Jordan’s plans for college. She shared with me that her eldest brother (who graduated from an all boys Catholic high school in the same neighborhood) received a full scholarship to a prestigious Midwestern university but turned it down because it was the year their father died and their mother asked him to stay at home. He is now working at an amusement park and trying to finish his degree at a local college.

“My mom feels like, she knows I can still take care of things, but she still feels that there should be a man in the house. And so right now that’s my brother.”

“And had he talked to you about that? How he feels about that?”

“Not really. We don’t talk too much like that. I think he feels that probably wasn’t the right choice because now he’s working full time and going to school...and so I feel like he sees me now going to college and feels like ‘that could’ve been me four years ago’.”

“Did you ever talk to him about wanting to go to San Francisco?”

“Yes, and he said ‘well if you can afford it and find the means, then go for it’. He always said ‘don’t worry about what mom says – go and do what you want to do’, because he knew that I wanted to leave. Obviously he knew how my mom would react, so he just told me ‘do what you want, do what you feel is right not what mom says’.”

Jordan revealed that she did not think she could have passed up the opportunity her brother did, but recognized that as Latinos, our family’s well being plays a large role in our decisions about our individual futures.

“I think it all comes back to that relationship I think Hispanics have to their family...to make sure they’re okay. I think that’s probably what held him back.”

“So how do you feel about that? Do you think that’s something positive in our culture?”

“I think it’s kind of great in some aspects. We’re not leaving our elders behind. However in this situation you know everything that you’ve learned – like take care of your family – it’s telling you now listen to your mom and take care of her but then you know you have your own education – like this is a big opportunity – a full ride scholarship – it’s not going to come across again. So I think you have to choose your family or your better opportunity. Sometimes that’s a hard choice. I think I would’ve taken the college. And I think I would’ve

known – yes she might think she needs me, however...Like if my brother had gone I think I would've been fine taking care of everything. If I were my brother I would've known this is the reason my mom sent me to high school to get all of this. So if I had the opportunity – I would've taken it.”

Clearly it is difficult to know how one would react in that situation. Jordan seems certain that she would not have passed up the opportunity to go to a well-respected college with a full scholarship. However, when faced with the decision of whether to follow her own dreams of studying in San Francisco or staying at home and attending a college close by, she chose to stay so as to spare her mother and her family any stress. The fact that she did not receive a “full ride” seemed to help rationalize her decision to stay. Just like the other girls in this study, Jordan did not want her college education to be a financial burden on her family.

4.4.3 **Attending Holy Trinity: “My new ‘step’ family since freshman year.”**

Jordan’s father died when she was in the 8th grade and she admits that his passing affected her performance in school that year. It was an obviously difficult time for a girl her age, as she remembers not wanting to be at home very much. She credits Holy Trinity with providing her with a “home away from home”.

“[I was] mostly adjusting to my life at that time and so the school was a little haven for all of that – you know focus on my school work and do different activities.”

“How do you think it would've been at a different school after having experienced this?”

“I probably would have gone down a completely different road you know. Like Holy Trinity’s atmosphere is very loving and welcoming and we had that family and at that time I wasn’t really associating with my family; I was distancing myself from them. I distanced myself

from them but I had this other family that I put myself into. And I think that in a public school I wouldn't have had that other family and so I probably would've done...I don't know what...so I guess that at the school, [I went] from my family to this other family that I felt welcomed in – my new 'step' family since freshman year.”

That sense of family is something all three girls expressed feeling at Holy Trinity.

“At HT the main word that we use to describe it is '*familia*'.”

“*Familia* and not family?”

“Yeah – *familia*. In the beginning I thought that's so cheesy – it's not true and then as the years progressed I said it *is* true we're all a *familia* here, me and my classmates, they're my sisters. Even the younger ones – they're young but that's okay they're still my family and we're all friends here. And the relationship we have with our teachers – it's just a nice group of people.”

Jordan concurs with her two classmates that because several of the teachers at HT are also graduates of the school and come from similar families and communities as those of the students, the girls feel comfortable talking with them about various things.

“I think where the teachers came from, I think they realize what the environment is. The neighborhoods aren't strong near the school and they can see, you know who the students are, what their race is, so I think they can realize the trouble we are going through. So they'll always be a part of us making sure that no matter what, we still feel that empowerment – that we can do what we want or we can choose what we want.”

One teacher in particular, Ms. Delgado who grew up in my old neighborhood, was able to relate her story to the girls about the struggles she faced when it was time to decide if she would leave home to go to college.

“Well Ms. Delgado, she didn’t appear to be Hispanic. She’s a little light skinned but with dark hair – but the way she would speak to us – she was so empowering! She would speak in English and put some Spanish words in there sometimes when she was talking individually to us. We would like it because that’s how our family talks. They’ll speak Spanish and mix in a little English here and there – we would identify with it. She went to UCLA on a full scholarship so we were like ‘Wow, you’re a genius’...She felt those same pressures from her mom. I don’t recall how many brothers and sisters she has but her mom was always saying ‘keep the family together’ and she would tell us that she knew that’s how her mom felt but she also knew that her mom wanted her to go farther in life so she met some of the demands, like she was there for family outings and things like that, but she was also going to focus on her school work. She dormed in college and so she spent her time there, but on the weekends she’d make time to go with her family and meet with the other part of her life that she had to attend to and she just made that balance – ‘yes I’m going to focus on all my school work like I need to, but I’m going to make this time for my family because they are also important’.”

Hearing her teacher speak the language of her home and community and knowing that this person also went to a prestigious university on a full scholarship reinforced in Jordan and her classmates that yes, people who come from their neighborhoods, who look and speak like them are successful. More importantly for these girls is the fact that this person chose to come back to her neighborhood and teach at her old high school.

“The teachers who live in the area, they always pushed us harder because they knew where we come from. We identified with them the most because we could see – you lived here, you went to this high school and look where you are. You are like our idols...you know the people who came here [to HT] say to us ‘you can do this and this and this...’ but we can actually

see them doing it...like they're proof of it. So I think that's what really spoke to us. That's more powerful than just telling you to do it. You can see it...they were always telling us – 'yes you're a minority, yes you're a girl, but you know what, go far in life, but always remember your family, remember where you came from. Like Ms. Delgado – she came to this school, she grew up here, she went to UCLA and instead of going to a rich place to teach, she came back here because she wants to help change things and make them better...this is where you came from so something good must be happening here.'"

Like her two classmates, Jordan also found Ms. Castillo, the history teacher, to be extremely helpful and encouraging. Jordan remembers Ms. Castillo including the history of Latinos in her classes.

"Ms. Castillo, I only had her for two years. She's also Hispanic. She's a little older so I saw her more as an advisor for everything. She was always so encouraging – like 'strive hard no matter what'. I kind of struggled in her AP history class with writing so she would be there to help...when she would do presentations she would include the history of the area...she was talking about some of the old history of the area – you know it was not covered because it's not a main part of history, but she would tell us about all the things that happened here... And so for us it was like – 'it's not normally in the book and you're teaching us here about our neighborhoods, our Hispanic neighborhoods' so that was always great."

What also adds to the sense of family at Holy Trinity is the atmosphere of cooperation and encouragement that the girls have all expressed feeling.

"Everybody encourages everybody. I remember I did bad on a test and my friend said 'don't get mad at me, but why didn't you study?' It wasn't a competition like trying to get higher than somebody, but instead it was more encouraging like 'come on let's go together here'

it's not one over the other. It was more like everyone striving to get higher together."

Once again, Jordan credits the teachers of HT with helping to foster cooperation among the students.

"You know we weren't going to let somebody do terrible and leave them there. We were all going to help each other. Our teachers were always telling us to help each other – 'you're only as good as the person next to you, so help each other to get there together'."

Although she has been attending Catholic school for most of her education, Jordan assumes the culture of public schools does not encourage the kind of cooperation she describes above.

"At another school I think I would've been more – well I'm self motivated now, but it probably would have been a lot more difficult not having that support system around me, having people there to encourage me all the time. I think it would've been lonely...I don't think it's that kind of community in a public school. It's just like go for yourself and try to make it, whereas in a private school it's like everybody here, we're together, we're all trying to get the same thing."

"Do you think that's common in any small private school or do you think that being a Catholic school or being this particular school with these particular teachers and these particular girls made it different?"

"I think it did because I think, like my class we're all – the majority were Hispanic so we all identified with each other, you know, even with the one's who weren't Hispanic were welcomed...I think all of us as individuals – we just made it better. We all strived for that...you have your family, but this is your other family so this is just as important as that family. So everyone takes care of the family. If there are problems – we'll fix it."

All three girls expressed that they felt comfortable attending a small all girl high school.

Class size and the absence of boys seemed to be key factors that influenced the level of comfort they felt. Although at eighteen, Jordan exudes self-confidence and maturity, she attributes it to her ability to develop socially through the support and encouragement she received at Holy Trinity.

“What do you think it would have been like for you – that person that you were at 14 – to enter a school of three or four thousand?”

“I would’ve been tremendously shy. I was shy enough in my first year so...

“Really?! (laughter) I find that a little hard to believe.”

“I probably wouldn’t be as vocal as I am now or as comfortable with myself as I am now. You know the smaller classroom it helps to – like you don’t get lost. In a smaller classroom everyone’s ideas get heard...it’s not a big group so it’s not as intimidating. And so when we were younger we got to keep growing with that – like learning how to voice our opinions, how to stand up for ourselves, so when we go into those big rooms we know who we are, we know how to voice our own opinions.”

“So you feel that four years in that small environment helped to give you a little bit of courage?”

“Definitely.”

Along with providing the girls with a sense of family and comfort, attending a small all girl high school also fostered a capacity for building support networks and social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 1997; 2001; 2004) that resulted in a college-going attitude among most of the girls.

“I think the benefit of having this small group of girls was that we all felt the same way – we don’t want to be held back by society. Not to be dramatic but it was kind of like us against

the world. Like we're all minorities and everybody's going to put us down. It's like – you know what – let's all strive together and push each other and make sure we can achieve what we want. And I think with boys at the school they may think 'well you know you're girls so eventually we're going to do better than you'. So you have those ideas when there are boys and girls together – the boys may have that negative attitude towards the girls. Maybe if you have the boys, they're doing everything instead of the girls. And so I think it's not easier but better to have that support there – having a group of people who are all striving for the same thing."

I introduced Jordan to some of the literature that criticizes single sex schooling and also asked her to respond to some of the critiques.

"I would say I could understand their point of view. I can see how it might be viewed as negative – we're here and we're our whole world for four years – all girls who have not the same opinions but the same kind of mind set then we go to college and we see the mind set of the men...I mean we may have the same mind set but we still challenge each other. Obviously we're not going to think the same, some people are going to have different opinions. But the basic thing is being able to voice your opinions and not having others discredit them...our teacher was always there to play devil's advocate to make sure it wasn't just everyone agreeing – that would be boring."

Again it seems that the most salient aspect of the all female environment was the sense of having a voice. The subtext of Jordan's comments is that when males are present, women have less of a voice or no voice at all. And it was that sense of voice that nurtured within the girls confidence and courage.

According to Jordan, some of her teachers at Holy Trinity attempted to compensate for the lack of gender and ethnic diversity in the school by reminding the girls that their college

classrooms would be very different from what they were accustomed to.

“I just remember the teacher telling us, ‘you know don’t be naïve...realize that when you go to college it’s a different world...even though you are in high school with all these Hispanic women, when you go to college there’s going to be much more diversity’. They always told us ‘don’t shy away because you’re in a lecture hall with a hundred people...you’re still your own person, you still have your own opinions, so be the smart intelligent person that you are...it doesn’t matter who you’re in the room with, your opinions are still valuable’.”

I asked Jordan if she thought the small class size and the fact that all the students were female and Latinas influenced the curriculum or class activities in any special way. She recalled an activity in her English class that contributed to her confidently expressing herself in front of an audience.

“Every student, one day out of the year, we would have to teach the class. Our teacher mainly told us, because she knows some girls are shy, to speak up and be responsible [for the class] – like direct people and tell them what to do...I was scared but it was a learning experience. The first semester we were all very timid. It’s kind of silly because we’re in our senior year and we know everyone, but we were still so shy to be up at the front of the room telling people our own ideas and being scared of that...to go there and learn to express your own ideas correctly...and have your own opinions and stand by them, because I know some Latinas are shy – you know they’ll think ‘maybe I’m not right, what am I thinking I’m just a girl’. So this really like empowered us – you know you have your own opinions, just support them with your facts.”

Jordan also remembered reading books in her literature class that dealt with themes and issues relevant to women. Charlotte Bronte’s (1993) *Jane Eyre* and Margaret Atwood’s (1986)

The Handmaid's Tale were both read during Jordan's senior year. Both novels examine women's role in society. *Jane Eyre* recounts the struggles of a young woman struggling to find herself and maintain her individuality within the moral confines of Victorian England. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, women living in a futuristic totalitarian dystopia are forced to exchange their reproductive capacities for mere survival. Reading these texts opened a dialogue on the history of women's oppression.

"Our English teacher oh she was awesome! It was mostly a class discussion most of the time we would read and discuss all of these topics and we read this book toward the end of the year called *The Handmaid's Tale*. We really like that book. It was set in the future and at that time women had no place in society, they were just used to make children and the men were commanders in charge of everything. So we were always talking about the way females are being treated. This land in the future, it's not so different from how it used to be a few hundred years ago. Women again had no place in society and were just used for the pleasure of men and to make children - that was their whole point in life. We were talking about that, the parallels between how it could supposedly be in the future and how it was in the past. So that was just one of the great books that we read."

Jordan could not remember reading any texts dealing specifically with issues associated with being Latina, but she remembered hearing some of the other students at HT talking about *The House On Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros (1984).

"*The House On Mango Street*" – I didn't read it but I heard everyone else talking about it. It was for Hispanic people. Well from what I remember hearing it was about leaving your neighborhood, but not forgetting where you came from. It was saying 'you can leave this place and go accomplish what you need to but don't forget the values that you learned here because

they're great values so don't forget them'. That stood out to me."

"Is that something you agree with?"

"Yes, I would like to leave and learn everything I can and then come back to help, help make it better."

Perhaps this lesson from Cisneros' book resonated with Jordan because it was the same lesson she recalled hearing from the elders in her family. Clearly it is one she has taken to heart as Jordan thrives on service. As mentioned earlier, she continues to help out at Holy Trinity despite the fact that she has already graduated and at the time of these interviews was starting college summer classes. Jordan also spoke favorably of the service requirement she and her classmates had to fulfill for graduation.

