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Soy Mi Cuento: Latina Students Bridging Multiple Worlds in Independent Schools

Abstract

The dissertation explores the hybrid identity, *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 1999), of Latina graduates of independent schools. Latinas currently represent one of the lowest performing, fastest growing, youngest ethnic minority groups in the United States (United States Census, 2010), and the smallest demographic in independent schools (Torres, 2012). Education offers Latinas academic and social capital for economic advancement and college opportunity (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Santiago, 2013); independent schools are an important entry to gaining this capital. Latinas attending independent schools often enter heterogeneous educational environments for the first time and find the need to explore their identity more salient (French, Seidman, Allen, and Aber, 2006). The experience results in bridging multiple worlds as students experience dissonance (Alvarez, 2011) negotiating their place and their experience. The purpose of the research is to answer the question, "Does an awareness of identity development offer an advantage to navigate the elite independent school cultural milieu?" Through *testimonio* (Pérez Huber, 2009), a form of storytelling or personal narrative, and Gloria Anzaldúa's (1999) *autohistoria-teoría*, the research gathered data from successful Latina independent school graduates about their experiences in independent schools. The research explored Latina identity development in the context of her school experience from the perspective of a new *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 1999) and offers a countervailing perspective to Deficit Studies (Madrid, 2011). Latina participants underscored Anzaldúa's theory of hybrid identity development indicating that socioeconomic status and family influence had a profound impact on their identity development.

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C. Michael Robinson,

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Pamela N. Minyard

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Soy Mi Cuento: Latina Students Bridging Multiple Worlds in
Independent Schools

By

Lillian Díaz-Imbelli

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of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

C. Michael Robinson, Ed.D.

Committee Member

Pamela N. Minyard, Ed.D.

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Dedication

If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more,
and become more, you are a leader.

John Quincy Adams

This dissertation is dedicated to the special people in my life who have inspired me and brought me to this point in my journey. Every moment, every meeting, every experience has shaped me and contributed to where I find myself now. My family has been the most constant, important, invaluable, and loving presence and to them I am most grateful. To my husband, Michael, especially, because you made it all possible, “*Yo te quiero, mi Corazón.*”

To the women who have given their time to the research, offered their honest reflection, and humbled me with their passion, their intelligence, and their grace and perseverance, I honor you with the names of important Latina women in my life: my grandmother, mother, daughter, and sisters of the soul. You too will always have a place in my heart.

To young Latinas currently in our schools, the ones in our future, and the teachers who are entrusted to guide them, I pray that you share your stories with one another, so that you grow to value each story with due respect and learn from them, so that your lives are enriched. I hope the message in these pages and the work that lies ahead inspires others to dream big, learn lots, do more, and become the person each of us is meant to be.

With deep love and gratitude, I thank God for the blessings in my life, the opportunities I have had, and the experiences that await me. I pray for the grace to honor

them always with a humble heart. Finally, to Cohort 3, Team 3, and my dissertation team, words are inadequate, you have changed me most of all.

Biographical Sketch

Lillian Díaz-Imbelli was born in Puerto Rico and grew up in the Bronx, where she and her husband have raised three children. She attended public schools from K-12th grade. She is the first in her family to graduate college, Stony Brook University, but has not been the last. Her professional life has been spent in New York City independent schools, where her children were fortunate to have also attended. She is currently in the tenth year of her tenure as the Director of Admission at a New York City independent high school. Her passion for the importance of story has had a long history. However, when she discovered the work of Gloria Anzaldúa, her professional life was changed forever. She began her doctoral studies in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2011. She conducted her research studying Latina students' experiences in independent schools under the direction of Dr. Michael Robinson and earned her doctoral degree in 2013.

Abstract

The dissertation explores the hybrid identity, *mestiza consciousness* (Anzaldúa, 1999), of Latina graduates of independent schools. Latinas currently represent one of the lowest performing, fastest growing, youngest ethnic minority groups in the United States (United States Census, 2010), and the smallest demographic in independent schools (Torres, 2012). Education offers Latinas academic and social capital for economic advancement and college opportunity (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Santiago, 2013); independent schools are an important entry to gaining this capital. Latinas attending independent schools often enter heterogeneous educational environments for the first time and find the need to explore their identity more salient (French, Seidman, Allen, and Aber, 2006). The experience results in bridging multiple worlds as students experience dissonance (Alvarez, 2011) negotiating their place and their experience. The purpose of the research is to answer the question, “Does an awareness of identity development offer an advantage to navigate the elite independent school cultural milieu?”

Through *testimonio* (Pérez Huber, 2009), a form of storytelling or personal narrative, and Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1999) *autohistoria-teoría*, the research gathered data from successful Latina independent school graduates about their experiences in independent schools. The research explored Latina identity development in the context of her school experience from the perspective of a new mestiza consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1999) and offers a countervailing perspective to Deficit Studies (Madrid, 2011). Latina participants underscored Anzaldúa’s theory of hybrid identity development indicating

that socioeconomic status and family influence had a profound impact on their identity development.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Over the past 30 years, independent schools have slowly been integrating Latinas and other ethnic minorities into their school system. However, Latinas still represent a small portion of the high school population. Research has found that independent schools offer viable alternatives for educating students that are underrepresented. Despite the demographic shift over the last ten years in urban public schools, independent schools have only witnessed a one percent increase in the Latino student population (Torres, 2012).

The phenomenological study uses the methodology of *testimonio* and *autohistoria-teoría*, a form of autobiography incorporating stories, mythology, and poetry rooted in Gloria Anzaldúa's Borderland Theory (1999) to tell the story of the Latina student experience in these schools. In gathering narrative data from Latina graduates of elite independent schools, students were encouraged to contribute beyond the text of an interview and offer additional expressions reflecting their sojourn as Latina students in independent schools. Qualitative interviews were conducted with a criterion sample (Creswell, 2000; 2007) of seven Latina graduates sharing the common phenomenology of receiving financial awards for demonstrated academic potential. The study sought to understand whether an awareness of identity development is an asset to successful navigation of school culture. Analysis was through a lens with the most relevance to

Latina students. Developed by Anzaldúa, (1999) Borderland theory explores the constant negotiation between different contextual realities in Latina students' lives.

Problem Statement

In the most recent census, Latinos became the youngest major ethnic and racial minority in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2012). Among school-age children attending public schools, one in five is Latino and one in four kindergarteners is Latino. Based on current demographics, this growth is projected to increase, so that by 2060 it is expected that 38% of the Latino population will be under 18 years old; 40% will be under 21 years of age; Latinos will comprise 31% of the total projected population of 420.3 million U.S. residents; and an estimated 1 in 3 Americans will be Hispanic (United States Census Bureau, 2012). Research also indicates that Latinos lag behind other children in achievement (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), yet education will hold the key to acquiring the necessary educational capital (Hussar & Bailey, 2011) to succeed in the future (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002).

While public schools in the United States are becoming increasingly segregated and causing the promise of equitable education for both black and Latino youth to be elusive (Edwards, 2011), independent schools recognize the value of diversity and inclusion on their campuses (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, & Gurin, 2002; Kaufman, 2012) and have both the means and the potential to contribute positively to balancing this growing education gap (Hoge, 2012). Gándara and Contreras (2009) assert that Latinas have the greatest potential to address the disparity in educational success through their own gains. One way to accomplish this is to set examples and encourage siblings to follow their lead by being among the first in the family to pass on important social capital (González,

Stoner, & Jovel, 2003). Research further validates the benefits of a mother's educational attainment and influence (Delgado Bernal, 2001; Repak, 1995) on her children's academic achievements and motivation (Blair, Blair, & Madamba, 1999; Fuligni, 1997; Plunkett & Bamaca-Gomez, 2003). Educating Latinas is vital to the nation's economic future (Gándara & Contreras, 2009) because of the important role women play in the family (Delgado Bernal, 2001).

However, independent schools and their inherent elitism (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009) pose academic, identity, and self-efficacy challenges (Blackburn & Wise, 2012) to Latinas new to their school communities. Latinas live the world in all three realms of identity (Kramarae, 1996; Walker, 2003) therefore, it is necessary to understand how each component - ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status – transmits to their educational experience. However, an effort to transcend conventional labels is necessary because different perceptions and belief systems underscore the fluidity of labels (Anzaldúa, 1999) and by rejecting these narrow parameters of identity, one transcends borders that limit experience. This approach enables us to explore the Latina experience in independent schools from a more holistic perspective by disrupting categories (Anzaldúa, 1999) and exploring the concept of a *new tribalism* (Anzaldúa, 1999), which offers an alternative to assimilation and separatism (Keating & González-Lopez, 2011) thereby forging the possibility of bridging our differences.

The research explores the Latina student's independent school education from the perspective of her experience in order to understand if an awareness of her identity development is a positive factor on the educational experience.

Theoretical Rationale

Culture is a signifying system through which the social order is conveyed, emulated, and legitimized (Bourdieu, 1986, 2008; Warren, 1992; Williams, 1982). Elite schools are communities that produce culture, by their construct have supreme authority, and convey the culture of power (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). For Anzaldúa (1999), this creates a postcolonial inferiority complex necessitating Borderland work to rise above binary thinking. Binary thought divides people into opposing camps: whites versus people of color; superior versus inferior; good versus bad; savage versus civilized (Hall, 1996; Keating & González-Lopez, 2011; Proctor, 2004). Rather than perpetuating a culture of opposition, Anzaldúa advocates a new tribalism, where everything is intertwined and we celebrate our commonalities rather than our differences (Keating & González-Lopez, 2011) in order to transcend thinking that divides us. The multiple layers of identity each play a unique role within the context of the new heterogeneous school environment; a phenomenon not often explored in independent schools (Cavanagh & Lopéz, 2012). Yet, when Latino students construct identity within dominant culture the experience is more difficult (Quiroz, 2001). Cultural identity is a complex phenomenon that is bridged by the dynamic relationship between what we inherit and what we acquire (Freire, 1998). This duality is echoed in Anzaldúa's Borderland theory which explores identity from a non-binary, fluid process of constant negotiation requiring one to traverse bridges between the multiple realities of Latina experience (Anzaldúa, 1999) of home and school.

From a social justice perspective, a humanizing education empowers students to make sense of the world and their place in it by connecting culture to critical democracy

(Freire, 1998). Exploring the contextual lives of Latina students underscores the role of critical ethnography, which mandates the exploration of how issues of oppression, control, and social justice (Seidman, 1991) define experience for research participants.

By conducting a phenomenological study to explore the lived experiences of Latina students in independent schools, we can shed further light on the challenges Latinas face negotiating school culture. Gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status form what the current study refers to as the Triadic Educational Loci of Latina Urban Students (TELL US) and the common factors linking research participants. Previous studies have focused on race as one of the three components of identity. However, the heterogeneity of Latino culture has made ethnicity an additional characteristic. Latinos may identify differently with regard to race, which is very culturally influenced (Taylor, Lopez, Martinez, & Velasco, 2012), while still identifying as Latino or Hispanic with regard to their ethnicity; a unique phenomenon witnessed in the most recent census (Taylor et al., 2012), where many respondents had difficulty choosing one category. This recent phenomena underscores Anzaldúa's (1999) observation that institutional identity categories are used to organize, separate, and disenfranchise certain groups, and that resisting categorization enables one to think in more inclusive and global-spiritual terms (Keating, 2000; 2009).

While race and ethnicity are separate identifiers, both contribute to alterity, or a feeling of otherness (Alsultany, 2009) creating the discomfort that Anzaldúa states is necessary to cross the Borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1999; Henríquez -Betancor, 2012). This hermeneutical approach focuses on the lived experience of Latina students who have graduated from independent schools. It asked participants to respond to three broad

questions: Did you feel you belonged to your independent school? Was there ever a point where this changed? Do you believe that you made sacrifices by attending an independent school? In asking participants these questions, the research sought to explore Latina student identity development from a pluralistic perspective put forth by Anzaldúa (Keating & González-López, 2011) as the student develops her *mestiza consciousness*.

Situating this study in the context of independent school experience offers a germane way to focus on the unique challenges underrepresented groups experience in the dominant culture of schools. Study participants represent a demographic that received financial assistance or merit aid to attend. Although not all Latina students attending independent schools receive assistance, for many it is the only means of access (Torres, 2011). Bourdieu's (1986) theory of capital offers a relevant context from which to explore and interpret the concerns of this research. He posits that economic capital is at the root of all other capital and that benefits derived in one area require sacrifices to another. While all students occupy a subservient role in schools because of the inherent structure, Latina students receiving significant assistance to attend schools may experience a sense of indebtedness Bourdieu calls gratitude (Bourdieu, 1986); a concept with an undercurrent of servitude. This unique position combined with Latina identity may contribute to the Latina student adapting a muted persona (Kramarae, 1996), one that is reinforced in the home where students are implored not to speak of or share private family matters (Anzaldúa, 1999; Keating, 2000), and never voice their concerns with regard to their place in the community. Anzaldúa implores us to speak from the liminal space in which we negotiate our experience and from which our voice must emanate;

creating radical visions for transformation (Anzaldúa, 1999). She underscores the importance of all voices needing to be heard and equally valued which can have a profound experience on Latinas everywhere (Upegui-Hernández, 2012). According to Bourdieu (1986) and Anzaldúa (1999), the violence perpetuated by the privileged is perpetuated to maintain the status quo, and has a silencing effect (hooks, 1990).

Anzaldúa asserts that for the silence to be transformed, it is both a very personal experience and a completely organic one (Keating & González-Lopez, 2011). For Anzaldúa, (1999) words have both a transformative power and a healing effect.

Empowering Latinas so that their voices are heard (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; McWhirther, Valdez, & Caban, 2013) and understanding the variant ways that females live are concepts foundational to feminist theory (Anzaldúa, 1999; hooks, 2000a, 2000b; Lugones & Spelman, 1990). Both hooks (2000a, 2000b) and Anzaldúa (1999; Keating, 2000, 2009; Keating & González-López, 2011) recognize that theory, like identity, is transitional and never fixed.

Anzaldúa's notion of *hybrid/mestiza identity* (1999) provides the grounding theory upon which this research evolved. Because Latina women negotiate their identity, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status in their academic, social, and familial world, Anzaldúa's theory empowers women to reach beyond the boundaries set by society's arbitrary imposition of one identity, and instead dare to inhabit multiple identities simultaneously (Anzaldúa 1999; Orozco-Mendoza, 2008). Borders are not only physically confined to a geographical space but rather occupy the interior spiritual, mental, and emotional domains of thought (Orozco-Mendoza, 2008). To distinguish the concept of geographic borderlands from the psychic spaces the individual negotiates in

society, Anzaldúa uses a small “b” to refer to both sides of the Texas-Mexico border, where she grew up, and a capital “B” to delineate the metaphoric space of identity (Keating, 2000). This concept of B/borders is very similar to Bourdieu’s (1986) habitus, which defines the domain of all of our learning. However, Anzaldúa’s (1999) theory was borne of her personal struggles with a culture she constantly negotiated as she defined her identity as a Mexican, lesbian, intellectual in both her home and professional life. In creating a methodology to address the symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1986; McKnight & Chandler, 2012) enforced on her by the dominant culture, she initiated a new way of thinking for Latina women living in a hybrid world (Anzaldúa, 1999) and constantly crossing borders as she develops her agility in a transnational world (Zaccaria, 2006).

Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of habitus and the role that agency, or self-advocacy, plays in its social reproduction parallels Anzaldúa’s (1999) theory of negotiating Borderlands. Gaztambide-Fernández (2009) found that in elite schools, students are equally complicit in reproducing the boundaries that structure their identities. Students in the dominant class want to protect their position and those considered subaltern, or subservient to the dominant class, are not encouraged to cross the invisible lines of power (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). While there are conflicting forces trying to impose dominant ideology on the subaltern (Gramsci, 1971), outcomes, however, are relational. Anzaldúa (1999) believed that for those living life in the B/borderlands, one has to become comfortable with ambiguity and be flexible in negotiating her way around domination. In fact, Alvarez (2011) found that the Latina students in her study felt empowered by the ability to negotiate two contrasting cultures. Bourdieu (1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) on the other hand, believed that agency enabled one to either

participate in the process of social reproduction or, through agency, manage it. For Anzaldúa (1999), however, it is necessary for the mestiza to shed the veil of victimhood and don the armor of resistance through the exploration of her identity and finding her voice in her writing. This empowerment is manifested in a struggle for social change or spiritual activism (Anzaldúa, 1999; Keating, 2000) serving as advocates for the self or others.

Another difference between the two approaches is that Bourdieu (1986) confined his critique in a traditional Marxist fashion and focused on class as his focal point. Anzaldúa's (1999) theory by virtue of both her ethnicity and gender is more complete and helps to frame the Latina struggle more fully beyond the parameters of class. Both Walker (2003) and McKnight and Chandler (2012), whose work in social and curricular analysis includes the context of race, state that critical analysis of schools is weakened if solely from a class orientation. Because race, and in the case of Latinos ethnicity, is so central to both the history and power structures of the United States, it must be considered in any meaningful discourse (McKnight & Chandler, 2012). However, it must go beyond the traditional identity constraints to embody an awareness of others, while recognizing our commonalities as well as our differences (Anzaldúa, 1999; Keating, 2000). Agency is also informed from the perspective of identity. For Anzaldúa (1999), when the subaltern creates her own master narrative, and tells or writes her own story, she transcends the duality that exists between the dominant class and her individuality albeit creating a hybrid identity in this process and refusing to be defined by others.

Anzaldúa's (1999) Borderland theory and her methodology of resistance offers a non-traditional approach suited to the research and the realities of participants in the study. Latina graduates of independent schools have navigated the borders between the elite independent school environment and the home successfully and offer valuable insight for others following the same path to gaining academic capital. This research enlisted successful Latina graduates to share their master narratives in order to better understand Latina student experience and determine whether an awareness of identity development has a significant influence on her education.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the Latina student experience in independent schools from the perspective of her hybrid identity. The space between her world and her school environment both challenges and creates her unique reality and identity; a reality known as the *nepantla state* (Anzaldúa, 1999), an in-between space necessary to negotiate before crossing between borders to a place unique to the individual. This *nepantla state* is a great source of stress on Latinas as they negotiate the demands of family and school and their need to reconcile the two (Alvarez, 2011; Orbe, 2008) distinct worlds.

In order to offer a counterbalance to studies focused on academic deficiencies and retention issues (Tinto, 1988, 2006), this strength-based approach focused on Latinas with demonstrated success as graduates of rigorous college preparatory independent schools. Every effort must be made to glean an understanding of the Latina student's academic success in order to improve the experience for all and encourage others to follow in her footsteps (Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Robinson Kurpius, & Rund, 2011).

Furthermore, researchers recognize that more effort needs to focus on understanding successful students and not just those that fail (Padilla, Treviño, Gonzalez, & Treviño, 1997). Because of the strong sense of family obligations and the desire to set an example for siblings (Alvarez, 2011), Latinas have the potential to play a significant role in bridging the current opportunity gap (Gándara & Contreras, 2009) with their success.

The research participants in this study represent a group of Latina secondary independent school graduates. The experience as students in independent schools during the important years of adolescent development and the critical period when students develop their abstract thinking and explore the multiple intersections of identity (French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006) can help to inform schools seeking to better serve this population. Because the theoretical frame of this study is based on Anzaldúa's Borderland (1999) and post-Borderland Theory (Keating & González-López, 2011), it is hoped that participants will become *Nepantleras*, a mediator for other Latinas crossing the Borders of identity, through their example and support of others; thereby continuing the work that Anzaldúa envisioned (Keating & González-López, 2011) through *Spiritual Activism* and praxis.

A future goal is to build on the results of this study to initiate a process leading to further research and an action research project enlisting additional Latina graduates. Identifying areas that need to be addressed in schools and recognized as missing from the curriculum is an important step toward achieving both individual praxis and collective praxis (Kemmis, 2010) toward developing a new *Mestiza* consciousness (Anzaldúa, 1999; Kynclová, 2006) resulting in an evolving *spiritual activism* (Keating, 2000).

Specifically for Latinas, and the independent schools in which they are being educated, Anzaldúa's (1999) work has the potential to build bridges and improve the independent school experience for all members of the community. For participants, it is hoped that validating their experiences encourages them to do the work of *Nepantleras* and contribute to improving the independent school experiences of her Latina sisters. Anzaldúa's social justice commitment informed her vision of a world that would be transformed from binary thinking to one embracing our interconnectedness. *Nepantleras* become the catalysts for change (Keating, 2009) Anzaldúa hoped to see. In the context of schools, *Nepantleras* can help plan, create, and implement changes to the diversity curriculum and be proactive contributors to the community. McKnight and Chandler (2012) underscore the importance of including class and race in the dialogue of curricular analysis and the research may contribute to that mandate.

Initiating a conversation, which provokes thought regarding hybrid identity development and the various forms of capital, is an important step to take. This is particularly important as it addresses one of the significant findings in Alvarez's (2011) research of first year Latina college students and their propensity to seek help from one another before reaching out to adults in the community. It also addresses one of the concerns students of color voiced in Gaztambide-Fernández's (2009) two-year study of boarding school culture and the process of reproducing elite culture on a prestigious New England campus. Latino students often felt they did not enter into their new school communities with the recognized cultural capital that earned them a feeling of belonging. Empowering students as invested members in the community underscores the goal of

action research to achieve practical results in the form of models of democratic dialogue and meaningful discourse (Kemmis, 2010).

Opportunities to present at admissions and diversity conferences attended by school administrators, admissions directors, teachers, and policy makers, provide forums and offer opportunities to share the research results, contribute curricular recommendations, and spark continued dialogue about ways in which we can better serve Latina students in our schools. Positive, strength-based evidence gathered from the research may inspire schools to enroll more Latina students, and encourage others to follow in their footsteps. Independent schools must recognize that enrolling Latina students in their schools is only the first step to achieving educational equity (Cavanagh & López, 2012). Students must also be served and contribute as equal participants, so that there is no doubt they belong and the cultural capital they possess is recognized and valued equally (Cavanagh & López, 2012; Esparza & Sanchez, 2008; Espinoza, 2010).

Research Questions

The research questions guiding the study sought to gain the insight of successful Latina graduates of independent schools. Anzaldúa's (1999) pedagogy of resistance is a methodology of empowerment and provides insight from those that have negotiated their way through elite independent school culture at a time where they have also engaged in the work of forging an identity amidst the competing culture of home and school. The goal of the research was to glean a better understanding of the challenges faced by successful graduates, so as to inform and guide students in the future. The questions below guided the inquiry.

1. From the perspective of Latina graduates of independent high schools who are enrolled or graduated from college, what did the process of identity development look like as they experienced it during their independent high school education?
2. From the perspective of Latina graduates of independent high schools who are enrolled or graduated from college, what advantages do they perceive there are to having the awareness that this development is taking place?
3. From the perspective of Latina graduates of independent high schools who are enrolled or graduated from college, how can the awareness of identity formation/development benefit the student attending an independent school and the school in which the process takes place?

Potential Significance of the Study

As the Latino student population continues to grow in this country (United States Census Bureau, 2012) and independent schools enroll more Latino students and their families into their communities (Torres, 2012), it is imperative that schools understand students' contextual realities (Freire, 1999) in order for the school to serve their needs best and design programs that are culturally sensitive (Cavanagh & López, 2012; Kaufman, 2012). Identifying this local problem is the first step in the process of improving Latino student experience; the second step is to engage students in the dialogue so they play a participatory role in influencing the world that is their new reality (Anzaldúa, 1999; Creswell, 2007). As there is a dearth in the research on Latina academic success, and little in the context of independent schools, this research contributes to the literature in order to better understand the complexity of identity development within the

context of the independent school community and its role in student success, so as to better serve the students enrolled in independent schools.

Definitions of Terms

The analysis of the research data used the lens defined by Anzaldúa (1999) in Borderland Theory to explain the process of hybrid identity development. In order to contextualize the definitions of unfamiliar terms and familiar ones with non-traditional definitions, the following list of definitions is offered. It is important to note that many of the important concepts in Anzaldúa's theories deliberately derive from the languages with which she identified. Her work is speckled with Standard English, working class English, Chicano Spanish, Spanglish, and *Náhuatl-Aztec* to the consternation of her early critics (Keating, 2009). This code switching (Kynclová, 2006; Umaña-Taylor, Gonzalez-Backen, & Guimond, 2009), or moving back-and-forth between languages, requires some guidance in order to appreciate the nuances of her style and theories. Anzaldúa refused to follow Standard English protocol of italicizing foreign words because she believed they had equal validity in the lexicon. Anzaldúa's epistemology is deliberately rooted in mythology that rejects male-centric, binary thinking replacing it with female archetypes from the pantheon of the Aztec goddesses. The following concepts represent both Borderland theories and post-Borderland theories.

Belonging: Feeling a part of a community or cultural institution beyond being in it. The distinction between "belonging in" and "belonging to" an independent school community is significant (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2011). In many ways, this is determined by the capital that you possess when joining a new community, which has been inherited by students.

Bridges: Thresholds to other realities and between them; symbols of shifting consciousness.

Capital: Associated with social class and power achieved through education and inheritance; it is a societal advantage to have capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977); there are many forms of capital: cultural, economic, social, familial, and societal. Not all capital is held in the same esteem by the dominant class.

Coatlicue [Kwat-LEE-Kway]: A serpent and mother of the Gods in Aztec mythology symbolizing life and death and the juxtaposition of contrary forces or the depiction of opposites.