"Every year we had to do twenty service hours and if you're in CSF (the California Scholarship Federation) you have to do another twenty hours...I always helped out at the elementary school across the street...so I got to know the faculty there and you know they would talk about the community 'oh the girls from Holy Trinity come and they help the little kids'. I liked it because it gave us the experience – this example of giving back to the community – like oh this is what they're talking about going and helping everyone. So I think it helped us to be well rounded – come here and give back to your community."

"What do you think were some valuable lessons you got from that experience?"

"Just like the hard work – you're setting aside time from your busy schedule, especially in your later years. It's like I have all this homework but I have these service hours. You sacrifice your weekends to go help out, you know, there's something more important than me, let me go help out other people who need it."

Jordan feels the service requirement helped teach her about finding balance in her life as she learned to prioritize.

“It’s like yes this is important but there is a bigger picture – so this is more important than this. Like I might be busy in school but my family also needs help, so let me see what they need – or with my friends too...The school work is important but my relationships with other people are also just as important so I make time for that too...like one of our clubs was the Letterwoman Society and we would help out in all the events and sometimes those events went late, so I had to balance doing all of this – going from practice back to school, help set up the events, go back and clean up and then go home and see what else needs to be done there and then do homework. So I think that’s going to help for college. I’ll be doing a lot more coursework and hopefully I’ll be working. So I have the experience of knowing how to balance everything – knowing how to prioritize what’s important and still take care of what’s left at home.”

Along with helping her learn to balance the various aspects of her life, Jordan revealed that the service project allowed her to discover her passion for helping others. She is considering a career in forensic science (although history continues to intrigue her) but she feels that no matter what career path she chooses, service has to be central to her life’s work.

“I think it just brought it out more for me – the kind of work I like. I would always tell my friends who thought it was a drag – I kind of enjoy it. It opened my eyes to other possibilities...now I realize I really like helping other people...I’ve noticed there’s always something to give to the community. That’s central. That’s what I really enjoy doing.”

4.4.4 **Reflections on Jordan**

As with her two classmates, I was immediately impressed by Jordan's maturity and strong sense of self. She is an extremely confident young woman, yet maintains a humility that allows her to recognize that she and her struggles are minute in the bigger scheme of life. Jordan has experienced some challenges that most young people her age never have to contend with. The loss of her father at the age of thirteen caused Jordan not only the expected grief anyone might experience at the loss of parent, but it also forced her to assume several responsibilities within her family. Having to oversee her family's finances coupled with all of the other changes that were taking place in her family caused Jordan to grow up very quickly. I sensed in her some pride for being able to contribute to her family's well being during a difficult time, but I also sensed a restlessness in Jordan. Of the three participants in this study, Jordan provided the most data, as she was eager to share with me her thoughts, ideas, and dreams – and I was eager to listen. She too longs for the opportunity to “try out” her independence, but like her two classmates, Jordan is committed to her family.

I was most impressed by the respect and admiration with which Jordan spoke of her elders. It was they who greatly influenced her decision to attend college close to home so as to help her family ease into the transition of not having her around. She expressed being grateful to them for teaching her a very important lesson about life – never forget where you came from. I could see that this message was ingrained in Jordan as she spoke with so much love and pride about her neighborhood and her school. She was eager to go out into world and learn everything she could so as to come back and put it to work at home.

5. INTERPRETING THEIR INTERPRETATIONS

5.1 **Contextualizing the Experience: “Like I said, in *my case*, it [attending Holy Trinity] did help me a lot.”**

[I]ndividuals come to educational situations with their own temperaments, histories, and purposes, and different individuals will obviously interact with a given configuration of education in different ways and with different outcomes. Hence in considering the interactions and the outcomes, it is as necessary to examine individual histories as it is to examine the configurations themselves. (from L. Cremin’s *Public Education*, as quoted in Irvine & Foster, 1996, p.176)

The “success” or “failure” of any K-12 single-sex education initiative is relative to a particular group of students in a particular setting and a given set of academic or social objectives. (American Association of University Women, 1998, p. 2)

The intent of this study was never to propose a solution for the academic ills that afflict urban Latinas from working class families. Nor was it intended to suggest one educational institution as superior to another. The challenge of educating the nation’s fastest growing school age population is as complex and diverse as is the population itself. Historically, institutions of power have attempted to lump Latina(o) communities into one monolithic body. Even the terms Latino and Hispanic are contentious because they negate the rich diversity that exists within our various communities. Though, as a people we may share certain common cultural traits such as language and a strong devotion to family, Latinas(os) are not a monolithic group. Therefore, in treating the educational needs of the children of these communities, educators must account for the differences as well as consider the commonalities.

Unfortunately, educational reform efforts continue to move toward a further standardization of learning and schooling experiences. Those of us who have long worked in various educational settings understand that when it comes to learning and the social development of children and adolescents – one size does *not* fit all. Several factors like gender,

race, and socio-economic status play key roles in how children and their families experience and respond to schooling.

The majority of the nation's Latina(o) students attend schools in the inner-city (Valencia, 2002a; 2002b). As discussed earlier, these schools tend to be overcrowded, lack significant resources and are often plagued by violence. Latino parents are well aware of this reality and consequently may choose Catholic schools because they are smaller, safer and provide more assurance that their child will get whatever attention s/he may need (Louie & Holdaway, 2009). The single-sex aspect of many of these schools is also appealing, especially for those with daughters, as many parents perceive the single-sex environment as reducing the risks that come from young men and women having ample opportunities for socializing informally (Ayala, 2006). Teen pregnancy rates are highest among Latinas (The National Women's Law Center & MALDEF, 2009; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, 2008; Dehlendorf, Marchi, Vittinghoff & Braveman, 2009) and young women with low academic achievement and low career aspirations are more likely to become pregnant (Dogan-Ates & Carrion-Basham, 2007). Parents understand the risks of their daughters' early engagement in sexual activity and they will often do whatever they can to reduce these risks.

For several decades, many working class Latino families living in U.S. inner cities have turned to Catholic schools in the hopes of providing their children with a quality education (Louie & Holdaway, 2009). Scholars have studied the schooling outcomes of Latinas(os) and other minorities and found these groups' overall experience to have more positive academic outcomes in Catholic schools (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Coleman, Hoffer, & Kilgore, 1982; Greely, 1982). Cornelius Riordan (2000) attributes the high success rate among minorities in Catholic schools (specifically Latinas(os) and African Americans) to a pro-academic attitude

amongst students and their parents, brought about by a higher socio-economic status membership, that causes them to choose these schools over public schools in the first place. However, there has been some criticism of Riordan's work by scholars who argue that Riordan's analysis focuses heavily on socio-economic status and does not account for the role culture plays in why certain groups choose Catholic schools (Diaz, 2006). Riordan's assumption is that families who have the financial means to pay the high tuition required from these schools, already have the propensity toward higher academic achievement. However, for the families of Holy Trinity, the 5,565 dollars a-year tuition is not being held in a savings account, a bank safe deposit box or even safely secured within mom's or dad's monthly paycheck. Several families require financial aid to send their daughters to the school and the principal, Sister Marta, informed me that the school is constantly negotiating payment options with the families who struggle to pay the tuition. In her words, "the school is always willing to work with the families to find a way for them to afford the costs".

The reasons why Latino families choose Catholic schools are varied and complex. While many may be attracted to the rigorous curriculum these schools boast, others, especially those living in large urban centers, may be looking for a safer campus or a smaller school in the hopes their child will not "fall through the cracks" (Louie & Holdaway, 2009). Diaz (2006) argues that single-sex schools (Catholic or not) are a better cultural fit for Latinas given the long history of all girl schools in Latin America. Up to now much of the research on minorities in Catholic schools has largely been concerned with academic outcomes. There is a considerable dearth in research that examines how minority students construct their identity in Catholic schools.

As a graduate of an all girl Catholic high school myself, who did well academically, I had never reflected until now, on how my high school education affected my conceptions of myself

as a Latina from a working class background. The high school I attended did provide a rigorous college prep curriculum and because it was an all girl school, I had greater access to activities that helped me build leadership skills. However, the school's curricula, both sanctioned and hidden, privileged a Eurocentric worldview. In four years I had only two Latina(o) teachers, one of them was my Spanish teacher, and with the exception of my Spanish classes, I never read any non-European or non-Anglo authors. My history classes consisted of the Western perspective of world and U.S. history with little mention of the contributions of Latinas(os) or other marginalized groups, despite the fact that the majority of the girls attending the school were Latinas. I do not even recall any special attention given to issues of gender, considering it was an all girl high school. Through this research I came to realize that although Catholic high schools may produce greater academic outcomes for minorities, they too run the risk of engaging in the same type of subtractive schooling (Valenzuela, 1999) which has been found to occur in public schools. A conscious effort must be made to provide a schooling environment that recognizes and reflects the cultural backgrounds of the students, if Catholic high schools want to provide minority students with an education that affords them with more than just a greater chance of getting into college.

For Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan, the all female, almost all Latina learning environment of Holy Trinity provided a sense of comfort and safety. Life in school provided the same comfort they experienced at home with their families. In each of their explanations of what it means to be "Latina", all three cited the importance of family as central to their cultural identity. For these three girls, to be Latina is to honor and respect family ties. It means to recognize one's responsibilities to these ties and most importantly, to never forget one's cultural roots. The young women, whose voices are fore fronted in this research, all attributed much of their

academic success and college preparedness to the privilege of attending a school that understood and was able to recreate this important aspect of their culture. All three girls recall feeling like they were amongst family while attending Holy Trinity. According to each of them, the relationships they were able to foster with their peers and their teachers, afforded them the inspiration, knowledge, information and skills needed to make difficult decisions regarding their college careers. Given the history, the make up and current situation of each girl's family and community, Holy Trinity seemed to be a right fit for them.

From my interviews with Jasmin, Lulu, and Jordan four themes emerged as central to their college decision making process: 1) Latina teachers served as role models and inspiration for furthering their education; 2) The almost all Latina learning environment gave the girls a sense of having a voice, it built self-esteem, and afforded them opportunities to construct positive identities; 3) Involvement in required community service projects heightened in the girls a sense of social justice and a desire to use their education to improve conditions in their communities; 4) Family responsibilities and obligations were negotiated using knowledge and skills acquired through significant relationships with peers and teachers at HT, to help facilitate the process of choosing a college or university that would meet theirs as well as their families' needs. These themes are "unpacked" and "interpreted" in the following sections. As a Latina, born and raised in a neighborhood like that of Holy Trinity High School's, and also a graduate of an all girl Catholic high school, I rely on my "cultural intuition" and cultural knowledge (Delgado Bernal, 1998) to help me frame and contextualize the experiences of these three Latinas.

5.2 **Latina Teachers as Possible Selves: “You lived here, you went to this school and look where you are.”**

The teachers at Holy Trinity hold high expectations for the girls. Perhaps because it is a private school, the teachers come to the school with the assumption that the girls want to go to college and therefore prepare them for it. Holy Trinity, like most Catholic high schools, boasts being a college prep academy (Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993). While some teachers may be attracted to this aspect of the school’s curriculum, believing that it draws a particular grade of student, I argue this is not the rule with the majority of the teachers who work at HT. Several of the teachers are Latinas, most of whom either graduated from the school themselves or grew up in the surrounding neighborhoods.

5.2.1 **Alumnae Teachers Make a Difference**

As someone who returned to her own neighborhood to teach, I can attest that what drew me back was my awareness of the limited learning opportunities and resources available to the young people of my community. I, like Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan had come to appreciate the opportunities my Catholic education had afforded me, and I felt a sense of duty to come back to my community and share the resources, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness I had acquired through higher education. From recollections of conversations with their teachers, Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan recognized in these women a desire to also give something back. Jordan’s statement regarding her science teacher, Ms. Delgado, illustrates this clearly.

“...she came to this school, she grew up here, she went to UCLA and instead of going to a rich place to teach, she came back here because she wants to help change things and make them better.”

5.2.2 **Teachers From the Community Understand the Struggles and Challenges**

Those teachers who grew up in the neighborhood but did not attend Holy Trinity also bring something valuable to the table. They attended the local public high schools and experienced first hand the frustrations, struggles and challenges Latinas(os) face in these institutions (Valencia, 2002a; Valenzuela, 1999). They bring this knowledge to their exchanges and interactions with the girls at Holy Trinity – girls who look like them, speak like them, come from families much like their own and who have in some ways come to understand the oppressive conditions that may exist within their homes and communities. Specifically, they bring their knowledge of what it is like to grow up female in a Latino family. These women are able to interpret through their own “cultural intuition” (Delgado Bernal, 1998) the everyday struggles and challenges of the young women at Holy Trinity. They bring to their teaching at HT the same “pedagogies of the home” that have helped them negotiate in their personal and professional pursuits, “the daily experiences of sexist, racist, and classist microaggressions” (Delgado Bernal, 2006, p.113).

I was able to witness this first hand during a visit to the school. Sister Marta had invited me to visit some of the classes and speak informally with some of the teachers. One of the teachers I met was Ms. Ortiz who taught Spanish. She was welcoming and expressed an interest in my research. As I began sharing with her the focus of the study and the personal recollections that turned me toward this topic, she nodded and smiled as if she understood exactly what I was talking about. Ms. Ortiz is the eldest of three and is the only daughter in the family. She admitted that expectations at home were different for her as the only girl and she understood what some of her students experience when they approach their parents about leaving home to attend college. “You know I went through the same thing when I was in high school and wanted

to apply to college. My parents didn't want me to leave home. They didn't seem so concerned about my brothers leaving home, but with me it was a different story. I went to [a nearby CSU campus] mainly because it was close to home." She has just completed a Masters degree at the same university, sharing that her students were extremely excited for her, and now she is considering applying to a doctoral program. I offered words of encouragement and let her know I would be happy to provide information or advice.

Ms. Ortiz and I spoke informally about our own challenges as young Latinas wanting to go out and make our mark on the world, but feeling an obligation to our families as well. She shared that the girls who are applying to colleges will often come to her for advice in dealing with parents who are reluctant to let them leave home. She said she feels a responsibility to serve as a role model for the girls especially as she herself continues her education. The availability of and access to teachers who can, not only empathize with the challenges faced by the students, but who can also share insight from their own similar experiences and provide strategies that reflect an instinctive and nuanced awareness of the cultural mores of a community, is an invaluable asset to any school. The young women of Holy Trinity High School seem to have such a resource in their Latina teachers.