Coatlicue state: An essential element in Anzaldúan (1999) epistemology representing the resistance to knowledge triggered by an intense personal struggle, which can result in paralysis and depression but must be accomplished as is a prelude to crossing bridges.

Conocimiento: Literally meaning understanding or consciousness; it is a consciousness rising tool. A post-Borderland epistemology expanding on Borderland theories of mestiza consciousness and *la Facultad* developed by Anzaldúa (1999). *Conocimiento* represents a non-binary, liminal way of thinking that is reciprocal and connects the inner life of the spirit with the outer worlds of action (Keating, 2000). There are seven stages to *conocimiento*, each informing the other (*el arretrato* –state of discomfort; *nepantla* – state of transition; *Coatlicue* state – the struggle within provoked by an awareness that change is imminent and necessary; the call - or the crossing and conversion; putting

Coyolxauhqui together – from fragmentation to wholeness; the blowup – a clash of realities; shifting realities – acting out the vision of spiritual activism.

Coyolxauhqui [Ko-yol-sha-UH-kee] Imperative: *La diosa de la luna*, or mother of the moon. Anzaldúa describes this concept as a process of inner healing and the desire to move from fragmentation to complex wholeness.

Desconocimientos: The opposing concept of *conocimientos* akin to denial; a not knowing or a refusal to know which can be damaging and is viewed as an evil of modern life in that it results in irreversible harmful effects.

El Mundo Zurdo: Literally the left-handed world and represents relational differences, or the commonalities between groups, where people coexist and work together to bring about revolutionary change.

Hegemony: A complete way of thinking ultimately requiring little thought; it is virtually spontaneous. Both families and schools are key agents of hegemony (Gramsci, 2012; Hill, 2007).

La Facultad: An intuitive form of knowledge or the capacity to see beyond the surface to see deeper realities by digging deep and soul-searching.

Identity: The development of self and the experiences that contribute to this process. Although identity is shaped over time by numerous factors including, but not limited to: family, group membership, geographic location, class status, race, education, political affiliation, country of origin, ethnicity, etc. For the purposes of this study, the three major loci of identity explored are these: ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status.

Inclusivity: The process of fully embracing students of color into a community beyond the boundaries of acceptance to include cultural representation in the community of the school, especially as reflected in the curriculum-what is often referred to as going beyond a diversity initiative of the “hero and holiday” approach (National Association of Independent Schools, 2012).

Latino/ Hispanic: For the purposes of this research, they are interchangeable terms to denote students that identify, either by birth or ancestry, with one of the Spanish speaking countries in Latin America and/or the Caribbean. It does not reflect an individual’s racial identification. It should be noted that the heterogeneity of Latinas makes it difficult to narrowly quantify an individual’s identity (Taylor, et al., 2012).

Mestiza Consciousness: Anzaldúa’s most popular concept; a non-binary way of thinking and acting that recognizes ambiguity in one’s lived experience.

Mestizaje: The Spanish word for mixture representing the multiple aspects of identity with which one identifies.

Nagual: The *Náhuatl*, Aztec, word for shapeshifter, which symbolizes the changes in crossing over.

Nepantla: The *Náhuatl* word for the in-between space of crisis and change occurring at the many transitional stages of life.

Nepantlera: A mediator or one who facilitates passage between different worlds.

New Tribalism: Creating alliances in the process of identity formation.

Nos/otras: A type of group identity or consciousness. By combining two words (us/them) it is a deliberate attempt to represent the divisions and inter-connections between groups and the promise of healing.

Spiritual activism: A form of praxis using the commonalities between people as a catalyst for change and transformation.

Subaltern: A concept with origins in Gramscian philosophy. It derives from Marxist thought regarding power and authority. Those with power are subordinate to those in power; they have a subaltern identity.

Chapter Summary

Because culture is fluid and influenced by time and place, past experiences may not totally reflect current student experience (Bandura, 2006). However, understanding the academic experience and identity development of Latina students attending independent schools may help other Latina students navigate their new communities so that their success is maximized. This chapter discussed the rationale for conducting phenomenological research with a criterion sample of Latina graduates of independent schools in order to gain further insight into their individual experience and identity development in the context of elite independent schools. Chapter 2 covers an overview of independent schools and the Latina student in the context of the school experience. In Chapter 3 the Latina student identity development is explored and details on the research design is provided. Chapter 4 presents the data, and Chapter 5 analyzes the findings and interprets results from the lens of Anzaldúa's Borderland perspective.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

One of the most significant trends in the United States 2010 census is the growth of the Hispanic population, which currently exceeds 50 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012) making Latinos one of the fastest growing, youngest, and largest minority groups in the nation. Consequently, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) forecasts record level growth in Latino student enrollment for every year from 2012-2020 in public schools (NCES, 2011). While it is essential for schools to prepare policies and leadership practices (Farmer, 2012) to address this demographic shift and future student needs, it is prudent to consider alternatives to public school education. When enrolling students in independent schools representing ethnic and racial diversity and comprising a smaller demographic than the dominant population, it is necessary to consider the needs of the student beyond academics. When students enter the heterogeneous community of an independent school for the first time, their cultural identity becomes more salient (French et al., 2006) and, consequently, it is necessary to understand what factors may influence their experience. The research explored whether a Latina graduate of an independent school had an awareness of her identity development at the time of attendance and whether this awareness presented an advantage or a challenge to her successful academic outcomes; how she negotiated her school experience and her home culture and whether she was aware of this process as she managed these disparate worlds.

It also explored the ways that the Latina graduates participating in the study can contribute to building bridges for students in the future, so that they too are successful.

Independent Schools

The National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) in collaboration with the Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) studied the attitudes and aspirations of graduates of both independent and comparable public schools and concluded that there are a number of advantages to independent school education in both college preparation and career success (Torres, 2011). Increasingly, NAIS schools' mission statements and recruitment efforts articulate a commitment to reflect the demographic profile of the community in their schools (Torres, 2012) and actively identify, recruit, and enroll students of color to reflect their mission. Offering comparable opportunities to a growing diverse population that reflects the same educational opportunities of students with inherited social capital is one way to assure their success (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002) and make educational opportunities more equitable.

To assure the success of Latina students entering independent schools, however, it will be necessary to understand students' unique experiences. Since Latina students are projected to be the most important influencers in bridging the Latino education gap (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), understanding the unique challenges Latinas face culturally and academically as potential impediments to success (Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002) is important. The literature review explores the Latina student in the context of the independent school educational experience at the important time of adolescent development when they are expected to know the nuances of their new communities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Through the voices of Latina graduates, we gain insight

into their experiences negotiating multiple identities in the context of independent schools eventually leading to successful graduation and a better understanding of the challenges they faced in this process. This study begins by giving an historical overview of independent schools, their growth, and summarizes the unique characteristics that distinguish an independent school.

The focus of the study is on Latina graduates of secondary independent schools within the auspices of the NAIS. There are also regional affiliates; the California Association of Independent Schools (CAIS) and NYAIS, the New York Association of Independent Schools. These serve members locally and address specific demographic challenges for their members. In order to explore the Latina student experience in the independent school academic community, an overview of independent schools is offered. There are approximately 2,000 independent schools in the United States serving more than 700,000 students from kindergarten through high school (NAIS, 2012). NAIS is a not-for-profit member organization committed to serving and strengthening independent schools through advocacy, best practices, dissemination of information, professional development, promoting the principles of diversity, choice, and opportunity (NAIS, 2012). NAIS serves over 1,700 private K-12 schools and associations in the United States and abroad (NAIS, 2012). The organization is the result of the merger of Independent School Education Board (ISEB) and the National Council of Independent Schools (NCIS) over 50 years ago. Individual member schools are governed by an independent board, have a distinct mission, and corresponding academic programs (Torres, 2011). The NAIS membership directory lists schools representing a broad range of offerings: elementary to secondary schools, day to boarding, single-sex to co-educational, secular to

non-secular, traditional to progressive, rural to urban, for students with exceptional potential and those with special needs, and various alternatives in between (NAIS, 2013). Although independent schools do not report to a centralized agency as public schools do, they are still accountable both to their boards and to their most important stakeholders, the families that comprise the school community (Calder, 2007).

Origin of independent schools. Since the founding in 1769, Dartmouth College was established as an independent educational institution governed by a board of trustees. In 1819, however, the New Hampshire legislature passed a law revoking its charter, removing their trustees, and replacing them with overseers appointed by the governor (Calder, 2007). With this gesture, Dartmouth was rendered a public institution provoking the school to sue for the return of their autonomy. Dartmouth reclaimed its independent status in a case successfully argued by Daniel Webster and retained the right to their self-governance provided that the school operated in a legal fashion to uphold its charter (Calder, 2007) setting the precedent for independent schools to remain private.

Compulsory Education Act of 1922. This act made it compulsory for parents to enroll children between the ages of eight and sixteen to attend a local public school in the state of Oregon. Failure to do so was a misdemeanor punishable by fines and/or incarceration (Calder, 2007). In *Pierce v. the Society of Sisters*, as the suit was known, the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary and the Hill Military Academy sued the governor, Walter Pierce, on the basis of two important points. The two schools argued that parents had the right to choose the schools and their children's teachers and the state had no right to jeopardize the schools' businesses and properties by forcing families to go elsewhere (Calder, 2007). The act was overturned with a decision in favor of the schools,

which acknowledged parents were the ultimate arbitrators of decisions pertaining to their children's education. Both of these decisions, one allowing private institutions to exist and the other empowering parents to make decisions regarding their children's education, set the foundation for the rights and privileges afforded independent schools today.

Unique characteristics of independent schools. Independent schools are non-profit institutions that are self-determining with regard to their mission and program. They are governed by independent boards and funded primarily through tuition, charitable contributions, and endowment income. They are not regulated by the government but accountable to the students they serve and the parents that enroll them (The Independent School Management, 2008). The oldest independent school in the nation is the Collegiate School founded in 1628 (Calder, 2007), which to this day serves boys in New York City. Independent schools maintain that their institutions are selective rather than inclusive (Calder, 2007) and today accept all students who fit their mission. They are not one-size-fits all educational offerings, however. Historically, they have afforded an alternative to public school.

Benefits of independent school education. The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) and NAIS in partnership with one another, conducted research to study the attitudes and aspirations of independent school graduates and compared their findings to comparable students in public and other private schools (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004). Their study was combined with results from the 2010 Freshman Survey (TFS), a component of the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), which is a recognized comprehensive source of information on college students. CIRP administers the longitudinal survey to hundreds of thousands of students across the nation

to explore myriad characteristics with which students identify. This collaboration resulted in a special report identifying the academic and personal development of independent school students in their freshman year of college (HERI, 2004).

Key findings of independent school graduates participating in the report were that students believed they were well prepared for the academic rigors of college life and success in the 21st century; they are self-aware and open to differing views; confident in their position but respectful of others; they are eager and prepared to fully engage in the intellectual, athletic, and social life of college. They seek to gain benefits from their experience beyond preparation for a career; they appear to have the potential for continuous economic success, social responsibility, and personal fulfillment; and, independent schools help graduates look beyond university life and recognize the importance of being fully engaged, contributing members of society (Torres, 2011).

Two professional organizations serving independent schools are the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) and Independent School Management (ISM). Both serve as advocates for the promotion of independent schools and each offers professional development (ISM, 2010).

ISM offers strategic management support for admissions, development, risk management and strategic long-term planning. While their purpose, membership, and support overlap to some degree, NAIS and ISM are philosophically different, particularly with regard to their stance on affordability. NAIS suggests that affordability should be maintained in schools so that the top 15-20% of families in the demographic the school serves should be able to afford tuition (NAIS, 2012). This recommendation underscores

NAIS's commitment to achieve greater socio-economic diversity (Blackburn & Wise, 2012).

ISM, serves most of the same schools as NAIS and an additional 3,000 member schools, maintains that tuition should be determined strategically based on a mission appropriate projection of where the school will be in six years. ISM's position is that tuition should be set with strategic goals and expenditures in mind. ISM posits that a school's autonomy and mission should be the guiding principle in determining tuition. ISM further contends that NAIS's tuition stance of a traffic-bearing point (listed tuition) without considering strategic mission goals may jeopardize the integrity of the institution over time (ISM, 2008). These divergent philosophies have the potential to significantly alter the independent school landscape. As tuition reaches an all-time high, some boarding schools have reached \$45,000 annually (Torres, 2012), cost becomes an obstacle to acquiring an independent school education and gaining the important cultural capital that results. Access and opportunity often is contingent on the family to which you were born (Bourdieu, 1986). National trends in higher education are witnessing the same economic disparities as elite institutions enroll disproportionate numbers of students from high-income families (Freedman, 2013). This would underscore Bourdieu's (1986) contention that some students benefit from cultural capital through inheritance.