Ms. Becerra, a veteran Holy Trinity teacher of twenty five years whose main responsibilities lie with the Modern Languages department, also teaches a Chicana(o) Studies elective course. Although the class was not offered this year due to low enrollment, Jasmin admitted it was a class she would have liked to take. Unfortunately, for girls like Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan who are trying to fill up their course schedules with as many Advance Placement classes as they can in their Junior and Senior years so as to make themselves more competitive when applying to colleges, important electives like the Chicana(o) Studies class do not fit into

their schedules. Nonetheless, Ms. Becerra informed me that she has been teaching the class for several years at HT and of the girls who do take the class, she said many share with her how much they appreciate having this particular class offered to them.

I met Ms. Becerra when I visited HT on Career Day. She too was extremely welcoming and excited to hear about the focus of my research study. Immediately, she began sharing with me information about the Chicana(o) Studies class. Ms. Becerra exuded a passion that seemed very familiar to me. She said she “loved” teaching this particular class because she wanted the girls at HT to know “their history” and how it was an integral part of American history. Projects she has engaged the girls in included a mock trial of the infamous Sleepy Lagoon Zoot Suit trial of the 1940’s, which took place in Los Angeles. Because Ms. Becerra has been teaching at Holy Trinity for over two decades, she has seen a couple of generations of families walk the halls of the school. She is now teaching some of the daughters of her former students. A few of the presenters of Career Day also were former students of hers. She herself grew up in the community and expressed a great satisfaction with teaching the young Latinas of these neighborhoods.

5.2.3 **Latina Teachers as Role Models**

As recognized by all three girls, the Latina teachers of Holy Trinity serve also as role models. Patricia Gándara (1995) and others (Ginorio & Huston, 2001; López, 2003) stress the significant connection between the “possible selves” young Latinas are able to imagine and the social context in which these future representations of themselves are constructed. Having teachers of similar cultural backgrounds, the girls at Holy Trinity are able to see first hand the “pay offs” of pursuing higher education. One of John Ogbu’s (1986) controversial theories

regarding the educational underachievement of what he calls *caste*-like or involuntary minorities, claims that often the members of this *caste* (e.g. Latinos and African Americans) will have trouble buying into the “folk theory” that formal education is a means to economic success because of the overwhelming lack of evidence in their communities. Critics of Ogbu argue his theory strips those groups he deems as *caste*-like of any agency and positions them as passively unable to change their oppressive circumstances. The Latina teachers of Holy Trinity challenge this theory in two ways. First, they are evidence for the girls that those who come from their same neighborhoods can be successful and secondly, those teachers who have returned claim they have done so with the hope that by educating the young women of this community they are effectively changing oppressive conditions. Moreover, the accomplishments of these teachers challenge narrow definitions of success. Most teachers in general are not paid high salaries, and those who teach in small schools like Holy Trinity are paid even less. Yet the girls look up to these women not because they have achieved great economic success, but rather because they embody the communal values and struggles they themselves are familiar with and they see in these women the capacity to successfully navigate the conflicting and contradictory borderland spaces (Anzaldúa, 1987; 1990) of their private and their public lives, of bilingualism and biculturalism, of family and work, and of self and community.

5.2.4 **Creating a “Homeplace”**

Pastor, McCormick and Fine (1996) argue that girls and women develop in relationship. Latinas especially find it difficult to construct an individual identity separate from those that have been imposed upon us – daughter, sister, friend (Rodríguez, 1994). These identities connect us to communities that Pastor, McCormick and Fine (1996) contend, provide a “buffer against

the isolation that could result from an over-reliance on individualism, especially given the legacy of racism [and sexism] that dominates American culture” (p.18). In the face of racism and sexism, women of color will rely on collective identities to resist oppression. One way of exercising this agency is to create “homeplaces” (Pastor, McCormick & Fine, 1996) where women come together to question and critique oppressive positionalities and develop counter narratives and alternative identities.

Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan seemed able to construct these counter narratives in the company of other young Latinas of similar background with the assistance of their Latina teachers, also of similar background. The girls often referred to feeling “at home” or among “*familia*” while attending Holy Trinity. As Jordan discussed the Latina teachers who grew up in the surrounding communities, she perceived these teachers as “pushing” them harder to succeed because as she sees it, these teachers knew personally of the struggles Latinas face. She states: “...they were always telling us – ‘yes you’re a minority, yes you’re a girl, but you know what, go far in life, but always remember your family, remember where you came from’.”

Jasmin remembered her U.S. History teacher, Ms. Castillo, as being “really into feminism” and always finding ways to bring the history of local communities into the class. After attending the Chicana(o) Youth Leadership Conference, Jasmin returned to school eager to share the knowledge and information gained from this experience and she also had some important questions. In her discussion with Ms. Castillo about the conference they discussed the absence of Chicana(o) history in the sanctioned curriculum. All three girls recalled Ms. Castillo acknowledging this absence and always trying to incorporate the history of the local communities often in her classes. Although Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan did not take the Chicana(o) studies class with Ms. Becerra, in *my* conversations with her, she also expressed a desire to raise

awareness and consciousness among the girls of Holy Trinity through an exploration of the rich history and culture and of the Mexican and Mexican American people.

5.2.5 **Latina Teachers Seen as Successful Border Crossers**

Delgado Bernal (2006) defines the “borderlands” as “the geographical, emotional, and psychological space occupied by mestizas, and it serves as a metaphor for the condition of living, between spaces, cultures, and languages” (p. 123). To hear Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan express themselves about their Latina teachers is to understand that these girls perceive the women who stood before them in their classrooms as successful border crossers (Anzaldúa, 1987; 1990). Teachers like Ms. Castillo, Ms. Delgado, and Ms. Ortiz offered Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan another perspective on womanhood and femininity. The mothers of these girls were born in Mexico or El Salvador to traditional Latino families. All three mothers migrated to the U.S. as young girls and had little education in their home countries. The girls all shared how their mothers encouraged them to pursue higher education, as many Latina mothers do (Ayala, 2006), as a means of ensuring for themselves some level of financial independence. However, the girls also recalled being conflicted by the mixed messages they received from their mothers who encouraged them to be successful, yet also expected them to fulfill traditional sexist gender roles.

Jasmin explained that because in Mexico, from an early age her mother was entrusted with the care of her younger siblings, she felt her mother expected her to be able to shoulder the same kind of responsibility. At nine years of age Jasmin was called upon to care for her younger sister, creating between them a strong bond. It was primarily this close relationship that heavily influenced her choices of where to attend college. Lulu found it “funny” that although her mother was the strongest supporter of her college dreams, she still criticized Lulu for expecting

her boyfriend to help her with some house cleaning. Jordan too expressed confusion over her mother's behavior because although she hoped Jordan could accomplish academically what her brothers had not been able to, Jordan was nonetheless expected to complete domestic chores that her brothers were given the option to perform. Her mother repeatedly reminded Jordan that these were primarily *her* responsibility "because she is the girl."

While each girl accommodated these sexist expectations out of a sense of respect and duty to their families, and I believe also out of empathy for their mothers' own oppression, they found ways to "push back" or resist complete subjugation. They either verbally questioned their mothers' expectations or through their actions they challenged these traditional sexist and patriarchal relationships within their families. Lulu received a full scholarship and proved to her father she could realize her dream of going away to college and paying for it herself. Jordan demanded her older brothers assume more responsibility at home. Jasmin chose to live on campus despite her parents' dependence on her for the care of her younger sister.

At school the girls interacted with their Latina teachers, who even as adults continue to struggle with similar conflicting demands and expectations from their own mothers and families. Through these interactions, the girls were able to expand, reconstruct and redefine their Latina identity. Lulu shared how she was inspired by Ms. Salcedo's (the A.P. English teacher and HT alum) passion for her work and her extensive world traveling. Like her aunt who lives in Canada, Ms. Salcedo represents for Lulu a level of freedom and independence she admires and aspires to. Jasmin recalled Ms. Castillo's trying to impart a strong feminist consciousness to her students. Jordan respected Ms. Delgado's commitment to her community as evidenced by her choice to return to HT to teach when, according to Jordan, she could have gone to work in a "rich place" given her degree from a prestigious university like UCLA.

The fact that several of the female teachers at Holy Trinity have continued their education beyond the Bachelors degree, or are in the process of doing so, has also inspired the girls. Jordan spoke of her Physical Education teacher who at twenty-two was going back to school for a Masters degree. “Like in our school I see all the women they’re still [going to school]. We had a twenty-two year old teacher and she’s getting her Masters and we’re like – ‘you’re twenty-two, you’re so young’. I have friends who are twenty-two and they’re not doing anything with their lives and you’re getting your Masters...like you’re here and you’re sending us messages – ‘you’re young, you can do anything’... We were in awe.”

Jordan shared her admiration of her teacher with her mother, who did not seem as impressed: “Really? She should be having a family right now”, to which Jordan replied, “No she should be getting her education”. Jordan’s following commentary sheds light on the internal conflict some young Latinas experience as they begin to embrace definitions of womanhood that may be at odds with the traditional sexist cultural norms (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006) their mothers grew up with.

“I think that’s how older Hispanic mothers view it. Like if you’re in your twenties you should be starting a family not continuing school. I think that’s where the views start like from the older generation.”

I asked her what she thought has changed for her generation.

“I think school. Like if you keep learning you can see and think for yourself – I don’t need a family *right now*. I want to keep doing this for myself so I don’t end up like my mother – so I don’t have to have a man give me money and make all of the decisions. I can do this by myself. So I think school...the people in our school encouraged us to strive harder.”

When I asked the girls where they saw themselves in ten years, both Jasmin and Lulu

included having a family of their own in their vision. Jordan was the only one who never made mention of the desire to have a family. She did however see herself back at Holy Trinity working with the school in some capacity. I sensed in Jasmin and Lulu an ongoing struggle between their desire to achieve professional success and personal independence with a need to have a family of their own. Lulu specifically expressed needing to balance the kind of freedom and independence she so admired in her aunt and teachers, with the caring and nurturing qualities she appreciated in her mother. The girls at Holy Trinity are redefining Latina identity for themselves by “braiding” the cultural foundations of their homes (Godinez, 2006) as represented by their mothers, with new conceptions of Latina femininity and womanhood exemplified by their teachers.

Angela Valenzuela (1999) in studying the relationships between Latino students and their mostly non-Latino teachers at a Houston high school, found each group to have differing conceptions of what it means to care about school. Teachers expected students to exhibit what Valenzuela refers to as an abstract or “aesthetic” form of care that focuses solely on behaviors that lead to achievement, while their Latino students were seeking a more authentic form of care reflected in relationships of reciprocity. She posits that these differences lead to a mutual sense of alienation, and “In the absence of such connectedness, students are not only reduced to the level of objects, they may also be diverted from learning the skills necessary for mastering their academic and social environment. Thus, the difference in the way students and teachers perceive school based relationships can bear directly on students’ potential to achieve”(p. 62). The teachers at Holy Trinity seem to authentically care about educating the whole woman, and have developed with the girls relationships of mutual trust, respect and admiration. Those who are alumnae and/or grew up in the same neighborhoods as the girls of HT are especially invested in

the overall successes of each girl, as they know from personal experiences the challenges and struggles these girls face everyday.

According to Lisa Delpit (2008) teachers must "...not only make children aware of the brilliance 'in their blood' but also help children turn any internalized negative societal view of their competence into a compelling drive to demand that any system attempting to relegate them to the bottom of society must, instead, recognize and celebrate their giftedness" (p. 123).

According to Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan the Latina teachers at Holy Trinity are meeting this challenge.

5.3 **Empowering Latinas in an All Female Learning Environment: "I like knowing that I know myself a lot better than I would have with men there."**

5.3.1 **No Boys Means Greater Opportunities**

Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan all acknowledged the absence of boys at the school did limit their exposure to more diverse perspectives regarding topics discussed in their classes. However, each girl also recognized that had Holy Trinity been a coeducational school, there are certain events, activities, and texts that perhaps would not have been central to the curriculum or learning experience.

The most memorable learning moments for these girls seemed to have happened in their English classes, where they read texts like *Simply María*, *House On Mango Street*, *Jane Eyre*, and *The Handmaid's Tale*, whose plotlines and central characters expressly deal with issues central to women's lives. Each girl recalled the lively debates that took place in their class as they grappled with issues of female independence and women's rights brought about by these various texts. Jasmin speculated that perhaps these particular texts would not have even been

chosen as part of their curriculum if the school were coed. Perhaps books with broader themes and topics would have been selected over those that spoke more directly to the lives and concerns of women. Traditionally in coeducational schools, texts and other learning materials have tended to favor male interests and have been presented from the male perspective, utilizing methods which privilege male learning styles and preferences (AAUW, 1992). Even if these particular books had been read in a coed learning environment, Jasmin felt she would not have experienced them in the same way. She wondered if perhaps listening to the boys' perspectives would have diminished the empowering effect she had from grappling with key themes with her female peers in an aggression free environment. While she accepts the male perspective is necessary in the world, and she is quite aware that in college she will not only be exposed to it, but she will also have to reconcile it with her own, for now she is satisfied knowing the all female learning environment at Holy Trinity afforded her the opportunity to develop a strong sense of self.

For Jordan, attending an all girl school was an equally empowering experience. Her thoughts as to how the presence of boys might change the social dynamics of the school speak volumes of how patriarchy has come to bear on her conceptions of gender conflict. In Jordan's view, when men are around they tend to take over. She expressed concern that if boys had been present, the opportunities for the girls to assume leadership roles at the school would have been greatly reduced. Jordan also perceived boys as adding a competitive dimension that seemed to be almost absent from HT. She remarked that boys see themselves as superior to girls and therefore introducing this attitude into the learning environment at Holy Trinity would have diminished the sense of cooperation and collective accomplishment she believes exists among the girls.

This was evident to Jordan whenever one of the nearby all boy Catholic high schools was invited to collaborate with Holy Trinity on a special event. She recalled the boys (most of whom were Latinos) immediately wanting to take over and direct the girls. She said it took some negotiation but eventually the girls were able to stand their ground and demonstrated an equal ability and desire to lead the project. Jordan credited the empowering learning environment at HT with preparing the girls for these encounters with the all boy schools. According to her, the girls are taught to believe in themselves as thinking young women, capable of making important contributions. Eliminating the distraction of having to compete with boys for attention and/or recognition (Sadker & Sadker, 1994), allowed these girls to channel their energies toward helping each other gain a greater understanding of themselves, as working class Latinas, as minorities, as daughters and sisters, and as thinking, contributing members of all of these communities.

5.3.2 **Gender as Curriculum – or Not?**

Although some competition and disagreement were acknowledged as being part of their everyday learning experiences, I sensed aggression is what was missing from the equation. While some schools, single sex or coeducational, may attempt to introduce gender as a theme within the sanctioned curriculum, these attempts often essentialize gender, much in the same way race and other aspects of culture are treated as a footnote or side bar of the curriculum. Usually through a type of calendar approach that relegates these lessons to non-critical “celebrations” of diversity during designated holidays (e.g., Hispanic Heritage month, Black History Month, International Women’s Day) certain historical figures (e.g. Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Cesar Chávez) are venerated without any authentic discussion or critical examination of race or

gender. In other words, schools “do” multiculturalism (Nieto, 1999) rather than live it. Because I did not conduct extensive observations or examinations of the learning environment, I cannot conclude that Holy Trinity is completely free of this type of superficial treatment of these issues nor that it is guilty of perpetuating these practices within the curriculum. From what I gathered through my interviews, in an attempt to maintain a reputation as a “rigorous” college prep academy, the school’s sanctioned curriculum, for the most part, adheres to the traditional “canon” of legitimated knowledge and does not have an articulated policy that overtly embraces a multicultural perspective. When multiculturalism is manifested in the curriculum or other school wide activities, it seems to happen as a result of individual efforts rather than a collective intent to transform the learning environment. Nevertheless, these efforts are significant, especially those that attempt to raise among the girls a greater awareness of women’s issues and struggles.

It is in the hidden curriculum of the school where I perceived these efforts to be strongest. Success is being redefined beyond Western patriarchal notions of individual achievement. Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) in discussing culturally relevant teaching methods, points out the importance of “helping the students work against the norm of competitive individualism” (p.69). When I discussed with the girls the notion of success, each one explained it to me in terms that reflected an attitude of collective accomplishment. Jordan recalled teachers insisting that each girl’s individual successes were only measured by the accomplishments of the whole group. They were encouraged to lift each other up. As Lulu discussed her participation in the various athletic teams at the school, she stressed that those who lacked the experience and/or skills to play the game did not feel intimidated to at least try out for the team; on the contrary they were encouraged to do so. Also, because there are no boys, the girls have an opportunity to explore

and experiment with their leadership skills. As Latinas who at home may witness the suppression of their mothers' voices, or who as dutiful daughters must accommodate the suppression of their own voices at times (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006) - at school they can "try on" and "try out" other constructions of femininity and womanhood while in the process of finding and developing their own voice.

All three girls stated they felt empowered as young women while attending Holy Trinity. Each recounted stories of teachers encouraging them to strive for excellence. Lulu recalled her teachers highlighting the historical accomplishments of women and their various contributions to society. I did see some evidence of this during my first visit to HT, as I was walking through the halls on my way to visit a class, I noticed a bulletin board on the ground floor with a poster of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Next to it was a section titled "Women in History" and it contained pictures of Hilary Clinton, Mother Theresa, Rosa Parks and Jane Goodall. While I was glad to see the school taking time to highlight significant women in U.S. history, I was disappointed not to see any Latinas on the bulletin board – after all Sonia Sotomayor had just recently been confirmed as the first Latina on the United States Supreme Court. I also wondered if the girls of HT were being given the opportunity to contextualize and critically examine the lives and contributions of the women whose pictures were on the bulletin board.

Aside from the open discussion format that seemed to be the prevalent discourse pattern in many of the classes the girls described and those I was able to observe on a couple of my visits to HT, there did not seem to be other pedagogical innovations happening in the classrooms. What the girls described as the standard method of instructional delivery resembles the traditional pedagogical practices of most high school classrooms. Because the school considers

itself a college prep academy, direct instruction and lectures seem to be the methods of choice, especially in the Advance Placement classes. However, because the classes are smaller, there is more opportunity for all of the girls to ask questions, and voice their thoughts and opinions. Lulu and Jordan both expressed how this aspect of their classroom interactions encouraged them to speak out more and take risks. They felt this was one of the most salient aspects of their academic as well as social development. From these open interactions in their classrooms, each girl gained a level of confidence she reported was missing when she first walked in to the school as a 9th grader.

Because Holy Trinity is a small school, it has the freedom to alter everyday routines more easily so as to incorporate events and activities that reflect the lives, experiences and realities of the girls who attend. One such event was the “Blast To The Past” day of activities. Since the school was celebrating its centennial during her junior year, Jordan recalled one day when instead of holding the regular schedule of classes, the girls attended the sewing, cooking, and knitting classes that were offered when HT first opened. I did not observe this day of events and none of the girls recalled any significant lessons focused on discussing it. However, Jordan did seem able to historically locate the curriculum offered then, acknowledging that when the school offered this kind of limited curriculum, young women were not encouraged nor expected to pursue higher education or careers in non-nurturing or care giving fields. Women were expected to care for their families and therefore the classes available to them in school offered them the skills necessary to be good homemakers. She stated she was glad to be living today when, as a young woman, she was able to attend a school that offered a more challenging and rigorous curriculum. She wants to study forensic science in college, and during her time at HT she had female teachers in her science classes, like Ms. Delgado, who served as role models.

5.3.3 **Latina Everyday Lives Represented Outside of the Classroom**

When I asked if there were any examples of the school recognizing and/or incorporating their Latina(o) culture into the curriculum and/or extra curricular activities, I was surprised none of the girls recalled the “Spring Showcase” - a stage production which incorporates drama, dance and the talents of the students in the Digital Arts Media class. This year one of the teachers, often hearing the girls discussing the *novelas* (Spanish language soap operas) they watched at home with their mothers and/or grandmothers, inquired about these *novelas* and out of her conversations with the girls grew the storyline for a play. The main character of the play is a young Latina, who is getting ready to celebrate her *quinceañera* (a Mexican religious rite of passage ceremony). She lives with her parents, a sister and her maternal grandmother, and every night battles ensue over which of the three generations living in the home controls the television remote control. The grandmother demands the TV be tuned to her favorite *novela* - *Orgullo y Prejuicio* (one of the English classes was reading *Pride and Prejudice* and they decided, with the help of the Digital Arts Media class, to turn it into a bilingual/code switching TV *novela*, which they filmed and projected on a screen during the play). The teenage girls on the other hand want to watch the latest music videos, while their mother is trying to finish sewing her eldest daughter’s *quinceañera* dress. The entire time the father’s nose is buried in his newspaper, while the women of the family make the food and tend to family matters. The themes explored in the play were derived directly from the cultural knowledge and experiences the girls brought from their homes and communities and they, with the assistance of their teacher, reformulated these themes with knowledge and skills acquired in school. I was most impressed with the fact that they narrated this story using the linguistic codes most commonly used by them and their families. The language of their home and community

was valued and deemed necessary for telling this particular story. (Their graduation ceremony was also bilingual.) However, once again, I was not aware of any further discussion regarding the themes addressed in the play, nor of any in- class opportunities to explore how gender roles were portrayed in the play.

Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan did not participate in the “Spring Showcase” but they all attended the performance. However, Jordan was the only one who, when I asked about the “Showcase”, did recognize its cultural value and significance as she explained: “I think it was funny because I think most of the females say their parents do that; they’re watching the *novelas* every night and so that’s another representation of the majority of the school. We all know what that is. If you get a white person coming here they’d be like ‘what is this?’ But all of us, we know. We’re all in on the joke. We know what’s going on.” Jordan also found the choice to use code switching (using Spanish and English interchangeably) to tell the story, a significant representation of her culture. “We all know what they’re talking about. That’s how our parents spoke to us so I think it’s showing like – ‘Hey let’s do it another way. We’re all females, we’re all Latinas and we’re all going here to this all girl school so we all know what everybody’s talking about.’ I think that’s great.” She also appreciated the fact that her graduation ceremony was bilingual. “We dread it because it’s twice the time, but I know my mom, she doesn’t understand English, so I’m glad they do it.”

None of the girls recalled the “Spring Showcase” immediately as an example of how their culture is valued or represented in school activities. Maybe they just did not remember or perhaps because it is an almost all Latina high school they did not find it remarkable that the play would highlight Latino themes such as family, generational gender conflict, bilingualism, biculturalism and religious rites of passage such as the *quinceañera*. I would not say they took

for granted these cultural representations and affirmations, but because they have not experienced a learning environment that is completely void of Latina(o) culture, they have nothing to compare their own experience to. I on the other hand was pleasantly surprised by the entire production and did find it quite remarkable that it was built around the gendered cultural realities of the girls. This was not my experience in high school. Although the annual production at my school was called the “Cultural Arts Festival”, the only culture represented was the mainstream dominant culture. Stage productions and other events did not reflect the cultural backgrounds of the students nor were we asked to incorporate into these performances our own everyday lived realities. Instead the young women of color at my school performed in productions chosen by the almost all white middle class faculty. Although many of us enjoyed and acquired valuable knowledge and skills from participating in and watching productions like *Fiddler On the Roof*, *The Sound of Music*, and *The Wizard of Oz*, we did not see ourselves represented in the characters or storylines.

5.3.4 **Spirituality Experienced in the Comfort of Sisters**

At the start of my research I was not particularly concerned with exploring questions of religion or spirituality, despite the fact that I was conducting this study with students from an all girl *Catholic* high school. Having distanced myself in the past few years from the Catholic faith I was raised and educated in, I was not interested in exploring the religious component of the all girl Catholic school experience. Instead, I was curious as to the effects of an almost all Latina, single-sex learning environment on the college decision-making process. However, because I have recently begun to question the social, political, cultural and economic implications of organized religion, I neglected to remember that within the *mestiza* consciousness paradigm

(Anzaldúa, 1987), spirituality is fluid and just another of the many borderlands I, as a *mestiza*, exist within (Delgado Bernal, 2006). Delgado Bernal (2006) explains how for Chicanas spirituality is an extension and expression of the commitment we have to our families and communities. Without me directly asking them, Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan reminded me that spirituality is essential to understanding a Chicana's/Latina's social, emotional and intellectual development.

The girls all recalled the spiritual retreats they attended during their four years at Holy Trinity as especially significant experiences that provided them with a nurturing safe space to express and explore their fears about life after high school, their worries about family, and their hopes for the future; all while in the company of peers they often referred to as *familia*. For Jasmin especially, the retreats provided that sense of “comfort” she repeatedly stressed was important to her sense of well-being at school. At her senior retreat she was able to discuss with her classmates how conflicted she was about leaving her younger sister to go off to college. She also appreciated the fact that because Holy Trinity is an all girl school, the girls felt more comfortable expressing themselves honestly and openly at these retreats. Jasmin shared that her friend who attends a coed Catholic high school felt constrained by the presence of boys at her retreat. Both Jordan and Jasmin credited the retreat experiences with strengthening relationships with their peers as well as providing them each with a deeper understanding of themselves. Jasmin remembered one of her friends pointing out the beauty she recognized in each of her classmates. Jasmin recalled feeling empowered at that moment, as she understood her friend to be speaking of more than just the girls' physical beauty. Jordan also described an epiphany that helped her appreciate her life and recognize she had much to offer. “I was just enjoying life...and the retreat – it just makes you realize yes you have problems and you have all these

commitments but you know what? You're alive and breathing. You have so many opportunities, so much you can do. Having realized it – I know I can make a big difference here.”

All three girls expressed feeling a sense of solidarity among their female peers at Holy Trinity. They all seemed to be describing a collective spirit as a driving force in their academic successes – a kind of “we’re all in this together” attitude. Several references were made to the family-like environment that existed at HT. The girls not only appreciated the all female environment, but the fact that the majority of the girls are Latinas and from working class families, also added to the feeling of comfort they experienced. Lulu’s statement seems to capture this feeling best: “Knowing that the person next to you has gone through stuff similar to you, like struggling with money...that’s the closeness we found”.

5.4 **Community Service Provides a Purpose: “Like I said, the community service is what influenced me to want to help others and want to ensure rights for people.”**

5.4.1 **Constructing Counter Narratives of Service**

In order to provide a counter narrative to the literature on resistance strategies employed by youth of color that focuses on more risky or self defeating behaviors such as dropping out of school, joining a gang, or engaging in risky sexual behavior, Delgado Bernal (2006) discusses “transformational resistance” as a means for understanding how Chicanas draw from pedagogies of the home to develop more liberating strategies that assist them in countering oppressive conditions. She offers this new framework as “a resistance for liberation in which students are aware of social inequities and are motivated by emancipatory interests.” (p.115)

Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan each recounted incidents in their daily interactions with family members that enforced the message - “because they are girls” they have been preordained to serve. Earlier I discussed some of the attempts made by the girls to resist or challenge this particular inscription of femininity on their identity. In those examples the girls were actively resisting a notion of service that is constructed within the confines of patriarchal privilege. At a very early age, many Latinas are socialized to serve others, usually the men in our families, and to put our needs second (Gallegos-Castillo, 2006). However, by embracing and valuing service within the kind of emancipatory project Delgado Bernal (2006) describes, we can “flip the patriarchal script” and create a counter narrative to these sexist notions of service that expect Latinas to acquiesce to patriarchal privilege.

I found that Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan were all aware of unequal and unjust conditions in their communities and each girl expressed a desire to use her higher education to do something to eradicate these conditions. This was evident in the conversations I had with the girls regarding their participation in the service project requirement at Holy Trinity. Jasmin and Jordan were especially affected by this activity in that it provided them with a first hand look at these unjust conditions. Jasmin spoke of how moved she was by the realization that many of the poor families she and her friends were delivering Christmas gifts to, resembled her own family. Her retelling of this experience exposes the internal conflict Jasmin underwent in trying to understand how and why these disparities exist. She recognized the struggles of her own parents, who as non-English speaking immigrants in the U.S. have faced discrimination and she also revealed a certain anger when speaking of the injustices other immigrants experience. Yet, unlike the families she visited, Jasmin and her sister never had to contend with a lack of basic resources. She recalled being surprised by the small living quarters of these families. As she

shared with me the experience of visiting these families, I sensed this had been an epiphany moment for Jasmin. She expressed feeling a sense of purpose and direction for her higher education efforts.

Jasmin plans to major in Public Health in college. She shared with me that her participation in the community service project, as well as her membership in the ecology club at school which also engaged in community service projects centered on ecological awareness, bolstered her intent to study Public Health in the hopes that this major would provide her with the knowledge and skills to return and work to improve her own community and the greater Los Angeles community as well.