Although independent schools serve a mere 1.5% of the nation's students, they have the potential to exert a significant amount of influence in local communities and beyond. Students in independent schools contribute through service projects and outreach in the community (Torres, 2011). Despite their perceived elitism, independent schools have a strong commitment to positively contribute to their local communities and

to educating a responsible citizenry (Torres, 2011). Recently there has been a further commitment to creating and maintaining sustainable schools to serve a public purpose. Finally, the aggregate number of leaders that independent schools graduate demonstrates their effectiveness (Adams, 2000). Bill Gates, a college dropout, Class of '73, attended Lakeside in Seattle, Washington and still attributes his success to his independent school (NAIS, 2012).

NAIS: Assessment of inclusivity and multiculturalism. NAIS has created the Assessment of Inclusivity and Multiculturalism (AIM), a document to evaluate diversity, multiculturalism, equity, and justice in independent schools and plan strategically for the projected changes (NAIS, 2012). As public schools become increasingly more segregated (Edwards, 2011), independent schools recognize and are firmly committed to diversifying their school population (Brosnan, 2012). Increasingly, public schools have become more segregated leaving students in schools with extreme poverty, poorly prepared teachers, high turn-over rates, lower levels of peer group competition, and the added financial burden that results from poverty (Edwards, 2011). In addressing this crisis of opportunity, the NAIS recognizes the impact the nation's increasing diversity will have on all schools. By 2020, half of all US students will be non-Anglo-Americans and Hispanics are projected to be 20.1 % of the total population and grow another 4.4% by 2050, which will significantly impact schools economically (Davison, 2009).

AIM is used as a benchmark by independent schools to ascertain progress in important areas. These include meeting diversity and multicultural goals, assessing current initiatives, and encouraging internal and external publics to contribute to the

dialogue on inclusivity initiatives through community-building processes and experiences in independent schools (Davison, 2009).

Research clearly demonstrates the direct correlation when race, poverty, and segregation intersect (Orfield & Lee, 2005). This causes conditions for inequities in schools and will impact our nation's economy (Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Guzmán & Jara, 2012). This is particularly true if, as futurists predict, socioeconomic diversity will supplant racial diversity as a prime issue over the next fifty years (Davison, 2009; Baptiste & McGovern, 2012). NAIS has boldly stated their commitment to eradicate and eliminate thinking, practice, and beliefs that intentionally or unintentionally marginalize certain groups (Ewing & Davis, 2010).

Latinos in independent schools. As Latino/as become the majority minority (Gándara & Contreras, 2009), independent schools consider the implications that this demographic shift will have on the educational system. The nation and our schools need to plan to develop policies and programs to address this emerging cultural change (Farmer, 2012). Independent schools need to be change agents in this process and lead the way as they address their multicultural and diversity mandates. Researchers Moll and Ruiz (2009) call on advocates of Latino students to practice educational sovereignty to challenge the limitations of educational opportunities that characterize the Latino student's current experience. According to Farmer (2011), Texas and other border states with Mexico have been leading indicators of demographic trends long before the rest of the country witnesses the same changes. The Texas data over the last ten years suggest that there will be an overall increase in the student population, an increase of economically disadvantaged students, an increase in the percentage of Hispanic students,

while the White student population will decrease. There will be faster enrollment growth in urban areas, and the percentage of limited English proficiency will also increase (Farmer, 2011). These changes foreshadow what the rest of the nation can anticipate and, by necessity, will need to address. For as Farmer (2011) states, educational systems that incorporate projections into their strategic plans are likely to serve students better and fulfill their public purpose promise. Currently, however, Latinos are the smallest minority in independent schools and represent 3.5% of the student population or approximately 13,000 students (Torres, 2011; Cavanagh & López, 2012).

In addressing these changes, however, independent schools will need to provide culturally relevant and sensitive pedagogy (Farmer, 2011). One of the crucial factors in Latina student success is the concept of developing an academic identity (Moll & Ruiz, 2009). Madrid (2011) underscores this in research findings citing the variables that are associated with student achievement among Latina students. Curriculum rigor, role of the teacher, class size, resources, parent participation, and exposure to environmental issues coupled with high expectations, meaningful relationships, and time on tasks, all factor into positive outcomes (Farmer, 2012). These criteria are precisely the factors that attract families to independent schools. Small class and school size are particularly attractive to families in deciding to attend independent schools, and research also underscores the benefits to the educational experience of a smaller environment (Biddle & Berliner, 2000). Because independent school graduates have historically done well in the most selective colleges and 85% of graduates from NAIS schools attend the most highly selective colleges and universities (Higher Education Research Institute, 2004), Latina students have much to gain from attending independent schools. However, entry

into independent schools can pose numerous challenges for unprepared students (Cavanagh & López, 2012; Dawe, 2011; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009). Sensitive and deliberate programming that recognizes students' cultural contributions and enhances self-efficacy and self-esteem (Cavanagh & Lopez, 2012; Dawe, 2011; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Moll & Ruiz, 2009) will assure students will gain maximum advantage from the experience of an independent school education. For Latina students, there are additional factors to consider which affect academic performance and compete with familial obligations (Gándara & Contreras, 2011; Sy & Brittan, 2008; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002).

Access organizations. These organizations identify, support, and guide students with high academic potential from underserved communities and introduce them to the independent school process. Their advocacy on behalf of students has helped to increase the representation of underserved students in independent schools (Dawe, 2011).

Although there are many such organizations, in New York, the two predominant ones preparing students for entry into secondary schools are Prep for Prep (Prep) and Oliver Scholars. Since 1978, when Gary Simons, a South Bronx teacher founded Prep with 25 students and three teachers, the organization has advocated for its students and has prepared over 4,000 students and alums to have access to independent school education (Prep for Prep, 2011). Each year Prep receives over 750 applications for consideration from the city's top students nominated by New York City public school leaders. Faculty members are drawn from leading public and independent schools (Prep for Prep, 2011).

Access organizations serve an important role in introducing, preparing, and mentoring underrepresented groups. They are often the first contact for students and their families to independent schools.

Latina Students

Any discussion on Latina students must begin with the family relationship. In a study conducted by Sy and Brittian (2008), the researchers used Ecological Systems Theory to base their research because they recognized individual development is very contextual and must be considered in the setting in which one is embedded. In their study of European American, Asian American, and Latina students, and the impact family obligations had on students' decisions as they transition to college, Latinas were found to be the most closely interconnected of the three groups with their families. The Latino cultural value of *marianismo* (Camarota, 2004) with roots in the Catholic Virgin Madonna, places high expectations on the woman's role in the family to be self-sacrificing and assume the role of the caretaker, if needed (Sy & Brittian, 2008). The expectation is that a Latina must always play the role of the good daughter (Espinoza, 2010) above all other relationships. Familism (Bauman, Kuhberg, & Zayas, 2010), the value placed on the relationships and the support expected of one another within the family, plays the most significant role in their lives and is often associated with their aspirations (McWhirter, Valdez, & Caban, 2013). It is closely tied to the concepts of loyalty, interconnectedness, and reciprocity (Bauman et al., 2010). In a study on the relationship between Latina mothers and their daughters who had attempted to commit suicide, the researchers found that adolescent daughters did not have the same perceptions about their relationship as their mother's, which resulted in increased stress

in the family (Bauman et al., 2010). Mutuality, a concept also related to identity formation (Edwards & Lopez, 2006; Morgan, Vera, Gonzales, Conner, Vacek, & Coyle, 2011) is important in Latina family dynamics because it is so closely linked to feelings and correlated to positive behavior and adjustment (Genero, Miller, Surrey, & Baldwin, 1992). Mutuality underscores the interconnectedness Latina's have with the members of their families and informs many of their decisions as students. Research on the implications of family on the success of college students underscores the role that these relationships have on their success (Fuligni, & Pederson, 2002; Sy & Britton, 2008; Sy & Romero, 2008). However, this same dynamic can place constraints on the academic demands and school responsibilities that are necessary for success, which create consequential conflicts (Sy & Romero, 2008).

In a very recent study by McWhirter et al. (2013) 41 Latina high school students ages 14 to 19 participated in six semistructured focus groups, which sought to explore the barriers to Latina education. McWhirter et al. (2013) found that study participants both valued their sense of obligation to families and were challenged by it. The researchers recommended that families engage in conversations with their daughters about ways to honor their traditions and still maintain their school obligations and persist on to college (McWhirter et al., 2013). An awareness of this dyadic relationship and its influence, especially during adolescence, is attributed to better communication, greater family satisfaction, emotional well being, and academic development (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 2001). Schools must also be sensitive to this process. The cultural conflicts Latinas constantly negotiate cannot be disassociated from understanding their school experience (Bandura, 2006).

Bandura's (2006) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) analyzes development from the perspective of constant change and human agency. SCT acknowledges the interplay between a person's personal experience and the competing influences throughout their lives. Bandura's (2006) SCT reinforces the need to look at the Latina student experience in the context of the family, personal development, and the environment in which Latinas are expected to negotiate all of this as they strive to achieve academic success. This is particularly important during adolescence when the social systems experienced may have a greater bearing on well being than all other factors of development (Bandura, 2006). Bandura links this development in three important areas. The theory of Triadic Reciprocal Causation includes consideration of personal influence and socio-structural determinants within causal structures, which in turn influences the individual's development (Bandura, 2006). This theory is relevant in the context of the study in that it looks at the economic, social, and family structures that influence a person's efficacy in each area.

Adolescence is a time when a person transitions from being the recipient of the culture to being an agent of the culture in which s/he lives (Bandura, 2006). For Latinas, they are navigating through multiple cultures and, thus, their socio-cognitive development, by necessity, must take place in both. This work involves what Anzaldúa (1999) refers to as the transcendent process of identity development, the place that creates ambiguity and requires the practice of internal dialogue (Upegui-Hernández, 2012) in order to make sense of it. Complicating this process for Latina students in independent schools is the different cultural influences that exist among members (Matsumoto, Kudoh, & Takeuchi, 1996) of the new community. Bandura (2006) states that younger,

higher educated, and more affluent adolescents are in the process of negotiating their development and identity individualistically. In contrast, Latinas with the strong influence of family and commitment to familial obligations circumnavigate the culture from a collectivist stance in contrast to their peers (Espinoza, 2010). Daily experience in the independent school world requires that Latinas continually compare and contrast the different cultural norms, while at the same time determining which ones they will adapt and reject (Upegui-Hernández, 2011). In Upegui-Hernández's (2011) study, she found that the daughters of immigrants felt empowered by their ability to navigate between two cultures; it afforded them a sense of agency underscoring Alvarez's (2011) findings as well. It is this process that allows Latinas to develop their own identity, find their place in the context of their multiple lives, and ultimately embraces their mestiza/hybrid identity. Bandura (2006) asserts that this process will become the norm for adolescents in a shrinking cross-cultural world as lines blur over time, place, and geographic boundaries creating cultural hybridization and underscoring Anzaldúa's (1999) Borderland thesis.

Identity Formation

Identity is particularly salient during adolescence as youth reconcile the identities that families and society impose on them with their need to control their own lives (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 2006; French, Seidman, Allen, & Aber, 2006). For Latina students, this process is further complicated due to competing signifiers of the home and the dominant culture at an important time of exploration and adapting essential to healthy emotional development (French et al., 2006). Deciding what these contrasts mean in one's life is a process of identity formation (Umaña-Taylor & Updegraff, 2007) and

critical self-awareness necessary to practice agentic decision-making. Through this process of self-awareness, Latinas can appreciate and better understand their personal self-efficacy, their approach to ideas and actions, and their motivations (Bandura, 2006). This awareness allows students to adjust to change and challenge and maintain their motivation as well as receive the benefits of performance success (Bandura, 1989). Furthermore, Acevedo-Polakovich, Cousineau, Quirk, Gerhart, and Adomako (2013), in their asset based study of Latino/a youth and identity formation, found that students with a strong sense of self, negotiating both their ethnic identity and their American identity, gain an important asset for appreciating, leading, and positively contributing to their community. Successful negotiation of identity requires flexibility and adapting to the changing context of one's life (Acevedo-Polakovich et al., 2013). Anzaldúa's reassurance that ambiguity must be tolerated in the development of a hybrid identity, because identity is not binary (Anzaldúa, 1999; Walker, 2003), underscores this conclusion. Because one aspect of Latinas' identity is rooted in the ethnic culture of the family and the other in the context of mainstream culture, Latinas find themselves feeling comfort in two very different cultural climates making them bicultural (La Fromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993). Bicultural theory, a binary approach to identity integration, has two levels of integration: blended cultural, which describes individuals who integrate both cultures, while alternating bicultural keeps both experiences separate (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997). This perspective is in contrast to Borderland theory espoused by Anzaldúa (1999), which acknowledges the existence of two worlds, but does not limit identity identification to two narrow parameters, but rather recognizes the multiple

identities that are necessary to negotiate when living in two cultures (Vera & de los Santos, 2005), which results in a third option or hybrid identity.

Anzaldúa (1999) explains that living in multiple worlds requires learning the nuances of each and living in all simultaneously. It is not necessary to choose one over the other, however. Binary thinking is society's way to define us and categorize our identities into neat compartments that require choosing between competing forces and, by implication, placing value judgments on our choices (Proctor, 2004; Anzaldúa, 1999). This binary perspective negates the value that different capital may have on the Latina experience. While family support is a cultural asset found to enhance the academic success of students (Orbe, 2008) and Latino students in particular (Hernandez, 2002; Hurtado, Sáenz, Santos, & Cabrera, 2008; Lopez, 2007; Zambrana & Zoppi, 2002), others have found this factor may lead to attrition in college (Chen, 2005; Choy, 2001); students will often place family obligations before academics. Underscoring Anzaldúa's (1999) work, Delgado Bernal (2001) found that for Chicana college students, drawing on what they have learned at home and in their communities—pedagogies of the home—students often balance, negotiate, and draw strength from their hybrid identity in order to achieve academic success. However, educational systems subliminally force choice and the early work of Tinto (1988) reinforces this misconception, by implying that success relies on choosing one over the other—family over school culture (Morley & Chen, 1996); Anzaldúa, 1999; Keating, 2000; 2002). Consequently, Anzaldúa's theory offers a realistic, yet validating alternative. She acknowledges that her culture as well as mainstream culture have both assets and liabilities that one is influenced by, yet can

choose to reject or accept without betraying either (Anzaldúa, 1999; Keating, 2000, 2002) or implying a value judgment by that choice.

All the while that Latina students are negotiating their place in the hegemonic culture of independent schools, they may not be aware that this process is happening, yet the research indicates that the struggle is real (Anzaldúa, 1999; Keating, 2000, 2002; Alvarez, 2011). Researchers have found that the experience of dissonance of thoughts and beliefs and the struggle to disprove stereotypes and misconceptions can weigh heavily on students of color (Steele, 1999; Torres, 2011, 2012). While this study seeks to explore the academic benefits of an awareness that this transformation in identity development is actually occurring, it is necessary to understand the stages of identity formation that are part of this process.

There are four stages of ethnic identity formation developed by Marcia (1980), which dominate the literature. In the early stages, there is the diffuse stage, where little or no exploration has taken place and there is not much understanding of the process; in the foreclosed stage there is still little exploration, but a clear understanding to which ethnicity one belongs, although it may be a positive or a negative appreciation; the moratorium stage is when exploration has taken place, but one is still unsure of the meaning of one's ethnicity; the achieved stage exists when one has gone through exploration and acceptance of one's own identity (Marcia, 1980). It is believed that the failure not to explore and arrive at understanding of one's identity can result in developmental maladjustment (Phinney, 1989); reaching the stages of exploration and commitment was also found to be essential for a students' mental health (French et al., 2006). In Phinney's (1989) study of ninety-one students of color representing all stages

and multiple ethnicities, she found that all students, despite the identity formation stage they were in, needed to deal with their understanding of their identity in a predominantly White society. The study also found that as high school students get older, they would likely explore their ethnicity more readily and deeply. Furthermore, students who reached the achieved stage showed positive adjustment in self-evaluations, peer and social interactions, and family relationships (Phinney, 1989). For many adolescents growing up in ethnically segregated communities, they may not have the opportunity to experience the exploration stage until they enter a community that is more heterogeneous and identity work becomes more salient (French, et al., 2006).

Traditional identity theories as indicated above suggest that the process is static and linear. Anzaldúa's Borderland Theory offers a perspective that diverts from previously proposed theories suggesting that identity is liminal or what she refers to as *nepantla* (Anzaldúa, 1987), existing frequently in an in-between state of exploration and development. Therefore, theory must be equally flexible, open, and responsive to new information (hooks, 2000a, 2000b), so as to be relevant to individuals and changing realities.

The data collected from Latina students analyzed through the lens of Borderland theory has important implications for independent schools as they enroll more students of color and will need to understand the context in which underrepresented groups negotiate their school experience. The research attempts to discover whether an awareness of identity exploration has a positive correlation on the independent school experiences of Latina students.

Borderland Theory and Post-Borderland Perspective

To fully appreciate the value of Anzaldúa's perspective on the Latina independent school experience, it is important to explore Anzaldúa's life trajectory and the experiences that germinated over time to give birth to her thoughts as offered by her biographer and collaborator Keating (2009). Anzaldúa was born in 1942 to farmworkers living in the borderlands between Texas and Mexico. She was an unhealthy child and a diabetic adult who found comfort in books early on in her life and later in her writing. Her illness defined much of her life and identity. She attended Pan American University and majored in English where she devoured the history of Mexican culture and the pantheon of Aztec female goddesses. After work as a teacher, Anzaldúa returned to school as a student and earned an M.A. in English and education from the University of Texas, Austin. She subsequently enrolled as a doctoral student between 1974-1977. Frustrated by the constraints placed on her in academia, she finished her course work but did not earn her degree. Instead, she moved to California to dedicate herself exclusively to her writing and scholarship. Frustrated by the lack of Chicana literature and representation available to her students, she began collecting material from Latina writers, which eventually became *This Bridge Called My Back*. Her groundbreaking and controversial collection has endured the initial critique with which it was originally received and is now viewed as a seminal work.

Borderlands was published in 1986 as a book of poetry, which Anzaldúa tweaked to include prose and published it the following year under a new title to reflect its theme: *Borderlands|La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. In 1987, the Library Journal selected it as one of the best thirty-eight books of the year. It has been reprinted three times since then.

Anzaldúa continued to write prolifically; speak throughout the country; guest lecture in creative writing, queer theory, and feminist studies, while struggling valiantly with her diabetes until her untimely death. Shortly before her death in 2003, Anzaldúa returned to university to finish her doctoral work. The University of California, Santa Cruz awarded her a posthumous Ph.D. (Keating, 2009). While Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1999) introduced the foundation for her thoughts, Anzaldúa never maintained that her theories were static, and continued to modify her original theories in her post-Borderland work (Keating, 2000). Criticism of *Borderlands* as limiting in its theory deliberately dismisses Anzaldúa's post-Borderland work to benefit the author's thesis (Feghali, 2007). In fact, Anzaldúa acknowledged that her theory would change as time and circumstance change, making her post-Borderland work a more inclusive epistemology and encouraging a new tribalism (Keating, 2000).

Chapter Summary

This literature review explored the multiple challenges Latina students negotiate as they develop a hybrid identity in the context of school. It looked at agency from three perspectives: Bourdieu's (1986) sociological perspective, Bandura's (2006) socio-cognitive perspective, and Anzaldúa's counter-hegemonic feminist perspective. It presented support for conducting research on Latina graduates of independent schools so as to better understand Latina academic success and contribute to the literature on identity formation in the context of hegemonic school communities. It offered a perspective on Anzaldúa (1999) and her Borderland Theory, the lens with which the research has been analyzed, and argued that Anzaldúa's theory has the most relevance to the context of Latina identity development in independent schools. The following chapter

will explore the rationale for using *testimonio* to gather information on Latina identity development from graduates of both day and boarding schools.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

The research will answer the question whether an awareness of identity development is an advantage to successfully navigating independent school culture. As one of the fastest growing ethnic groups and the youngest population in the nation (U. S. Census Bureau, 2012), Latina students have the distinction of being the least educated and lag behind other ethnic minorities in achievement (Gándara & Contreras, 2009). Latinas in the independent school world are in stark contrast to their growth in the nation and they continue to be underrepresented (NAIS, 2010) and reflect the smallest demographic representation. The rationale for choosing to conduct a qualitative hermeneutic study and using *testimonio* (Perez Huber, 2009) as the methodology reinforces the multiple theoretical frames of this study. Because schools are areas of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1986; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2011), members not historically represented need to redefine their rightful place through counterhegemonic methodologies (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) in order to readdress cognitive and moral submissiveness (Bourdieu, 1986, 2008; Hill, 2007).

The relevance of considering the triadic loci of Latinas school experience from the perspective of their ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender gives credence to their unique experience (Kramarae, 1996; Walker, 2003), while being mindful not to create new binaries (Keating, 2009), and honors Anzaldúa's Borderland Theory. It empowers Latinas to negotiate their mestiza identity and develop an agentic commitment

to praxis (Freire, 1998) in the form of Spiritual Activism (Keating, 2000). Anzaldúa believed social change could only come after the spiritual healing (Keating, 2000). Furthermore, *testimonio* validates one's place in her community and unmutes the disenfranchised (Delgado Bernal, 2001; hooks, 1990; Kramarae, 1996; Zaccaria, 2006) by engaging individuals in the dialogue for social change.

As stated earlier, Latina identity is very complex due to the heterogeneity of the culture. Self-identification and political classifications further complicate the issue. In 1976, the United States Congress passed Public Law 94-311 requiring the gathering of data on Hispanics (Rumbaut, 2006) making them the only ethnic group that is categorized on the basis of their shared language, culture and heritage, but not race (Taylor et al., 2012). Because race and ethnicity are distinct from one another, Latinos have been found not to agree with these narrow classifications (Taylor et al., 2012; Navarro, 2012). As a result, Latina identity cannot be narrowly defined nor should it. Classifications are political constructs designed to subjugate and control the subaltern (Anzaldúa, 1999; Keating, 2000).

Research Context

A criterion sample of Latina graduates of independent schools receiving merit and need based aid were chosen for the unique position they inhabited in the independent school community. Research participants, however, were asked to retrieve memories of their past experience. There are two types of memory: procedural, reflexive memory of previously learned skills, and declarative memory, which consists of facts and beliefs about the world (Klein & Nichols, 2011). Episodic memory is a component of declarative memory and has a self-referential aspect to it that is unique to this type of

memory (Klein & Nichols, 2011). According to Klein and Nichols, episodic memory affords its owner with the information to create a personal narrative and identity across time (Atance & O'Neill, 2005). In Alvarez's (2011) study of first generation Latina college students negotiating the multiple worlds of identity, she stated that the limitations of retrospective recollections might miss certain insights that may have otherwise informed her research. Anzaldúa acknowledges this in her work citing that memory may lack accuracy in details but is true to the psychological experience (Anzaldúa, 1999; Keating, 2000). This underscores the concept of the fluidity of identity as well. Experience may impact us in the moment one way but over time may have a very different effect. Consequently, it would appear Latina students' memories of the past offer a reliable measure of their recalled identity of a specific time in their lives and serve the purpose of this study.

Research Participants

Seven Latina graduates were interviewed representing the common phenomenology of graduating from an independent school. The research attempted to discover the transcendental experience they share (Moustakas, 1994) negotiating their evolving identity in the elite culture of independent schools. Anzaldúa's Borderland Theory (1999) evolved from the author's personal need to explain her hybrid identity, *mestiza* consciousness, and that of other Chicanas living in border towns and straddling two or more cultures. *Mestiza* consciousness is defined as being fluid, resilient, and oppositional (Delgado Bernal, 2001). This is not to say that Latinas are aggressively contrary, rather, that they have a voice that should be heard (hooks, 1990). In Borderland

terms, she must create her own master narrative (Anzaldúa, 1999) and transform her past into a future that she envisions (Pérez Huber, 2009).

Latinas negotiating two disparate worlds, the home and school, undergo similar constraints negotiating patriarchal structures amidst cultural boundaries (Delgado Bernal, 2001). Because they still remain closely linked to the culture of the home (Delgado Bernal, 2001) and are required to adapt to school culture, this requires them to do Borderland work as they reconcile their bilingual, bicultural, and personal identities (Anzaldúa, 1999). Consequently, Latinas live with ambivalence (Sy & Brittan, 2007) and may feel marginalized or subordinated by the dominant culture. Hence, they develop a subaltern (Gramsci, 2012) identity requiring them to implement strategies of resistance (Delgado Bernal, 2001). *Testimonio* as a methodology of resistance is a powerful tool, which can promote critical thinking and may serve as a counterhegemonic instrument to counterbalance negative social constructs (Daisey & Jose-Kampfner, 2002) and give voice (hooks, 1990) to Latina students. This research may offer insight through a Latina lens on her gender, ethnic, and socioeconomic status in the context of hegemonic school culture and offer strategies to make both the educational and social experience more relevant in order to better serve Latina students in the future.

All participants in the study have graduated from independent schools. They have attended Ivy League universities; some work in admissions at schools listed in the National Association of Independent School network both on boarding school campuses and at day schools, while one works in the corporate world. Participants were acquired through word-of-mouth, email requests (Appendix A), networking at conferences, and through professional organizations affiliated with the independent school community.