Jordan also experienced a revelation while engaging in the community service project. Through her volunteering, Jordan came to realize how much personal satisfaction she gains from serving others. She expressed gaining a sense of purpose from knowing there is something more important than herself. She seems able to see the “bigger picture” in which she can contextualize whatever career she chooses in the future. She credits the service projects she was involved in during high school with helping her find not only this sense of purpose, but also with helping her learn to balance the various demands of her life – school, family, friends, work and self. A skill she acknowledges will be extremely useful to her in college. While at first she participated in the service projects because these were a requirement for graduation, she admitted that over time she found herself enjoying her volunteer work and continued it even after she graduated. Not long after I completed my interviews with all of the girls, I ran into Jordan at a popular hamburger stand in downtown LA. She and the Holy Trinity volleyball team were on their way back from a game against another all girl school across town. We chatted for a while and she informed me that she was volunteering as an assistant to the HT high school team and was coaching the

volleyball team at the elementary school that is part of the Holy Trinity parish, and she continues to help out at her alma mater in various other ways whenever she can.

Jordan admitted having a difficult time adjusting to life after her father's death. Besides offering a welcoming family like community to her during this difficult time, Holy Trinity provided ample opportunities for Jordan to engage in positive activities that helped her cope with her grief. She enjoys helping others and at HT she was able to realize this. Jordan expressed a desire to learn as much as she could in college so that she could return to her community and effect positive changes. I believe she is already doing this through her volunteer work with the younger girls of Holy Trinity High School and the elementary school. She is following in the footsteps of those Latina teachers she so admired at her school who served as role models. For Jordan these women took advantage of opportunities afforded them through their parents' hard work and sacrifices, they challenged and resisted oppressive stereotypes and expectations and they returned "home" so as to move others forward.

Similarly, Lulu's experience with the community service project at Holy Trinity gave her a sense of giving something important back to the community. She recalled with great satisfaction the time she spent with young children at one of the local hospitals. She was deeply moved by the fact that these children were missing out on their childhood because they were confined to a hospital. For Lulu, being able to play with them for a few hours and bring them a little bit of joy, made her feel she was contributing something significant to their lives. Like Jordan, she was able to see the "bigger picture" and recognize her education was about more than just getting good grades. She claimed the experience of working with young children taught her patience, and the overall volunteer experience helped her recognize the need for balance in her life.

5.4.2 **Social Justice Through Service**

Raskoff and Sundeen (1998) write: "...community service provides a means for American youth to learn the counterpart of individualism, such as a concern for the common good, and has the potential for effectively socializing students into civic roles necessary for democracy" (p.67). The opportunity to engage in such community service is more likely to occur in private religious schools than in any other learning environment. Unlike public schools, who are constrained by various bureaucratic matters, and other non-sectarian private schools whose focus may be solely academic, many private religious schools espouse altruistic values centered on the notion of service to others (Raskoff & Sundeen, 1998). This is evidenced in Holy Trinity's philosophy statement:

Through prayer, service, and study, we provide opportunities for students to mature in their own faith, so as to develop an active, living Christian heart. Rooted in the Gospel, [Holy Trinity] women seek justice as conscientious stewards of the Catholic faith who revere Christ in joy and who are enriched by their vibrant service to others. (Retrieved from Holy Trinity website)

Central to HT's philosophy is the notion of service and justice. In conversations I have had with colleagues who are also graduates of Catholic schools, many of us recall this message of service as a foundation of the education we received in these schools. Many of us also attribute our involvement in more activist activities in college, to the emphasis our Catholic education placed on helping others. Other scholars of color who have examined the history of minorities in Catholic schools also point out that the commitment to service is a central theme in these experiences (Jackson, 1996; Shields, 1996).

5.4.3 **Finding a Purpose Through Service**

A recent article in The Washington Post (April 26, 2010) reports an increase in youth volunteerism over the last 20 years. The article also cites a recent study by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA that shows an increase in the number of teenagers currently involved in community service projects who report an intent to continue volunteering during their college years. An earlier study conducted by the same research institute reports that participation in service activities shows significant outcomes in academic performance, values (commitment to activism and promoting racial understanding); self-efficacy, leadership, choice of a service career, and plans to participate in service after college (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000). However, much of this research on community service among high school students also points to a lack of connectedness between required community service projects and the school curriculum. While Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan did recall various examples of learning events that focused on issues of social justice in their classes, there was no mention of classroom learning activities that were an extension of the community service experience.

Jasmin's opening paragraph of the personal statement she wrote for her college applications seems to sum up how these experiences helped to shape her world view: “‘We must be the change we wish to see in the world,’ said Mahatma Gandhi. Throughout the four years I have been active in community service, I have gained an understanding of what God has called me to do. My diverse volunteer work has made an impact on how I view life and the world itself. I have come to agree with Gandhi and believe I need to be that change.”

5.5 **Family Is Central When Deciding About College: “They try their best to give us what is within their reach so that we can have a better future.”**

For Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan their families’ needs and expectations were significant factors in their college decision-making process. Central to their purpose for going to college was a desire to make their parents proud. Each girl recalled the sacrifices made by her parents to send her and other siblings to Catholic school. All three girls are the daughters of immigrants who had little education in their home countries and thus expressed to their daughters the hope that they could achieve something they as immigrants were not able to do. In listening to the stories of these three young women, I felt as though the weight of their families’ futures rested on their shoulders. Along with wanting to make their parents proud, Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan each saw the opportunity of a higher education as a means for not only enhancing their own individual lives, but also as a means for improving their families’ socio-economic status. As they shared with me the process they each underwent in deciding which colleges and universities to apply to and what they considered as they finally chose a school, I came to appreciate the significance of this moment in their young lives. Their families’ past, present and future seemed to all be converging on them as they made this very important decision. Although each girl shared with me her past dreams of attending a college far from home, when it came time to finally choose a school, there were several more things to consider than just their individual dreams.

5.5.1 **Latino Parent Involvement Means More Than Just Help With Homework**

For too long Latino parents have been blamed for the underachievement of their children. The myth that Latino parents do not value or do not care about education has permeated educational discourse for some time. However, Latino parents have demonstrated for decades an

ardent interest in their children's education. From fights to end the segregation of Mexican children in Southern California schools during the 1930's and 1940's, to recent attempts throughout the country to ensure more equitable learning environments for their children, Latino parents have been at the forefront of educational reform efforts, though not necessarily through expected or "preferred" actions, debunking the myth that they do not care about schooling or education (López, 2001; Valencia & Black, 2002). Expectations of parental involvement in U.S. schools tend to resemble traditional White middle-class practices of helping children with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, and generally responding gratefully to a teacher's academic interventions. Discussions regarding parental interest or involvement rarely extend beyond this conventional understanding to include non-traditional expressions of interest or care from the perspectives of minority families.

Latino parental involvement in education manifests itself in unconventional or non-traditional ways. Scholars interested in expanding mainstream notions of parental involvement and interest have considered the ways in which Latino parents express to their children support for their education in "noninterventionist" ways (Auerbach, 2006). Latino families see the offering of *consejos* (narrative advice) and *apoyo* (support) (Auerbach, 2006) as a reinforcement of their value in *educación*. This concept of *educación* among Latino families should not be translated literally. To be *bien educada(o)* (well educated) in Latino culture does not mean one possess great amounts of material knowledge, but rather it refers to "the family's role of inculcating in children a sense of moral, social, and personal responsibility and serves as the foundation for all other learning" (Valenzuela, 1999, p.23). Moreover, findings by various scholars demonstrate that the close family ties experienced by Latinas(os) positively influence academic achievement (Ceja, 2006; Gándara, 1995) and that success in school is one way

Latinas(os) fulfill their sense of duty the family (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1998).

Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan all recognized the great sacrifices being made by their parents in order to send them to Catholic school. Each girl was able to articulate a profound understanding and appreciation for just how much their families cared about their current and future educational successes. While none of them recalled their parents ever sitting with them to do homework or to go over college applications, they did not seem to mind. They understood that their parents' limited English skills and their unfamiliarity with schooling in the U.S. inhibited their ability to offer assistance in conventional ways. Yet these girls all expressed their desire to succeed in college as stemming from the *apoyo* they received from their parents and the sense of duty and responsibility they felt to their families.

Jasmin understood this as she discussed her experience at home. Her parents were unable to participate in the traditional expected ways of mainstream culture. For Jasmin, her parents' inability to provide assistance with schoolwork or to advise her regarding which colleges to apply to, did not mean they did not care or were not interested in her education. As she struggled to locate the privilege of receiving a private education within a larger understanding of the schooling experiences and choices of middle-class Anglo youth, Jasmin insightfully deconstructed her own experiences as the daughter of working class immigrant parents. Though she and her sister have been afforded the privilege of a private education, it has come with a price. In order to pay the yearly tuition at Holy Trinity, Jasmin's parents have had to work long hours, making them unavailable for what Jasmin believes are common practices in White middle class homes where parents do not work as much, like sitting down to dinner as a family and talking about the day's events. Her parents do not speak fluent English either and Jasmin is aware that with their long work hours, it is virtually impossible for them to study English

formally. Therefore her parents, like many other immigrants, pick up enough English to survive in their work environments, but it is not enough to provide Jasmin and her sister assistance with their school work. Nonetheless, Jasmin sees the efforts and struggles her parents have undergone to give her educational opportunities they did not have as a demonstration of their love and concern for her future.

Lulu also recognizes this as she recalls in her personal statement her parents telling her that everything they do is for her. She expressed having a close relationship with them and was appreciative of the sacrifices they have made for her. She specifically recognizes the struggles they went through in trying to leave El Salvador to come to the U.S. She recalled the stories her parents told her about how they risked their lives to come to the U.S. and these stories weighed heavy on her decision to go to college.

Lulu also has a younger sister (though she did not report having the same kind of close relationship Jasmin has with her sister) who will be attending Holy Trinity soon. Currently her sister is attending the same Catholic K-8 school Lulu attended for her middle school years and so she recognizes the financial strain these tuitions place on her parents. Like Jasmin, Lulu acknowledges how hard her parents have worked so as to afford a Catholic education for both her and her sister and sees this as their way of showing that they care. Lulu recalls in her personal statement her parents' reaction when she was struggling with maintaining high grades in school. "They sat me down and told me...they did not sacrifice their youth and work hours of hard labor for their daughter to be 'just average'. They did it so I could thrive and...reach my highest potential. They did it all for me." Lulu's parents are also limited English speakers, and therefore are not able to provide the traditional kind of assistance most schools and teachers expect of parents. Nonetheless, Lulu knows her parents care about her schooling and future

because they have worked so hard to give her and her sister what they perceive to be valuable learning opportunities.

5.5.2 **Family *Consejos* Influence Decisions**

As mentioned earlier, all three girls recalled their mothers encouraging them to pursue higher education beyond high school as a means toward gaining financial independence. They also acknowledged that as a result of limited educational opportunities and dominant beliefs about gender roles within the culture, their mothers were “stuck” in their current situations. This seemed to also motivate them. Jordan states, “...my mom she didn’t have that education and she’s kind of like stuck in her job because she can’t go somewhere higher without an education. So I saw that and I don’t want to end up like that...”. Jordan’s mother is aware of these limitations and therefore admits to her daughter, as Jordan recalls her mother saying to her, “Maybe it’s not worth everything to be a housewife. Maybe you should go on to college and get your career”.

Jennifer Ayala (2006) in discussing the relationships that often exists between Latina mothers and daughters, asserts that as women of color, Latina mothers are formidable women (Castillo, 1994, as cited in Ayala, 2006) “because women of color are mothering in the context of interlocking systems of oppression, fighting to survive while maintaining loving bonds and strong commitments to their communities” (p.30). Similarly, Sophia Villenas (2006) explains that in their daily interactions, Latina mothers and daughters are consistently “crossing and recrossing” various borderlands (e.g. cultural, generational, linguistic and gender role expectation borderlands). Villenas describes these borderlands as pedagogical spaces “where dilemmas are negotiated and possibilities for creativity and self-love flow” (p. 147). The

mothers of Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan are hard working women, as acknowledged by their daughters who also recognize that their mothers want the best for them. Although their mothers were not able to help them with schoolwork and/or advise them during the college application process, their mothers did offer them *consejos* about life, sometimes verbally, and other times through the struggles of their own daily lives. The girls learned to appreciate and respect their mothers but nonetheless they are determined to seek out something more from life than what was immediately visible to them at home and in their families. All three girls expressed feeling encouraged by their mothers to do so.

While their parents were not able to advise the girls during the college application process, Jasmin's and Lulu's parents did participate in helping their daughters select a school. Lulu mentioned that her mother attended a special meeting at Holy Trinity hosted by the college she ended up choosing. At this meeting her mother was able to learn more about the school and ask questions. She also visited the campus with Lulu and both these events heavily influenced her advising Lulu that this school was a good choice. Similarly, Jasmin recalled her mother and father both going with her to visit the school she ended up choosing, liking it very much, and supporting her choice.

Jordan's older brother had been through the college application process already, having decided to turn down a full scholarship to a prestigious university because their father had just died and their mother asked him to stay at home. Jordan mentioned she thought her brother regretted his decision. When she talked to him about her desire to leave home and go to San Francisco to study, he advised her to follow her dreams and not let their mother's worries or requests stop her. However, Jordan received some conflicting *consejos* from some of her aunts who urged her to consider the stress her leaving home would put on the family. Jordan has great

respect for the elders in her family as she commented, “They’re wise and they say ‘family is important no matter what...just always remember where you come from’”. As a result, Jordan heeded the advice of her aunts and chose to stay at home and attend a local campus of the CSU system, acknowledging that the compromise would be that she would move out of her house during her sophomore year and share an apartment with a friend.

5.5.3 **Family Financial Concerns Influence College Choices**

All three girls repeatedly mentioned not wanting their families to be burdened with the cost of their higher education. As mentioned earlier, Jasmin, Lulu, and Jordan were all well aware of the great financial sacrifices their parents made to send them and their siblings to Catholic schools, and for this reason they did not want their parents to have to pay for their college costs. Jasmin and Lulu were aware that their younger sisters still had four years at Holy Trinity ahead of them, and this was a great concern for them.

Lulu received a full scholarship to two schools, the small Catholic college she ended up choosing and a northern California UC campus. Similarly, Jasmin’s choice to attend a small private college some forty miles outside of Los Angeles was highly influenced by the generous financial aid package they offered her. Her first choice was the same college Lulu is attending, however Jasmin had problems with her financial aid application and consequently the school was not able to make her an offer. Jordan also saw money as an obstacle to moving to San Francisco. She did not receive the generous aid packages that Lulu and Jasmin both received to attend the schools they each chose. By living at home temporarily, she can work part time and save money to eventually move out without putting a burden on her family.

5.5.4 **Family Ties and Gender Role Constructions Make Leaving Home Difficult**

Each girl had a story about the resistance they originally faced as they approached their families about wanting to move away to attend college. Both Jasmin and Lulu mentioned having cousins who were attending local colleges and universities and how their parents would use these family members as examples of why they did not have to leave home to get an education. Lulu was able to find a compromise that suited her parents' need to know that she would be safe as well as her need to exert some independence by moving away. The fact that the school she chose is a small, Jesuit college seemed to assuage some of her parents' concerns regarding her well being and safety. The fact that school is located in northern California made Lulu very happy. Because her parents gave her their blessing, Lulu feels comfortable with her decision.