All research data gathered and transcribed from interviews will be held in the strictest confidence. Participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcripts to assure accuracy and to make any adjustments or modifications they desired. This process assures reliability and validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Data Collection Instruments

In order to assure that the criterion sample of participants self-identify within the constraints of this research and inform the reader of the specific demographic chosen (Patten, 2009), a questionnaire was administered prior to semi-structured interviews (Appendix B). Adhering to interview protocol, demographic information was gathered to assure participants met the parameters of the research and to establish a rapport (Patton, 2002).

Once it was established that participants met the criteria, they were emailed the Informed Consent Form (Appendix C) and individual interviews were scheduled and conducted in person with the exception of one participant who was not available to meet face-to-face and was interviewed via Skype. In qualitative research, questions should remain under close scrutiny and be as broad as possible (Wolcott, 1994; 1999; 2001). Although the purpose of this study is to discern whether an awareness of identity formation poses an advantage in navigating the educational experience of independent schools, participants were asked the following deliberately broad questions, so as not to influence answers in any unintentional way.

1. In what ways do you believe you changed in the years you attended your independent school?
2. How did your family respond to these changes?

3. Did you feel you belonged as a member of your independent school community? Why? Why not?
4. Was there ever a point that this changed? When? How?
5. Do you believe that you had to make sacrifices and/or gained benefits attending an independent school?

Survey respondents were also asked one open-ended question, “Is there any other information you would like to add that you believe is relevant to your experience”? This final question was designed to offer the opportunity to elaborate on any question that the participant believed needed further elucidation.

Following this, participants were asked to illustrate at least one significant observation through a story, if it had not been offered. Stories have the potential to illuminate a particular experience in a memorable way (Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 1991). In addition, the methodology of *autohistoria* (Anzaldúa, 2000) encourages self-expression in multiple domains. Consequently, participants were also asked to share any additional insight as to their identity development that they may have wanted to share in the form of poetry, art, or narrative, which could have been created in the past or for this research.

Organization and maintaining meticulous notes throughout interview phase was vital as was keeping analysis separate (Seidman, 1991) so as not to inject bias or hypothesis at any point in the process. It was imperative to immerse in the data (Seidman, 1991) and draw conclusions that emerged from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In scrupulously reviewing the raw data, one looks for patterns and themes to emerge,

concepts, and new relationships from which categories are developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). If information emerges that is distinct from what is anticipated, it also must be included and its importance assessed based on the other data (Miles & Huberman, 2014). In the initial contact with participants, self-disclosure (Patton, 2002) was conducted so that both the researcher and participants are fully aware of the nature of the study and the researcher's background and intent in the context of the research question.

Data Analysis

In keeping with the premise that Latinas develop a hybrid identity when negotiating multiple worlds, the research was analyzed through the lens of Borderland theory using the concepts rooted in Aztec mythology proposed by Anzaldúa (1999). In order to determine whether an awareness of identity formation is an advantage to Latina student success in independent schools, the first step after the data was gathered from interviews was open-coding of the transcripts to identify separate segments and/or patterns and coded for identification purposes (Creswell, 2007). Sub-themes emerging from the data were categorized under the main Borderland Identity themes (Anzaldúa, 1999). In the process, preliminary notes were made when over-arching themes were noticed. The final stage identified the overarching essence of all the gathered data in order to explain the connections that emerged. In addition to the categorization of data, as information emerged, it was necessary to further cross reference and conduct a constant comparison to find the patterns that evolved; a process that Creswell (2007, 2008) refers to as zig-zagging, because of the constant back and forth between the data gathering through interviews and note-taking and analysis to search for the patterns, categories, and relationships that emerged.

The data that emerged was analyzed through the different stages of identity development explored both in *Borderlands* (Anzaldúa, 1999) and in Anzaldúa's post-*Borderland* work (1999; Keating, 2000; 2002). An important component of Anzaldúa's work is the intimate nature of it. *Conocimiento* requires raw honesty, with oneself and with others. Anzaldúa encouraged those willing to take on the task of *conocimiento* to "risk the personal" (Keating, 2009). The research has had an intense influence on me both as a researcher as a Latina. Although I have never attended an independent school as a student, my professional life has been exclusively in them. As a first generation college student, who has lived abroad on two different continents, I am intimately familiar with the feeling of alterity and have lived in a state of *nepantla*. I have experienced the intense pain of the *Coatlicue* state, wrestled with ambiguity, been paralyzed in a state of *desconocimiento*, afraid of the ramifications of shifting consciousness, unsteadily crossed bridges, and triumphed in the *Coyolxauhqui* state, emerging spiritually healed. My journey continues. What I have never had to do is the work that the Latinas in this research were required to do in adolescence, when their identity development first became salient in independent schools. These stories are important in themselves but more significant because of when in their lives this work took place. I remain in awe of their courage and accomplishments.

Summary

Initial contact with potential participants was made through an email blast to a number of professional organizations indicating the purpose of the study, the parameters of participant criteria, and an overview of what the process entailed including the time commitment and participant rights. Numerous Latina independent school graduates

indicated interest in participation in the study; seven confirmed participation and were interviewed. A formal letter was written to anyone identified and indicating interest and expressing willingness to participate through the initial appeal. Once participant criteria were established through the protocol questionnaire, interview appointments were made and face-to-face meetings took place throughout December. A professional transcriber, who signed a confidentiality agreement, was used to convert the recorded tapes into text for coding. Participants were offered the opportunity to read and approve transcripts for validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000) and had the option to add or redact any information they preferred to edit. All data maintained each participant's privacy through the use of pseudonyms and the elimination of any identifying information. Once all transcriptions were completed, data was analyzed through the lens of Anzaldúa's (1999) Borderland Theory.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

In this chapter, the findings of the stages of identity development as experienced by Latina graduates of independent schools are reported. Interviews with seven participants were audio and/or video recorded and transcribed to extract themes that emerged. Analysis of the text sought to uncover the deeper meaning underlying participants' recalled educational experience (Bourdieu, 1999), so as to better understand the multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) of their identity development during the time they attended an independent school. Emerging concepts are categorized under the broader themes presented in Borderland Theory developed by Anzaldúa (1999). This chapter concludes with a summary of the research findings.

Research Questions

The study explored the educational experiences and identity development of seven Latina graduates of independent schools. Three of the participants attended day schools in a large urban city in the northeast entering the respective schools in ninth grade; three attended New England boarding schools from 9th -12th grade; the one outlier attended a day school from kindergarten through graduation in 12th grade. All participants went on to attend prestigious colleges and universities upon graduation; five have graduated and two currently attend university. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 45; one attended school in the late 1980s; four attended high school between 1980 and 2010, two graduated less than five years ago. Of the five university graduates, four have

remained in education professionally: three work in independent schools, and one is a leader in a nationally recognized charter organization; the fifth is working in the business sector. Of the two current college students, one anticipates entering the field of education, while the other is considering a career in law.

Participants all identified as Latina representing the following cultures: Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Mexico. Students learned about independent schools through caring mentors and/or access organizations that recognized their potential for success early on and guided them through the application process. All students received full or partial financial assistance in order to attend the independent school in which they were enrolled.

Julia attended a religiously affiliated day school in the late 1980s; Celia attended the same school 20 years later; both Emma and Maritza attended New England boarding schools – one a religiously affiliated school, the other a secular community; Emma attended a Quaker school in the northeast; Carmen attended a secular boarding school in New England, although she worked in a progressive Quaker school as an adult; Gloria attended a progressive school in an urban city; Adela was the only student to attend a prestigious single-sex school in a large city from kindergarten through 12th grade. An overview of participant demographics is illustrated in Table 4.1. Participant names have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographics

Participants	Type of School	Day/Boarding	Grades Attended	Current Status
Maritza	Episcopal	Boarding (Co-Educational)	9-12	Working in Education
Gloria	Progressive	Day (Co-Educational)	9-12	Working in the Business Sector
Celia	Religious	Day (Co-Educational)	9-12	College Student
Emma	Quaker	Boarding (Co-Educational)	9-12	Working in Education
Carmen	Secular	Boarding (Co-Educational)	9-12	Working in Education
Julia	Religious	Day (Co-Educational)	9-12	Executive in National Charter Organization
Adela	Secular	Day (Single-Sex)	K-12	College Student

The results and themes that emerged from the research have been guided by the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of Latina graduates of independent high schools who are enrolled or graduated from college, what did the process of identity development look like as they experienced it during their independent high school education?
2. From the perspective of Latina graduates of independent high schools who are enrolled or graduated from college, what advantages do they perceive there are to having the awareness that this development is taking place?
3. From the perspective of Latina graduates of independent high schools who are enrolled or graduated from college, how can the awareness of identity

formation/development benefit the student attending an independent school and the school in which the process takes place?

The first research question highlighted in Table 4.2 addressed the process of identity development in independent schools from the perspective of the Latina graduate. The following themes emerged from the recollections of participants: Gratitude/Opportunity; Hybrid Identity Formation (*Mestizaje*); a distinction between Belonging and Deserving to be in the independent school community; the role of Leadership and Agency on their experience; and the difference between Access and Equity as they experienced and understood it. The roles of family and socioeconomic status were significant throughout each and every experience.

As Latinas described the process of identity development during their independent school years, it was clear that the ambiguity and the pain Anzaldúa says is necessary to reach *Conocimiento* was experience by each participant. Students were challenged at home and at school by the changes their independent school experience had on their evolving sense of self. In the early stages of the process, ambivalence overshadowed each encounter. However, as Latinas embraced their leadership or confronted challenges and were triumphant in overcoming them, confidence in themselves evolved and empowered them to deal with the next challenge that they may have confronted.

Table 4.2

Question 1 Process of Identity Formation

Q1 What did the process of identity formation look like to participants when attending their independent schools?		
Thematic Category	Key Concepts	Characteristic Level 3 Responses
Gratitude	Happy and excited; blessed to get full ride; transformational; gained an immense amount	Made me be the person I am today; It was transformational; I was unstoppable; Without that education, without having that attention I had from teachers, I wouldn't have succeeded as much academically as I did and it's kind of a domino effect that led to a better college, which led to a better job, which, hopefully, leads to a better life. Those are experiences that will forever be a part of me, that's really prepared me for college.
Opportunity	New environment; Education was key; developed my spirituality; developed my confidence	
Hybrid Identity	Constant state of limbo; Double person; a lot of negotiations; float in and out; we run the gamut; pick and choose from culture	I wasn't Latino enough for the Latinos coming directly from Guatemala, Spain, etc., but I wasn't whatever enough, American enough, for anybody else.
Belonging	Social aspect difficult; socioeconomics shocking; it could be taken away; weird path; feelings fluctuated over the years; felt different; loneliness; needing to prove academic belonging; agency; made myself fit in	I had a positive experience because I knew that support was there and yet there were a lot of negative feelings that came attached to those because I felt very lonely in spite of the fact.
Deserving	Worked hard; wanted to make an impact	I can't function without a purpose, without a goal.
Leadership	School leadership roles; control of life	I wanted to be involved in everything.
Access	Wasn't as prepared; felt dumb; certain things unable to do due to economics	This difference in class, you know, I can't have the fun that you can have.
Equity	Felt incredibly poor; geographic stigma; sometimes it felt like charity	I didn't feel like I belonged because I felt like I stuck out. I was just so cognizant of how incredibly poor I was. Didn't know how to manage it.

The second question addressed the process of Awareness, or in the lexicon of Borderland Theory, *Conocimiento* (Anzaldúa, 1999). Table 4.3 shows themes of *Conocimiento*, the student's sense of what she experienced at this stage of her identity development, which were: personal struggle (*Coatlicue* State); ambiguity (*Nepantla*) with regard to identity what one student labeled "picking and choosing" (*Nahual*/Shape Shifting) what to take from the cultures one is exposed to daily; and letting go and healing, the *Coyolxauhqui* State of identity transformation. This constant negotiation is what Anzaldúa described as bridging between cultures, a concept with which all participants identified.

Bridging posed challenges that were unanticipated for the Latina student. At first, students were unprepared for the socioeconomic contrasts that they experienced both on campus and in the experiences that were afforded them or denied to them. For some, the process was more challenging than it was for others. For Emma, her strong sense of her ethnic upbringing and pride in the cultural capital it afforded her fortified her with a confidence that allowed her to deal with contradictions on her own terms. Overtime, Latinas had the opportunity to do the work of the *Nepantlera* as they discovered that their wealthy peers became more frugal, due to the guidance they experienced witnessing Latina sacrifices, even though there was no economic incentive to do so, and respected the Latina for this modeling.

Not one Latina had regrets; a profound appreciation for the capital gained through the independent school experience was evident to all. Celia and Gloria's encounters with former classmates made this realization more salient.

Table 4.3

Question 2 Awareness of Development

Q2 What advantages do participants perceive there is to having awareness that this development is taking place?		
Thematic Category	Key Concepts	Characteristic Level 3 Responses
Personal Struggle (<i>Coatlicue</i> state)	Sacrificed friends from home; felt dumb; wasn't Latina enough for others; don't want to identify as minority; "flipped my world"; aware of own prejudices; felt really poor; hide intellect from friends at home	Like, recently, I was thinking, wow, what identity am I trying to go for? My cousin lived down the street...I wasn't allowed to go out with her...then, looking back on it, she has a kid now, she didn't finish high school. Like, what if?!
<i>Nepantla</i> (Ambiguity)	Pick and Choose	I am a bunch of different types of Latina.
Bridging (Shifting Consciousness)	Have friends from all walks of life, cultures	I always knew I was poor, but I never felt underprivileged, I was proud of my poverty. I was proud of overcoming challenges. I think that I've seen both sides of it and it makes it easier for me to understand, but at the same time, I've sacrificed an identity element.
<i>Nahual</i> (Crossing Over)	Choices made as an adult influenced by experience	I am comfortable with all these environments.
<i>Coyolxauhqui</i> (Spiritual Healing)	Letting go of asserting identity into community	Senior year, other things were more important. I was able to focus on the inner me rather than the outer me.

The third and final question summarized in Table 4.4 addressed the possible implications for students and the independent school community on understanding the stages of identity development experienced by the Latina graduates of these schools. Students discussed the divisions and interconnections within the communities; the

importance of mentors as guides during their experiences; the awareness of relational differences as well as commonalities between groups and individuals. Family relationships are of paramount importance in the lives of participants and cannot be separated from their experience. Student experience offers an important opportunity for schools to consider in designing programs that best meet the needs of the student as well as the community.

Table 4.4

Question 3 Awareness of Identity Formation

Q3 How can the awareness of identity formation benefit the student attending an independent school and the school in which the process takes place?		
Thematic Category	Key Concepts	Characteristic Level 3 Responses
<i>Nos/Otras</i> (Divisions & Interconnections)	Everyone has a story; connected on basis of experience not as friends; appreciate difference: family dynamic and influence is very important	We need to do a better job of teaching an appreciation of differences. The students of color felt like they had a lot to prove and there was no one really there to help guide them to a different theology.
<i>Nepantlera</i> : Mentors	Had support: giving and being able to help others; help guide others in their awareness that there will be drastic changes	It doesn't matter how many opportunities you give kids unless you're dealing with the social-emotional issues and the effect of poverty on kids. If we have people representing, if we have Latinos in our schools, where do we have them and what are they doing?
<i>El Mundo Zurdo</i> (Co-existence): Alternative to Assimilation & Separatism	Learn from others; diversity not well understood in independent schools; lack of cultural competence; don't lump people into identifiable groups	This is what it's going to be like from now on. These are still ways that you can network with people and ways that you can reach that self-knowledge and self-development even when people are kind of attacking you or wanting to label things that you don't even want to label yourself...just because they don't know better.

Overview of Data Analysis and Findings

Participants were eager to give voice to their unique experiences as students of independent schools from the perspective of their race, socioeconomic status, and gender.

One participant underscored her desire to be heard with a comment she made immediately before the interview was initiated, “It’s about time we share our story; it needs to be told.” Participants shared the recalled experiences of the years they attended independent schools with honesty and depth, which supports Anzaldúa’s (1999) Borderland theory, and are reflected in the themes that emerged and are highlighted in Table 4.5.

Overview of Themes Emerging from Research Questions

Process	Awareness: (<i>Conocimiento</i>)	Implications on Student/School Experience
Gratitude/Opportunity	<i>Coatlicue</i> State: Personal Struggle	<i>Nos/Otras</i> : Divisions & Interconnections
Hybrid Identity (<i>Mestiza/Mestizaje</i>)	<i>Nepantla</i> : Ambiguity	<i>Nepantlera</i> : Mentors
Belonging v. Deserving	Bridging: Pick & Choose; Shifting Consciousness	<i>El Mundo Zurdo</i> : Co-existence; alternatives to assimilation & separatism
Leadership	<i>Nahual</i> : Crossing Over	
Access v. Equity	<i>Coyolxauhqui</i> : Spiritual Healing	

Process

In order to fully appreciate Borderland Theory (Anzaldúa, 1999) in the context of research findings and the emerging themes that will be discussed, it is imperative to connect the methodology of *testimonio*, or narrative, to the theory framing the research. Student voices are conveyed in some depth, so as to honor the story they shared. Participants illustrated important transformations during the years studying in

independent schools as their hybrid identities evolved. Often, they entered shy and muted, but emerged empowered, and confident. Their authentic voices bring these transformations to life on the page. Maintaining the integrity of *testimonio* as an important and valid methodology was a key goal of the research.

The concept of crossing borders and bridging different cultures as one's individual identity emerges is not a linear one, nor is it necessarily sequential. Every attempt has been made to focus on major themes that developed at the different stages of the Latina participants' experience when answering the three research questions. However, themes often crisscrossed one another, overlapped, and/or were repeated at the *Conocimiento* stage, during the process of identity development, and in the *Coyolxauhqui* stage. As a result, references to themes that may have been more dominant at one time over the other often emerged earlier and were addressed where significant. In much the same way as the themes presented themselves at different stages in participant lives, the methodology of *testimonio* validates the theories espoused by Anzaldúa (1999) as participants described the experience of bridging and crossing back and forth between the cultures in which they participated.

Students described the initial access experience as one that was hard won and fraught with many unexpected first-impressions. Most were keenly aware that they had earned an important opportunity and were very grateful to have achieved this recognition. First exposure to their new communities found them unprepared for the impact on their identity, however. Participants shared examples of their first encounter with hybrid identity; their perceived difference between belonging in a community and deserving to

be there; the role that leadership played in their success; and their growing awareness of the opposing concepts of access versus equity.

Gratitude and opportunity. Along with awareness and appreciation for the opportunity of an independent school education, participants shared the burden of indebtedness. Participants were both proud and eager to enter their new communities, though they were not prepared for the immediate contrasts that they would experience. The fear that the opportunity could be taken away was an ever-present one.

I attended a medium sized Episcopalian school, very traditional, dress code, chapel and formal dinner twice a week. So, it was as traditional as you can possibly get. You know, moving to this country when I was six or seven years old, not knowing any English, from Mexico City to a tiny town in Connecticut, the idea of an immigrant going to an independent school was not in my plans at all. It was 1997. I went there and fell in love with the school. It was everything that I could ever dream of. All the people around, you know, in comparison to where I had gone to school, the diversity that this school had was appealing to me. They were not Latinos how I was, they were international students, but at least they were there and I felt that people at that school wanted to learn just as much as I did, that education was key to them. I was the only person of color, only Latina, in my eighth grade graduating class. I was blessed to get a full-ride for four years, because that was the only way my parents said I could go. I was excited, you know, I was so happy. I had to start to try to navigate my world at school and then at home and become kind of this double person of someone who obviously is still there for academic purposes and succeeding and was on student

council and did three sports, basically involved in every single piece because that's what I felt. If someone was going to afford me this experience then I had to take every piece of it, you know, cause it could be taken away at the drop of a dime. In the long run, if somebody said, "You know what, this isn't for you," it could be taken away. So, the fear of that was always on my mind and, looking back on it, kind of what kept me in a weird path sometimes. (Maritza)

Students recalled the contrasts in socioeconomic status as chief among the issues needing to be navigated. The constant negotiation, or bridging, required to understand and reconcile one's place in the community was balanced by the exposure to curriculum that challenged Gloria to better understand herself.

I think those were probably the years of biggest change for me (9-12). I was going from a regular middle school in Washington Heights where everyone looked exactly like me and I walked home every day two blocks. I went to school with all my cousins. I lived in Washington Heights, which is all Latinos, and this independent school was different. The school I attended was one of the most diverse schools in the city in terms of independent schools. The way I got into the independent school was through a scholarship program and it helped you get into a top private independent school in the city. But definitely, the biggest years of change because I was around people I was not used to being around. I was going to school with kids who could spend money on anything...and some people just didn't look like me. I was used to being around one type of person and speaking Spanglish all the time. But, I mean it did really feel great when I was there

because I took a lot of feminist courses and that's really where I kind of came to identify as a feminist. (Gloria)

Often feeling different, whether a result of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status, contributed to a feeling of doubt in one's abilities, in the community, and in the decision to accept the opportunity. The feeling of otherness, or alterity, was a constant struggle experienced by participants and often experienced in isolation.

I think entering was very weird for me. I think my freshman year I didn't have many friends. I think I spoke to one person intimately. It wasn't because the people around me made me feel a certain way. I just had never been around people who weren't my skin color for the first time in my life. Coming here and feeling like I was the outsider, no one had to tell me like you don't belong, or treat me a certain way, or treat me differently, and no one did, but I just had this barrier in my head that I would never be like you. I told myself that you can't understand me, you don't know what I have been through, and you don't have my life. When I first entered, I thought I was smart, but then, you know, I never had the resources that the other students had...my self-esteem, when it came to academics, I thought I was dumb, or for some reason like everyone around me got higher honors and they were naturally smart and that I was in a school with naturally gifted people. (Celia)

As eager as participants were to embrace their new communities and take advantage of the opportunities afforded them, they felt profoundly isolated from family. For many, it was the first time they were so far away both physically and emotionally, from the bosom of the family. Because family connection emerged as an important part

of the student's experience and sense of self, the isolation had an impact on everyday experience at school.

I went to a private middle school in New York City that enrolls students in independent schools throughout the city, so it (independent school) was an option I had. I could have decided to apply to day schools or boarding schools...and after looking at the schools and researching online, I talked to my parents about boarding school. My mom had no idea what it was and didn't understand it, so I talked to my older brother...he supported it and mom considered it as well. So, she was finally like sure I'll entertain this idea. I think secretly, at the back of her mind, she always wanted me to just give up on it, but being very tenacious and persevering, I kept up with the boarding school idea. It was quite a transition to be away from family, especially coming from a Latino background and having close ties...but physically being detached from them certainly made it hard in the everyday activities. All of a sudden, having to do that over a phone conversation just made it all that much harder. (Emma)

I went to my boarding school in Connecticut from 9th to 12th grade. It was about two and a half hours from home. I am from Newark, New Jersey. For us, that was a far distance, 'cause we don't get to, New York City, Manhattan, is so far and we don't like to go because it's such a trek to go over there, so a school that's two and a half hours away is, oh, so far. So, I didn't get to see my family very much and it was, I guess, cell phones were starting to become a little popular, but it wasn't, no one did that. I had a positive experience, because I knew that the support was there; there were so many well-intentioned supportive people of all

colors, of all different types, of all walks of life. And, yet, there are a lot of negative feelings that come attached to those, because I felt very lonely in spite of the fact that a lot of people liked who I was, including teachers and students.

(Carmen)

For many students, entering a heterogeneous environment for the first time was anticipated with deep concern and trepidation. Latinas spoke of the family's desire to protect them. This was often met with a hesitancy to send them to a co-educational school, as well as one where they might not have the camaraderie they were accustomed to in their local schools.

I fought really hard to go to a co-ed school, really, really hard. I fought really hard with my parents for everything. (Laughs) I am the oldest of five and I'm a girl and first-generation American in a traditional Dominican family. Being in a co-ed environment really influenced me; it was probably important to navigate that. I remember my mother saying very early on when I was in eighth grade, "If you go to that school, I am going to have to warn you about you really being exposed to a mainly white, predominantly white environment, and you are probably going to get involved with somebody that is white and it's going to be problematic, right?" Being in a Catholic school was really important and then just having that level of rigor was just completely different training and then, you know, the economic diversity. (Julia)

The experience for the one outlier in the group was somewhat different as she attended her school beginning in kindergarten. Because her family was both a presence

in her school and in her life during the thirteen years that she attended independent schools, she found herself pushing away from them rather than longing for them.

I was there (her school) for thirteen years, I guess, obviously there is going to be a lot of changes wherever I was. In the beginning (K-5), it was much more family oriented...bringing the whole family into the community. Toward the end (6-12), it became more of me as like being a part of the community: academically, socially, in every way. Sort of like doing it on my own and getting ready to be a separate person. (Adela)

Hybrid identity. Based on the work of José Vansconcelos (1961), the Mexican philosopher who envisioned a fifth race where people of color would represent the four major races of the world, Anzaldúa (1999) developed the concept of a *Mestiza/ Mestizaje* identity, which she described as a dual or multiple identity inhabited by Latina women who, by virtue of race, ideology, culture, or biology, continually navigate between one culture or another causing great restlessness. While this new identity is tinged with contradictions and results in a tolerance for ambiguity, it enables one to move in, out, and within multiple realities, while forging an identity that is uniquely personal. Anzaldúa saw the Mestiza consciousness as above all else a feminist one. Participants shared their experiences of navigating between home, school, and their own hybrid identity development, while students attending independent schools, thus, validating the concept of living and crossing back and forth across the borders that represent their realities and shaped their hybrid identity. Students found themselves living very different lives in each world and needing to come to terms with the contradictions they experienced. Carmen captures the dual identities that she had to inhabit in her recollection of the code switching

(Umañja-Taylor, 2007) which was necessary when she went home and then returned to school.