Jasmin's sense of duty to her family weighed heavily on her mind as she considered what college she would attend. The close relationship she shares with her younger sister was obviously one of the biggest factors in Jasmin's decision as to whether she would move far away or stay close to home while going to school. She explained feeling conflicted by the desire to move far away from home so as to enjoy that "real" college experience and yet not wanting to leave her little sister. She realizes her parents' limits when it comes to helping out with homework and providing advice regarding other school related matters and for this reason she was reluctant to go too far away for fear she would not be as accessible to her sister. Although she hoped to attend the same school as Lulu, the issues with her financial aid application prevented that from happening. Consequently, Jasmin was spared having to make the difficult decision of whether to move far away to attend school or stay close to home. She, like Lulu, found a comfortable compromise that made her parents happy and still allowed her to have the college experience she had always dreamt of. Jasmin is living on campus, but is still close

enough to where she can come home occasionally or if she is needed.

As mentioned earlier, Jordan also decided to remain at home for her first year of college. Although it has been more than four years since her father's passing, she feels she is still needed at home. Up to now, her mother and her brothers have depended on her to help manage the family's finances and also assist with other household matters. Like her two classmates, Jordan has found a compromise that is acceptable to both her and her family. She feels that by living at home for the first year of school, she can more smoothly facilitate a transition of responsibilities between her and her brothers. Her plan is to gradually turn over the financial matters she has been in charge of for the last four years and get her brothers accustomed to doing more around the house to help out their mother. She expressed looking forward to eventually moving out, as she too is anxious to experience the same independence her classmates long for.

6. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Conclusions

As I have stated earlier, my intent for this research project was not to promote any particular learning environment as a panacea for the educational challenges faced by Latinas from working class communities as they confront decisions about their post secondary lives. These challenges are as complex as are the lived realities of the young women whose experiences are discussed in these pages. There are no simple solutions nor quick and easy answers to the educational challenges faced by Latinas, and what I have learned from this research is that even educational institutions which share a common history and mission (i.e. Catholic schools), also vary in their approaches to education and schooling depending on numerous contextual factors.

It was through personal reflections and some exposure early on in my doctoral studies to the literature on single-sex schooling that I found myself turning toward the phenomenon I explore in these pages. Reflecting on the four years I spent at a single-sex Catholic high school I started to question the impact of those four years on my understanding of myself as a Chicana from Los Angeles, and how that understanding influenced the choices I made about life after high school. But rather than try to piece together the scattered memories of my high school years, I thought it would be more worthwhile to explore this phenomenon through the eyes of young Latinas, who are recent graduates of a single-sex Catholic high school.

The unique context of Holy Trinity as a small all girl Catholic high school serving predominantly Latina(o) working class communities, with a significant number of faculty who are either graduates themselves of the school or who grew up in the surrounding neighborhoods, made this an especially appealing site for me to conduct this study. I was interested in exploring

how the demographics of the student population as well as of the faculty and staff contributed, if at all, to the way the students constructed their concepts of self and how these constructions influenced their decisions about college.

Up to now much of the research on minorities in Catholic schools (Benson, et.al., 1986; Bryk, Lee & Holland, 1993; Greely, 1982; Lee, 2002; Lee & Bryk, 1986; LePore & Warren, 1996) has looked at the issues of academic success and achievement mainly through the lens of traditional indicators such as grades, graduation and college going rates. Findings from these studies point mainly to smaller school size, more attention from teachers, and rigorous course offerings as the most significant reasons for the success of minorities in Catholic schools. While these should certainly be recognized as critical factors contributing to the success or failure of these students, the unique experiences and educational needs of particular minority groups attending Catholic single-sex high schools also deserve and require further examination. Absent from the literature on minorities in Catholic schools are more in-depth and nuanced explorations of how students and teachers establish and maintain relationships of authentic trust and care (Valenzuela, 1999), as well as how a college prep curriculum reflects and validates the cultural knowledge and skills brought to school by students from historically marginalized communities, and finally how gender, race, class, language, sexuality and spirituality all intersect to influence key relationships and curricular choices.

Simply examining the academic benefits of attending a single-sex Catholic high schools could not provide a complex enough look into the factors that impact the Chicana(o)/Latina(o) schooling experience. In order for Chicano/Latino students to succeed in school, it is not enough to just provide access to a rigorous curriculum, if that curriculum continues to “subtract” (Valenzuela, 1999) or devalue the culture of the students. Nor is it enough to just promote

college as an important option after high school if students are not being mentored and assisted in developing the knowledge and skills that will allow them to navigate and negotiate various border identities, in order to achieve a kind of success that transcends primarily academic endeavors.

For the past two decades researchers (Delgado Bernal, 2006; Gándara, 1995; García, 2001; Gibson, Gándara & Koyama, 2004; Pizarro, 2005; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999; Yosso, 2005) have been looking more closely at those Latina(o) students who manage to succeed in school, graduate from college and pursue meaningful careers, despite various obstacles. These scholars are challenging the traditional paradigms that have viewed Latino culture as deficient, by bringing to light the extensive repertoire of strategies Chicanas(os)/Latinas(os) draw from to overcome and resist barriers, all the while demonstrating that when school systems, and those in charge of administering those systems, recognize these strategies as assets rather than deficits, the Chicana(o)/Latina(o) student has a better chance of succeeding. This study is my contribution to this growing body of literature that has concerned itself with what Chicana(o)/Latina(o) students *and* the schools they attend are doing right.

The experiences of Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan demonstrate that the relationships they established with teachers and peers at Holy Trinity, and the learning they experienced both in school and through participation in the service project, gave them a fuller understanding of who they are as Latinas from a large urban neighborhood, and helped them better formulate a purpose for their post secondary academic and career pursuits. As they shared with me some of the key aspects of their high school education, Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan highlighted the relationships and experiences that most impacted their understandings of themselves as Latinas from working class immigrant families and how these constructions of self influenced their choices about college.

The most significant feature of their learning experience was attending a school where they felt they were amongst *familia*. In each of their stories, Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan repeatedly cited this aspect of life at Holy Trinity as central to providing them with a sense of comfort and safety as they challenged themselves and each other to take risks and “try out” varying constructions of womanhood and femininity. They each described feeling there was a sense of collective accomplishment at the school. This they said was supported and encouraged by teachers who reminded them often that their individual accomplishments were only significant if they contributed to the overall success and accomplishments of others (e.g. their fellow classmates, their families, and/or their communities).

Research suggests that family plays a central role in the lives of most Latinos, especially among Mexican Americans. As García (2001) points out, “...research with Hispanic families compared to Anglo American families suggests that there are closer relations and greater loyalty among members, more frequent visitation of relatives, [and] parental encouragement of family-centered orientations in their children...” (p.108). At the heart of this strong connection to family is a sense of feeling “safe” among those people with whom one has established trusting relationships. For many Latina(o) students, experiencing this sense of “safety” in school and being able to establish authentic relationships of “trust”, have been shown to be important factors in academic success or failure (Duque Raley, 2004; Reyes, Scribner & Scribner, 1999; Stanton-Sálazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). When these students feel “at home” in their schools and have established trusting relationships with key players (i.e. teachers, counselors, peers, administrators) they are more likely to assume a more pro-academic attitude and seek out help (Gibson, Gándara & Koyama, 2004; Stanton-Sálazar, 2001).

Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan all reported feeling encouraged by their teachers and classmates

to succeed and they claimed to have returned this encouragement whenever possible. What stood out most to me as I listened to the girls describe this collaborative and supportive environment was the seeming absence of aggressive competition. Yes, they acknowledged competition was present in some of their in class activities, but they felt it was absent most from the more important aspects of the learning experience. Jasmin, Lulu, and Jordan reported feeling supported, by what they referred to as their *sisters* at HT, to take risks. As mentioned earlier, the girls who attend Holy Trinity share very similar cultural backgrounds. Perhaps it is their commonalities and the struggles inherent in some of these that allows for that strong sense of family. Lulu's comment regarding this commonality is a powerful statement of what the girls shared with each other in terms of these struggles: "Knowing that the person next to you has gone through stuff similar to you, like struggling with money...that's the closeness we found".

This sense of family was enhanced by the fact that several of the teachers at Holy Trinity come from similar backgrounds as the girls who attend the school. Current demographic data tells us that while the student population of the U.S. is becoming more and more diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, language, religion and socio-economic status, the teaching force has remained predominantly white, female and middle-class (National Collaborative in America's Teaching Force, 2004). Scholars have identified as major obstacles to minority student success, those teachers who are under-qualified and who lack a deep knowledge and understanding of non-white student cultures and backgrounds (Burciaga, Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2010; Irvine, 1989). These teachers tend to still be found in the largely minority schools of the inner city (Pérez Huber, Huidor, Malagón, Sánchez, & Solorzano, 2006).

Adair's discussion of the complexity of the black teacher's role in society echoes the perceptions Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan shared of their Latina teachers who grew up in the surrounding communities:

Traditionally the Black teacher has played multiple roles in schools. Among these have been teacher, parent surrogate figure, counselor, disciplinarian, and model figure. These roles have been anchored in a collective Black identity where these teachers perceive the success or failure of their pupils as gains or losses to the Black community. That is, the teacher and pupil share a common interest and mission. The teachers view themselves as ethnically responsible for preparing these youth for future leadership and for making contributions to this unique mission, namely the liberation and enhancement of the quality of life for Black people. (as quoted in Irvine, 1989, p.54)

All three girls recalled a particular Latina teacher (or two) who served not just as a role model but as a mentor as well. Because these women share similar backgrounds with the girls of HT, most are fully aware of the challenges and struggles the girls face both in and out of school – many of them experienced similar struggles and challenges in their own lives. For this reason these teachers, as Jordan recalled, not only expected more of the girls, but they also pushed them more while still providing support and guidance.

The Latina teachers of Holy Trinity also provide for the students another version of Latina womanhood. Jasmin, Lulu, and Jordan each articulated an awareness of the different gender role constructions and expectations that exist within the various generations of women in their families. All three girls expressed a desire to experience the kind of independence they felt their mothers were denied. The Latina teachers of HT are examples of the “possible selves”

(Gándara, 1995; Ginorio & Huston, 2001) the girls could aspire to, in that these women are educated (some are even pursuing graduate degrees) and they have returned to their communities to affect positive changes. Through their interactions with these teachers, Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan were able to negotiate constructions of themselves as Latinas that did not necessarily resist or rebel against the versions of womanhood and femininity as represented by their mothers and/or other significant women in their families, but rather they weaved together or “braided” (Godinez, 2006) what they perceived to be the best aspects of both.

Because several of their teachers grew up in the same neighborhoods as they, and chose to return to teach at Holy Trinity, this also gave the girls an appreciation for giving back to the community. Along with the examples set by their teachers, the girls participated in several community service projects that heightened their awareness of the various issues affecting their communities. Jasmin seemed to be the most affected by this experience as it brought her face to face with her own relative level of privilege. When she spoke of the struggling families she visited during the holidays I sensed how profoundly impacted she was by the rampant poverty she witnessed. Participating in community service also helped Jordan discover the great joy she experiences when helping others. After her father’s death, Jordan was seeking a space, away from her immediate family, where she could find herself. She expressed having found that space at Holy Trinity and the community service projects allowed her to, as she put it, “see the bigger picture”. Jordan is well aware of the struggles she and her family have faced, but similar to Jasmin, the community service activities helped her recognize also the advantages and privileges she has enjoyed and thus she recognizes there are “bigger” issues to deal with in the world and she is looking forward to making her contribution. Lulu was also moved by her community service experiences of working with little children. She said she felt like she had gained patience

through these experiences. All three girls expressed also learning the importance of finding balance in their lives from participating in community service.

Historically, girls have been marginalized in schools. Teachers and administrators unknowingly, tend to reward male aggression with more attention and resources, and curricular choices and pedagogical practices have tended to favor male preferences (AAUW, 1991, 1992, 1998; Sadker & Sadker, 1994). Latinas, like other women of color, have struggled to overcome the double oppression of being marginalized for their race and ethnicity as well as their gender (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990; Castillo, 1994; Rodriguez, 1994). The battle by Latinas to overcome this oppression is fought on various fronts, as these women actively resist male domination and struggle to make their voices heard at home as well as in school. Up to now there has been a paucity of research that examines how young women of color manage to do this in various types of school settings; public and private, single-sex or coeducational. Research on girls in single-sex schools has focused primarily on middle class White women attending private academies and/or colleges, and those studies that have looked at working class minority girls in single-sex schools, portray the culture of these girls as something they need to escape in order to succeed (Diaz, 2006). Little attention has been given to the experiences of those young women of color from low-income communities whose parents struggle financially to send them to single-sex Catholic high schools. The three young women whose stories are told in these pages are providing insight into the experiences of a group, who up to now has been noticeably absent in the literature on single-sex schooling.

While Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan all recognized that the absence of boys at their school limited the worldviews and perspectives they were exposed to in their classes and other learning activities, none of them regretted attending an all girl school. They expressed having gained a

greater sense of who they are as individuals as well as a greater confidence in expressing their ideas and opinions. As Jasmin states, “I like knowing that I know myself a lot better than I would have with men there”. Jordan and Lulu also expressed feeling more willing to take risks and develop their voices. All three of these young women struck me as confident with a definite point of view and a desire to share it with the world. Nevertheless, in the stories they shared with me, they recalled being somewhat shy and lacking in confidence when they first arrived at Holy Trinity. But through their interactions with their classmates and teachers, as well as through their participation in various organizations and their assumption of leadership positions within these, they gained more confidence and began to develop their voice. Overall, each girl expressed feeling empowered by the almost all female learning environment at HT.

Each of the three young women in this study all recognized the great sacrifices their parents made to send them to Catholic school. They were all well aware of the financial strain their tuition put on their families and for this reason each was extremely concerned that their college education *not* be a burden on their families as well. The financial cost of attending (and for two of them, living at) a college or university factored greatly on the school each girl ended up choosing. Though all three of them had long dreamt of attending a college far from home, the ultimate reality of how much college would cost significantly altered their plans.

While financial concerns did weigh heavily on the girls, these concerns were wrapped up in their commitment to take care of their families. None of them ever expressed to me that at any time their parents said they could not help pay for their college education. Given the descriptions of their families each shared and the sacrifices already made to send the girls to Catholic school, I am fairly certain their parents would have found a way to help them pay for their college tuition as well. However, it was the girls themselves who decided they would find

the funds for this endeavor on their own. To an extent I believe it was a way for them to exercise that independence they were so eager to demonstrate, but also, I believe each girl had a genuine concern for her family's well being. Lulu and Jasmin both had sisters who would be attending Holy Trinity soon.

But finances were not the only or most significant determinant in their college choice. The girls each shared how when they were younger, they dreamt of going away to college to have that "real" college experience. However, as their senior year drew to an end and colleges were expecting acceptance letters in May, the decision of whether to leave or stay close to home became more difficult. For Jasmin, the close relationship she shared with her little sister weighed heavy on her mind. She wanted to be around to provide support and guidance for her sister during her high school years and she knew her parents relied on her to help with her sister's care. I wondered if secretly Jasmin was relieved that her financial aid application was held up therefore preventing her from attending the college in northern California. Lulu's financial concerns were greatly reduced as she received full scholarships to two schools. I found it telling of her respect for her parents that she chose the school they approved of. The small Jesuit college that Lulu chose, though far away, provided her parents with a sense of comfort that in turn made Lulu feel better about her decision to move away. She seemed at peace knowing that although she had to leave her family, she was doing so with their blessing. Jordan seemed determined at first to move to San Francisco and her brother's advice, having given up a great opportunity himself to appease his mother, helped to validate her decision. However, it was the words of her aunts, whom she greatly respects, that finally swayed her to stay at home so as to help her family make the transition to not having her around.

Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan, each have their own unique story of what it has taken them to reach this important milestone in their lives. While neither of them is the first member of their extended family to attend college, as they all have older cousins attending college now, Lulu and Jasmin are the first in their immediate family and Jordan will be the first in her immediate family to attend a four year college. This is nonetheless a significant achievement for the daughters of immigrants with little education. These young women are well aware of how important this accomplishment is not only for them but for their families as well, both the families they were born into and the family they created with their sisters at Holy Trinity. Though each girl worked extremely hard to make it this far, they all give credit to their high school for helping them make the journey.

6.2 **Limitations and Recommendations**

While this study explores aspects of a phenomenon that is increasingly drawing the attention of other scholars – the academic achievement of young Latinas, it does so in a manner that provides a glimpse into the experiences of only a few, in the unique context of a single-sex Catholic high school. By focusing on only three participants, my intent was not to put forth research from which general conclusions could be inferred or offered, but instead I hoped to provide a more nuanced exploration of each participant's lived experiences within this unique educational setting and how these experiences impacted difficult choices about college.

Because the purpose of this study was to understand the phenomenon from the point of view of the participants as they experienced it, interviews were the primary source of data collection. These interviews were conducted after the girls had already graduated, therefore they were being asked to recall significant events and/or experiences of their high school years after

the fact. Having to rely on memory may not always produce the most accurate accounts of events or experiences. Nonetheless the essence of those experiences came through in the words of the young women.

Conducting the research after the girls had graduated also limited the ability to carry out triangulation in this study. No documents, other than the personal statements of two of the girls, were examined (the third girl could no longer locate her personal statement). Semi-structured interviews were conducted only with the participants, though a few informal interviews were conducted with some of the teachers and the principal of the school. More structured interviews with key school personnel as well as with parents would have provided more varied perspectives on this topic and would have generated more questions for future research. It was not my intention to conduct an ethnographic study, as I was interested in seeing the phenomenon through the eyes of the three participants. I opted for depth over breadth.

In this research I examined the difficult choices three Latinas encountered as they prepared for their lives after high school. The influence of close family ties and responsibilities was examined as was the role of an all female learning environment in helping the girls negotiate these decisions. These girls grew up and attended high school in Los Angeles, a large metropolitan area with several colleges and universities (public and private) located within a twenty-mile radius of downtown, allowing many to attend college and still live at home if necessary or at least remain close by. For young Latinas, like the ones in this study, who struggle to convince their families to allow them move far away to attend college, living in a large city like Los Angeles affords them options that can satisfy both their needs as well as their families'. However, for those young Latinas who live in smaller towns or in more rural areas where the nearest college or university is several miles away from home, the options are few.

More research is needed that focuses on this group of young women so as to better understand how family ties and responsibilities impact their opportunities after high school.

This study focuses solely on Latinas. While others have conducted research that looks into the schooling experiences of minorities in single-sex schools (both private and Catholic), more research is needed that recognizes the unique role culture plays in how various minority groups experience different schooling contexts. Studies that employ a variety of methodologies to examine the impact of single-sex learning environments on Latinos, African American males and females, as well as other ethnic minority groups, can provide valuable data and findings to help us identify educational settings and practices that help minority students achieve academic success, while also developing within them the ability to successfully navigate and negotiate the many borders they will continue to encounter throughout their lives.

Based on the themes that emerged from this study I offer some recommendations for those concerned with the educational, cultural, social, emotional, and spiritual development of Latinas.

As reported throughout this study the three young women interviewed here expressed feeling a sense of comfort in attending a school where the environment made them feel like they were among *familia*. As Valenzuela (1999) reminds us, schools need to make every effort to ensure that the relationships that arise between Latina(o) students and key school personnel (i.e. teachers and administrators) reflect an “authentic” notion of care in which the whole student is valued. If Latina(o) students are to be successful academically, schools must recognize the unique context of the Latina(o) family and community structure. Jasmin, Lulu and Jordan all reported feeling encouraged and challenged by their Latina teachers who shared similar backgrounds. Teachers, especially those that are non-Latina(o), must be aware that often

academic and professional success for Latinas is a collective endeavor in both means and goals.

For many poor and working class Latinas(os), the “possible selves” they are exposed to in their communities are limited (Gándara, 1995; Ginorio & Huston, 2001; López, 2003). Having teachers who share similar cultural, linguistic, and socio-economic backgrounds not only affords Latinas positive role models to which they can aspire to, but they also have in these teachers a valuable resource when the time comes to make important decisions about their post-secondary aspirations. More effort is needed to recruit Latinas(os) into the teaching profession, especially at the secondary level.

All three girls reported feeling great satisfaction from participating in the community service project. Participation in this project provided them with valuable skills for both their academic and professional careers (i.e. time management, balancing various aspects of their lives), and the experience opened up their eyes to some significant social issues, helping them find a purpose for their college education. Schools, both public and private, should inquire into providing these types of community service opportunities for young people.

Finally, schools must ensure opportunities for Latinas to participate in extra-curricular activities that allow them to develop leadership skills and confidence. The girls of Holy Trinity felt comfortable taking risks because aggressive competition was almost absent at their school. Schools need to foster more cooperation among students and provide opportunities for collective successes rather than solely stressing the values of competition and individual achievement.

From *Simply María or The American Dream*

By Josefina López

SCENE TWELVE

(toward end of the scene)

MARIA: “Dear Mamá and Papá. Last night I heard everything. Now I know that your idea of life is not for me – so I am leaving. I want to create a world of my own. One that combines the best of me. I won’t forget the values of my roots, but I want to get the best from this land of opportunities. I am going to college and I will struggle to do something with my life. You taught me everything I need to know. Goodbye.”

GIRL 1: Los quiero mucho. Nunca los olvidaré.

GIRL 2: Mexico is in my blood...

GIRL 3: And America is in my heart.

MARIA: “Adiós.” (Fade out.)

End of Play

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APPENDICES

Appendix A.

Seidman's Interview Model

Interview #1: Establish the context of the participants' experience.

- How do you identify yourself? Or, what do you call yourself? (Mexican, Latina, American, etc)?
- What experiences and/or relationships have influenced what you choose to call yourself?
- Can you share with me about any significant relationships you've had with women throughout your life, be they friends, family members, teachers, neighbors, etc.?
- Has attending this school played any role in what you call yourself in terms of your identity? If so, how?
- How do you feel about attending an all girl school? Do you feel it has been beneficial to you in any ways, and if so how?
- What do you think might have been different for had you attended the local public high school?
- Share with me some examples of how this school deals with an all female student body?
- Are there any particular classes, programs, and/or events that have been organized around the idea of enriching or empowering the lives of young women?
- What are some examples of how the school acknowledges the fact that it is in a predominantly Mexican community?

Interview #2: Allow the participants to reconstruct the details of their experience within the context.

- Share with me the path you've taken to this place you are at in your life in which you are now prepared to attend college after graduation.
- What things did you do both academically and socially to prepare yourself for this next step?
- Are there significant persons in your life that have influenced or assisted you in this preparation? Can you share with me what role they played?

- What have been some of the conversations you've had with parents or other significant family members about attending college?
- How do they feel about you going on to college?
- What conversations have you had about where you might go to school?
- How did you go about choosing the schools you're applying to?

Interview #3: Encourage participants to reflect on the meaning of their experiences.

- What has influenced your choices of schools to apply to? What is it about those schools that make you want to attend them?
- Tell me about some of your teachers that have been particularly significant in your learning experiences as well as in your preparation and decision making process about college? What about them makes them significant to you?
- Is there anything unique about your experience at this school that has contributed to your identity as a young woman?
- How have you seen your cultural background and the values of your home and community reflected in the school? (through the curriculum, classes, teachers, projects, events, etc.)

Appendix B.

University of Illinois at Chicago

Research Information and Consent for Participation in Social Behavioral Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Researchers are required to provide a consent form such as this one to tell you about the research, to explain that taking part is voluntary, to describe the risks and benefits of participation, and to help you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: **Mónica G. García**

Department and Institution: **Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of Illinois Chicago**

Address and Contact Information: **6236 Magnolia Ave. Whittier, CA 90601**

Why am I being asked?

You are being asked to be a subject in a research study about the college decision-making process of Latinas at single-sex Catholic high school. This study will examine the experiences of Latinas at a single-sex Catholic high school during their senior year. I want to know what challenges they face as they decide to pursue higher education, how they negotiate possibly conflicting family demands and expectations, and how the context of a mostly female learning environment influences their choices and decisions.

You have been asked to participate in the research because you are Latina, you are already 18, and you have taken the recommended academic courses and examinations for admission to a four-year college in the state of California.

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Chicago or your particular high school. **If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.**

Approximately 4 subjects may be involved in this research through UIC.

What is the purpose of this research?

Researchers are trying to learn what role, if any, an almost all female learning environment might play in the college decision-making process of young Latinas.

What procedures are involved?

This research will be performed at either your home or at a local coffee shop.

You will need to come to the study site 4 times over the next 4 months

Each of those visits will take about an hour to an hour and half.

The study procedures are

1. Initially, you will be asked to sign the required consent form.
2. Once you have signed consent forms, an interview schedule will be established with you.
3. You will be given a journal to document your college choice and decision making process. You will be asked to record thoughts, ideas, feelings, and any significant events related to the college choice and decision making process.
4. You will be interviewed individually on three separate occasions. Interviews will be spaced approximately within one to two weeks of each other.

5. After three interviews have been conducted with you, you will be given a draft of my data interpretations and reporting from your individual interview, to check for accuracy.
6. Approximately two weeks after the completion of the individual interviews, a focus group interview will be conducted with all participants.
7. Finally, participants' journals will be collected at the end of their senior year in high school.

What are the potential risks and discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. The interview questions and journal writing activity proposed for this study have been designed to illicit open-ended responses that require reflection and the sharing of information that may be of a personal nature regarding conversations between the participants and family members, peers, and/or key school personnel. Given your age and the possible stress you may be experiencing as you approach your graduation from high school and are in the process of making difficult decisions about your futures, these reflections can provoke some emotional responses.

There may be risks from the study that are not known at this time. Interview questions that probe your ideas and understandings about yourself and your immediate environments, while not intended to function as therapeutic, can possibly raise awareness of feelings, attitudes, beliefs, and/or behaviors that can bring about unforeseeable and unintended changes in you and/or your environment.

Again, it is important for you to remember that you may withdraw from any part or the entire study at any time with no questions asked.

Are there benefits to taking part in the research?

You may not directly benefit from participation in the research.

This study is not designed to benefit you directly. This study is designed to learn more about factors influencing your decisions about post-secondary education.

Taking part in this research study may not benefit you personally, but we [researchers] may learn new things that will help others.

What other options are there?

You have the option to **not** participate in this study.

What about privacy and confidentiality?

The people who will know that you are a research subject are members of the research team.

Otherwise information about you will only be disclosed to others with your written permission, or if necessary to protect your rights or welfare or if required by law.

Study information which identifies you and the consent form signed by you will be looked at and/or copied for checking up on the research by: me the principal investigator.

When the results of the research are published or discussed in conferences, no information will be included that would reveal your identity.

During the data collection process, individual interviews will be held at an off campus site so as to ensure the anonymity of the participants. Data will be coded so as to remove any identifiers of the participants, and pseudonyms will be used in the reporting phase of the project. Given that a focus group interview is also part of the data collection process, it cannot be avoided that the participants will know each other, but they will not have access to each other's data collected during the individual interviews. Interviews may be recorded with the participant's consent, but pseudonyms will be given to each participant and used during the interviews. Tapes will be

stored in locked file cabinets in my home and/or office and these will be destroyed after they have been transcribed. All hard copies of data will also be stored in a locked file cabinet in my home and/or office. Data stored on my home or office computer will be password protected, and as mentioned above, all participant identifiers will be coded.

Only I, the principle investigator, will have access to any and all identifiable information. Although we ask everyone in the group to respect everyone's privacy and confidentiality, and not to identify anyone in the group or repeat what is said during the group discussion, please remember that other participants in the group may accidentally disclose what was said.

What are the costs for participating in this research?

There are no costs to you for participating in this research.

Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. You can simply contact me and let me know you no longer wish to participate.

You have the right to leave a study at any time without penalty.

The Researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if I believe it is in your best interests or if I feel your continued participation is no longer contributing to the inquiry goals of the project.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

Contact me, **Mónica G. García** at 626-627-6992 or at luupps@yahoo.com or **Dr. William Ayers** at 312-996-4508 or at bayers@uic.edu if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, or if you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research.

What are my rights as a research subject?

If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, including questions, concerns, complaints, or to offer input, you may call the Office for the Protection of Research Subjects (OPRS) at 312-996-1711 or 1-866-789-6215 (toll-free) or e-mail OPRS at uicirb@uic.edu.

Remember:

Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

Signature of Subject or Legally Authorized Representative

I have read (or someone has read to me) the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

Signature

Date

Printed Name

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date (must be same as subject's

Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

Appendix C.

INITIAL CONTACT SCRIPT

Hello my name is Mónica García, you may have seen me around your school as I have visited there a couple of times in recent weeks to talk with your principal. I am in the process of completing my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction through the University of Illinois at Chicago. In order to receive my degree, I have to design and conduct a research study in an area of education that interests me. Having graduated from an all girl Catholic high school myself, I've often thought about how that experience influenced my preparation and decision to go to college. As such, I thought it would be interesting to visit an all girl school, similar to the one I attended, and interview seniors who were getting ready to graduate and go on to college. I'm interested in finding out how attending an all girl school might influence the college decision-making process of Latinas.

I'm contacting you because you are Latina, you are already 18, and you have taken the recommended academic courses and examinations for admission to a four-year college in the state of California which tells me you're seriously considering going to college. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary so you shouldn't feel pressured to participate. You should know that even though I had to get permission from your school and the Archdiocese to contact you, my study is in no way connected to your school, which means that whether you participate or not, your choice will have no effect what so ever on your standing at school. While the school knows that I am contacting some students to invite them to participate, no one from the school knows which students I am contacting, so your privacy will always be protected. If you think you might be interested in helping me out by letting me interview you, then I'd really appreciate it if we could meet either at your home or at the community center that is located at the park by your school, wherever you'd feel more comfortable, so that I can explain the study in more detail, answer any questions you might have, and give you some forms to read and sign. You should also know that even if at first you decide to participate in the study, but then later change your mind and want to quit, you could do that without any questions asked. As a requirement of my program of study at my university, I have to work under the supervision of a faculty advisor. My advisor is Dr. Bill Ayers. You can call him at 312-996-4508 or send him an email at bayers@uic.edu, if you have any questions regarding my research study or me.

VITA
Mónica G. García
6236 Magnolia Ave.
Whittier, CA 90601 626-627-6992
mggarcia@csusb.edu

Academic Degrees, Licenses and Credentials

Ph.D. Curriculum and Instruction, University of Illinois at Chicago, 2011
M. Ed. Bilingual Education, University of California at Los Angeles, 1995
Single Subject/BCLAD Credential in Spanish, University of California at Los Angeles, 1995
B.A. Sociology and Spanish, University of California at Berkeley, 1991

Professional Experience

09/09-present: Lecturer
College of Education, Department of Language, Literacy, and Culture, California State University, San Bernardino
Responsible for teaching courses in the Secondary Education program, in the areas of Secondary Literacy and Language Arts, (see course listings below) and advising teacher candidates.

09/07 – present: Adjunct Instructor
College of Education, Teacher Education Department, California State University, Long Beach
Responsible for teaching courses in Teacher Education as well as in the Curriculum and Instruction Masters program.

06/07 – 06/09: Visiting Instructor
Department of Education and Child Development
Whittier College, Whittier, CA
Responsible for teaching courses in the Teacher Education program as well as in the Education Masters program. Also, responsible for co-coordinating part of a federal Title V grant aimed at assisting Community College transfer students interested in pursuing a teaching credential.

09/05 – 06/07: Lecturer
College of Education, Department of Language, Literacy, and Culture, California State University, San Bernardino
Responsible for teaching courses in the Secondary Education program, in the areas of Secondary Literacy and Language Arts, and advising teacher candidates. Co-director of federal grant (Preparing Paraprofessionals for Teaching).

08/03 – 07/05: ESL Teacher/Coordinator

Project FLAME (Family Literacy: *Aprendiendo, Mejorando, Educando*) College of Education, University of Illinois at Chicago

Coordinate all aspects of family literacy program. Hire and assign ESL teachers to various sites. Maintain communication with participating schools and park district sites. Assist in revision of literacy curriculum. Oversee literacy curriculum implementation at participating sites. Assist ESL teachers with development of participatory model of ESL curriculum. Provide information on the program to sites interested in adopting the FLAME model. Coordinate annual institute information sessions for participating parents. Coordinate annual family book fair. Keep director informed of programs progress. As an ESL teacher – develop and deliver lessons using a participatory approach method, oversee parent trainers and assist them in the preparation of literacy workshops.

08/03 – 07/05: Teaching Assistant

Curriculum and Instruction, College of Education, University of Illinois at Chicago

Teach one course per semester in Curriculum and Instruction area.

09/00 – 7/03: Lecturer

College of Education, Department of Language, Literacy, and Culture, California State University, San Bernardino

Responsible for teaching courses in the Secondary Education program, in the areas of Multicultural Education and Bilingual education and advising teacher candidates. Participated in various committees. Co-directed federal grant (Preparing Paraprofessionals for Teaching). Assisted in development of reports (SB 2042) and documents (Part-time faculty handbook). As part of the committee to write the SB 2042 report, I collaborated with colleagues in the secondary program to develop course descriptions and syllabi for new courses to meet the SB 2042 standards. Assisted in GEAR-Up grant implementation.

09/99 – 06/00: Program Assistant/Tutor

Success For All Reading Program, Public School 96, New York, NY

Tutored elementary school students reading below grade level employing the methodology of the Success For All reading program. Assisted the program coordinator in various tasks including data analysis and processing, staff training, programming and scheduling of staff and students, and Spanish translation.

09/98 – 06/99: Student Teacher Supervisor

School of Education, Whittier College

Supervised student teachers working in primary level classrooms. Oversaw and collaborated on lesson planning and assisted with structuring effective classroom management strategies. Ensured that student teachers met requirements set forth by the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Met with other Teacher Education faculty to discuss student progress and collaborated on the development of an effective curriculum for student teachers.

09/95 – 06/97: Spanish, Social Studies, and ESL teacher, grades 9-12
Woodrow Wilson High School, Los Angeles, CA.

Taught Spanish to both native and non-native speakers beginning at level 2 up to Advanced Placement. Taught Social Studies to non-English speakers in an all-Spanish language classroom, as well as in a sheltered English environment. Was responsible for developing English language and literacy skills in the content area classroom. Initiated the implementation of and taught a Chicano Studies elective course for juniors and seniors. Participated as a member of the school's LEARN Governing Board. Led student support groups in the IMPACT program. Collaborated with faculty and administration in establishing school policy and procedures and in the preparation of the overall school report for accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

09/92 – 06/94: Language Arts/Reading, Math, Social Studies, Science teacher, grades 6-8, San Antonio de Padua School, Los Angeles, CA.

Taught Math, Reading, Science and Social Studies to grades six, seven and eight. Assisted in curriculum development in said subjects and served as Chair of the Science Department. Assisted with student extra-curricular activities such as Student Council and Community Service coordination. Collaborated with faculty and administration in establishing school policy and procedures and in the preparation of the overall school report for accreditation by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

09/91 – 06/92: Bilingual Teacher, grades 5 & 6,
La Salle Ave. Elementary, Los Angeles, CA.

Provided instruction for a combination class of English only and limited English proficient fifth and sixth graders in a modified bilingual program. Coordinated multicultural events.

Courses Taught

California State University, San Bernardino

ESEC 405 Secondary School Culture

This is a required introductory course in secondary school culture examining the importance of students as the center of school culture, including a broad range of issues and theories that serve as the foundation to the profession of teaching in a pluralistic society. The growing number of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations in our public schools requires all educators to have a deeper understanding of the concept of culture and its relationship to educational practice. The changing demographics and historical patterns of culturally diverse groups will be analyzed and discussed in order to understand present and future trends in California public schools.

ESEC 413 Language Interaction in the Classroom

English learners, including their linguistic and academic needs, are the focus of this course. Specifically, this course examines concepts central to teaching/learning and empowering students to acquire English academic language skills. Relevant issues such as family and cultural background, second language acquisition, including psychological and socio-cultural factors, language teaching and assessment, history, theories and methods of bilingual education, state and federal laws, content area teaching and assessment, and addressing English language development and content area standards. Special attention is paid to the teacher's role in designing, creating, and maintaining democratic learning communities where English learners are empowered academically and provided equal access to high status academic knowledge.

ESEC 419 Reading Across the Curriculum

Acquire and demonstrate research-based instruction that provides for teaching effective strategies and methods for guiding and developing the content based reading and writing abilities of all students, including students of varied reading levels and language background.

ESEC 505E Secondary Curriculum and Instruction Single Subject English

Introductory course in secondary curriculum and teaching methods with emphasis on subject area materials, mediated materials, secondary curriculum and legal aspects of teaching as a profession.

ESEC 506F Secondary Curriculum and Instruction in the Content Area – Foreign Language

Links the academic discipline, student field experience/intern teaching, and the professional preparation courses with an emphasis on foreign language methods. It is designed to assist students with the application of appropriate pedagogy in the classroom by integrating theory and practice.

ESEC 512 Principles of Pedagogy - TPA 1 and 2

This course examines, reviews and assesses students in passing Teacher Performance Assessment of 1 and 2, which consists of the Teacher Performance Expectations (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12). Students must successfully complete this course in order to continue in SB 2042.

ESEC 321 Culture and Schooling

Basic understanding of the nature of “culture”, its manifestations and the dynamics of cross-cultural contact. Key issues of group and individual acculturation, assimilation, biculturalism, culture shock, and racism and their impact on educational practice. Includes a ten-hour field component at an approved setting.

ESEC 333 *Curriculum and Instruction for a Diverse Society*

Overview of the social, theoretical, classroom and policy perspectives used to explain the school performance of English language learners. Includes historical, legal, and educational foundations of bilingual education; first and second language acquisition; structure of language; nonverbal communication; English language development; specially designed academic instruction in English; assessment and placement issues; and an examination of the role of verbal interaction in learning. Requires a ten-hour field component in an approved setting.

ESEC 510 *Teaching English Language Learners in Secondary Schools*

Offers a broad overview of approaches and methods used in language teaching, but will focus specifically on practices that can support the development of English language proficiencies needed for success in secondary schools.

ESEC 545 *Community Service in Literacy Learning*

This course teaches tutors how to teach literacy skills on a one-to-one basis and provides a direct field experience. It focuses on low literacy, bilingual issues, learning disabilities of K-8 students, and the connections of literacy and math skills. This course is unique in emphasizing one-on-one methods, strategies and techniques.

ESEC 605 *Curriculum for Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE)*

Study and practice of the design, implementation, and assessment of Specially Designed Academic Instruction in English (SDAIE). Includes selection and use of appropriate SDAIE strategies and materials.

ESEC 680 *Practicum in Teaching English as a Second Language*

Simulation and classroom-based practice in teaching methods and materials to include planning, teaching performance, classroom organization, student management, and evaluation competencies.

California State University, Long Beach

EDSS 490: *Subject Specific Pedagogy for English Learners*

Subject-specific curriculum and methods addressing background and needs of English Learners (e.g., SES, race, ethnicity, special needs) for the secondary teacher.

EDCI 500: *Studies in Curriculum and Instruction*

Introduction to graduate study in curriculum and instruction. Overview of curriculum and instruction as a field of inquiry. Reading critically and conducting educational research. Using reflective strategies to analyze and improve professional practice.

EDCI 615: *Contemporary Issues in Elementary & Secondary Education*

Aims to cultivate an understanding of the philosophical, institutional, societal, and political contexts in which current curricular and educational practices are decided, implemented, and reformed.

EDCI 625: *Analysis of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment*

Advanced study of curriculum design, instructional processes and student assessment through analysis of theory and research on teaching and learning. California K-12 Content Standards and the California Standards for the Teaching Profession are used to evaluate curriculum, instruction and assessment.

Whittier College

EDUC 290/590 *Teaching and Schooling in Popular Culture: Critical Perspectives*

Dissects, deconstructs, analyzes and critiques various popular cultural texts in an attempt to understand the pedagogical impact of these on perspective teachers.

EDUC 300 *Sociological and Anthropological Perspectives on Education*

This course focuses on the educational experiences of the major ethnic/racial groups in the United States, beginning with the *Common School Movement* to the current context of high stakes educational reform under the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. A key anchor in this historical and highly situated examination is a focus on how the various ethnic/racial groups responded and resisted within the educational history. More specifically, the course helps learners understand how increasingly diverse students (and their families and communities) interacted with schools' conditions and practices.

EDUC 404/504 *Second Language Acquisition Theory and Methodology*

This course provides students an opportunity to learn about second language acquisition theory and practice, with particular focus on the philosophy, design, goals and characteristics of school-based organizational structures designed to meet the needs of English learners in California schools. A major focus of this course is the development of understanding and practice through fieldwork with English learners.

EDUC 601 *Educational Inquiry*

Overview of quantitative, qualitative, and action research approaches to educational inquiry, with a focus on critiquing research, writing a literature review, and an action research plan.

University of Illinois at Chicago

CIE 472 *Assessment and Instruction for ESL*

This course is one of a series of courses required by the state of Illinois for meeting the requirements for English as a New Language (formerly ESL and

Bilingual) Approval. Specifically, this course covers language proficiency assessment and ESL methods. The instructional portion of this course focuses more heavily on methods for developing oral language, although one must understand that there is always an integration of vocabulary and grammar with reading and writing, and all four aspects of language interact, overlap, and support each other. The assessment portion of this course covers listening, speaking, reading, and writing in ESL.

CIE 481 Foundations and Cross-Cultural Issues in Educating Limited English Proficient Students

This course provides teachers and prospective teachers with an opportunity to read and discuss the ideas of a variety of educators, psychologists, linguists, historians, and others who have researched and written about the education of English language learners. Class participants also explore an issue in depth by carrying out an inquiry on topic in the course. Since the course also includes a practicum, class participants examine the implications of theoretical constructs for actual classroom and community environments.

Professional and Academic Association Memberships

- American Educational Research Association (AERA)
 - Division B Section Chair (2010-2011)
 - Treasurer – Hispanic SIG (2004 – 2006)
- American Educational Studies Association (AESA)
- Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social (MALCS)
- National Association of Chicana and Chicano Studies (NACCS)
- National Association of Multicultural Education (NAME)

Conference Presentations

- “Real Latinas Navigate Curves: Negotiating the Bumps on the Road towards Educational Advancement”, Symposium presentation at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, CA, 2006.
- “Hanging with the ‘right’ crowd: Social Networks of Support Among High School Latinas”. Paper presented at annual meeting of the American Educational Studies Association, Charlottesville, VA, 2005.
- “Latino Parental Involvement and Latino Identity in the Context of Post-Welfarist Educational Reform”, Panel Discussion, annual meeting of the American Educational Studies Association, Charlottesville, VA, 2005.
- “Single-sex Catholic schools and Chicana/Latina students: Successes and challenges”, Paper presented at the Twelfth World Congress on Comparative Education, La Habana, Cuba, 2004
- “Surviving in Academia: Reflections of Women of Color in Tier 1 Universities”, Panel Discussion, Twelfth World Congress on Comparative Education, La Habana, Cuba, 2004