This is in Newark public school, there was certainly code shifting then, right. So, I felt like I had to hide the smartness. When I went to my independent school it was funny because, or it was interesting to me, because the students of color there, the students of color would tell me you need to elevate your vocabulary because you are here for a reason and you need to, it was like I had to prove myself amongst them. So that I could then, in turn, be influential in the community and represent the students of color, not necessarily Latino students, but those students of color in a positive way. So, you have to be like you say don't speak, don't be ghetto and then don't, and play sports and do, you know, just be involved, don't be one of those people. (Carmen)

Because independent schools are financially exclusive, socioeconomic status emerged as a significant aspect of personal identification. Upon the realization that socioeconomic status set participants apart from the predominant population of full-pay students, the participants found themselves gravitating toward other students of color with whom they felt they could relate and share this mutual bond. Despite this, there was a high cost to pay associated with the feeling of alterity with which students struggled.

When I got there, it was a new environment, there's wealth that I've never experienced. The level of classes (academic) and everything else, and I think the social aspect of things was the hardest piece, because I wasn't Latino enough for the Latinos coming directly from Guatemala, Spain, etc., but I wasn't whatever enough, American enough, for anybody else, so it was a constant state of limbo.

So, even though my Latino friends would love to come to my house and spend time on some weekends with my family because it was home, on other weekends they would go to New York and go shop on Madison Avenue. That was where lines of communication broke. I loved them dearly, but I was the one left behind on campus. So, my kind of friend group started to shift and I became very close friends with the other students of color, with the African American students. I related to them more on the experiences of what we collectively were going through at the independent school level, when it came to socioeconomic status and access; I mean preparation in terms of going to an independent school was what I could relate to them more than I could with anybody else. I had to try to navigate my world at school and then at home and become kind of this double person. Again, it was that negotiating of who I was, you know, because I was not being true to myself, I wasn't being true to anybody. So that was really hard, that constant double life that a lot of us had at independent schools. I think that sense of belonging fluctuated over the years. (Maritza)

For Gloria, her emerging feminism gave her the confidence to confront those in the community who intentionally or inadvertently perpetuated stereotypes. The struggle between how one sees oneself and how others perceive you in the context of your culture is a significant hurdle to overcome in identity development resulting in a hybrid identity.

In high school was where I could really develop that (feminist identity); I had really great teachers that gave us the stage to have those conversations and to talk about those things. Even though some of the teachers were really inclusive and very open to having these conversations, and some of the student as well, there

were definitely times when some people weren't as open, some people had that other glance and when they looked at me, I kind of realized how different I was. There was a time in math class when I was doing my work and the teacher said something to me and I said something sassy right back and he said, "Oh, you're such a fiery Latina!" I was just like seriously, let's not go there and I walked myself away from the situation. This was a teacher at my school and it was supposed to be the most diverse school in New York City and I have an educator that's teaching me and saying these kinds of stereotypical things and putting me on the spot in front of my classmates and putting the label on me. That was really one of the moments when I was like, "Wow, like people view me differently; they're also aware that I don't look like them." (Gloria)

For Celia, the moments of alterity caused internal turmoil and increased isolation resulting in the necessary pain Anzaldúa asserts is necessary to fully embrace one's Mestiza consciousness as hybrid identity is developing. Despite the fact that both she and her family noticed changes in her, they did not discuss this or know how to manage it.

My family we've always been very close. It was a very inner experience (changes experienced in high school). My parents, like my mom and my other uncle, didn't go to high school. The only other person who knew like what it would be like to be around someone who's different and make you feel this way was my youngest uncle. But, I just thought it was weird to bring it up, so I never did. It never crossed my mind that this was something that I may be able to talk to someone about, like I feel out-of-place. I never told my parents like I'm not happy here because of x, y, or z. Like, I never had that discussion with them; they just knew

that I was kind of miserable. I think miserable is a strong word and it's just like feeling kind of an outcast. They weren't aware of the changes that were happening. How I was changing. (Celia)

For Emma, growing up in a "Latino rich" environment, made it much easier. She gathered the confidence to navigate her new community, and this allowed her to negotiate the awareness that, "You definitely learn really fast that (culture) plays a key role in who you are and how others identify you." (Emma).

I guess I could speak a little about identity (in response to changes experienced during her school years). I knew I was, I was very self-aware of my Mexican heritage. I was born and raised in New York, but my first language was actually Spanish. I grew up speaking it until I had to go to school and even then my kindergarten class was bilingual. It was only when I moved to a new neighborhood and in that school, they didn't have any more room in the bilingual class and I had to go to an all English class and I was forced to actually really learn English. That's when I acquired the language naturally in first, second, and third grade. My parents, being first generation immigrants, really kept the traditions alive and I grew up, you know, with everything from hearing Mexican music to watching Telemundo (Spanish speaking television) to listening to Spanish radio all the time and hearing the stories from my mom and dad of the life they led in Mexico as well. So, it was always something I was aware of, it was always present in my life, but I never saw it being something that really distinguished me from somebody else. In my community in New York, I had Puerto Rican, I had other Mexican families; it was a very Latino rich community,

if you will. Then, coming to a boarding school, where I was one of very few in the entire school, you definitely learn really fast that that plays a key role in who you are and how others identify you. Throughout the years, if anything, that self-awareness was heightened, for sure. I was feeling much more proud of coming from where I came from, and just really connected even more so with my background and my culture. (Emma)

In hindsight, Carmen was acutely aware of negotiating her identity in isolation and saddened by the effects it had on her. She spoke emotionally of having to do that even within and among members of her affinity group without the guidance of a skilled adult, who might have helped students in this process. At various points, she referred to these challenges as being very difficult and burdensome for an unprepared adolescent.

One of things that I am upset about now that I am an adult, because boarding schools have very different cultures, was that I wasn't taught at a young age to appreciate difference. I think we all need to do a better job of that in every situation that we're in. So, at the time that I was there (1998 to 2002), the students of color at the school felt like they had a lot to prove and there was no one there at the school to help guide us out of a certain theology, which was maintaining where you're coming from and that is really hard to do at that age. We (the students in her affinity group) were talking about assimilation and whether or not assimilation, that was a big word (metaphorically), that was a key word at that time, and what the repercussions of that were. (Carmen)

Part of the struggle of identity development and one's emerging hybrid identity is the contrast between how one sees oneself and how others do. As student's fully

immersed themselves in the school community, they believed they were equal members and contributing participants. However, because of the impact of socioeconomics, students often found themselves confronting cruel realities that were in conflict with their initial perceptions.

Testimonio and *auto-historia* encourages the use of other media in crafting the Mestiza's full story. Julia was the one participant who shared an article that was written about her school experience soon after graduating college. In it, she discussed, fully immersing in the new culture at her school in her eagerness to assimilate. While she visited her wealthy school friends at their homes, they never visited hers in Washington Heights. In the article, she is quoted as saying, "It's very painful coming to the realization that you're deluding yourself. I thought I was just like them." Twenty years later, she recalls that memory and places it in the context of race and class divisions. Hers is another example of the yin and yang of identity development; she discovered her beauty, while also having to confront the stigma of race in the behavior of the peers she so valued.

But, you know, I loved it there. It was small. It was intimate. It was a place where I realized, this is going to sound weird, but I realized my beauty. No one knew what a Dominican person was, when I came to school, right. Everyone was like you're Puerto Rican, like what's the difference? Once I got there, I would let them know, I'm Dominican. I had no racial identity whatsoever because I was Dominican, because Dominicans are still struggling with that now. So, I think the racial identity thing became much more pronounced really when I started my first job in education. I am a chameleon, which made me overly social. I could run-

around with any group I wanted. The only other difficulty again was the economics. One thing I absolutely remember is never having friends come visit me at home and I remember we would go out to Queens to Forest Hills to Jackson Heights. There was economic diversity at school, but there was definitely a stigma along like race and class. So, you could go to a poor area in Queens and nobody would think twice or, if they were further away, you would go to Rockaway, right, but going to Harlem or upper Manhattan is like, “Oh, you don’t want to go there, it’s going to be dangerous.” (Julia)

In the early years of Adela’s experience, her parents and her peers’ parents managed their social lives. In middle school and high school, students were becoming more independent at the same time the school diversified. While socioeconomic difference was always present, Adela was not aware of it in the early years, but that changed in high school.

Something that didn’t really hit me until maybe high school, I guess, was when that financial aspect came into it. I think that especially in the second half of middle school and in high school is when more diversity comes into private school, and I think that that’s when I was more like, “Okay, well I’m not the only one in this boat anymore.” I think that it makes it easier and you kind of, you know, you have friends who kind of fit with you in different ways. (Adela)

Belonging versus deserving. For students of color, belonging to and belonging in (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2011) community is not always seen as the same concept. Participants echoed this awareness in their recollections. For the Mestiza, this awareness can be empowering and transform the student from a victim to an agent of her own

experience reinforcing Borderland theory (Anzaldúa, 1999). Often, the sense of place was illustrated against a backdrop of indebtedness (Bourdieu, 1986; Thompson & Schultz, 2013) and an awareness of the academic capital that is accessible to some students, but not others, due to privilege.

I think coming to understand where I fit in that environment because I knew that I wanted to be someone who was well known in the community for a variety of reasons, both as a leader, you know, kind of. I worked in admissions, I was a tour guide for four years, so there were points that I think my social and academic aspects started to become a little bit more challenging. First of all, I wasn't the big fish in a small pond anymore, there were people who were a lot smarter than I was and were a lot more prepared and I just came in with what I knew and I worked really hard but there were some things where I knew I had a huge gap. It's not to say that my teachers weren't there, because they were, you know, they definitely reached out, but I don't think that I had the self-advocacy that some of my peers had. You know, it wasn't kind of an intuitive thing that I had at that age, and it's something that slowly I developed. (Maritza)

Although Maritza was eager to take full-advantage of the many opportunities available to her, the challenges she experienced handling them all, and the recognition that her peers advocated on their own behalf better than she did, resulted in her doubting her abilities. Doubt framed many participants' feelings of belonging.

I think that it complicated my situation both socially and academically because you're spending so much time together in a boarding school, you're showing your true colors. You're showing the fact that, okay, do you really deserve to be here?

Why are you here, is it just because you're Latina and you have a particular last name or, what not, you know? So, it was always kind of the doubting of, "Okay, I made it this far, but do I really deserve to be here, should I leave?" You know, because I obviously was taking harder courses and taking a lot more responsibilities outside of the classroom it made things that much more difficult, you know. Yeah they're my dear friends, and I love them to death, but at the same time I was always kind of the outcast, you know, for a variety of reasons.

(Maritza)

Carmen characterized belonging as a mutual "wanting you too;" however, participants did not necessarily experience it the same as having an equal voice in the community. Gloria recounts an incident that made her question whether belonging was relative to certain situations. She recalls the situation as one that made her question whether the voices of students of color held the same weight as those of the dominant class. Experiences such as these contribute to Latinas' sense that there is a distinction between the concepts of belonging, access, and equity.

So, there's this kind of curiosity and this kind of idea of that's a little different in this culture and I feel like there were many instances where people were genuinely curious about my culture and I was very open to have those conversations with them, but there were times that the curiosity was a little unnerving, because it kind of was a way for them to work through their own ideas about what my culture was about. So it wasn't just curiosity, I want to learn about it, but more that they kind of wanted to prove some of their own kind of ideas of what a Latina is or something like that. So, I definitely saw a lot of that in high

school for sure. I think that's really where my identity kind of formed during that time. Like for example, there was a student lounge within our cafeteria that we had and I would go in there with, and it just turned out to be that way that a lot of the people do stick together, and so I was in there with a lot of girls who were African American and a lot of girls that were Latino like me and we were playing music and dancing, and during our lunch we would just dance in the student lounge. Yeah, we were lounging, you know, whatever we wanted to do and I remember that after a while they kind of tried to get us to stop doing, because they were saying that we were isolating ourselves. Then, we never, you know, we never want to isolate ourselves, we're just here, we're just friends, we're just trying to have a good time and dance. If anyone wants to come in they can and some of my friends that weren't in those ethnic groups did come in and they would dance with us and hang out, but then there were some people that kind of, I guess, felt threatened by it because they were like, "Oh, we don't have a space where we can do that." But, that wasn't our space. I mean no one said this is the designated space for the people of color to hang out and dance. It was a space that we took, anybody could go in there anytime, but they didn't. We never kicked anyone out. It was, I just kind of, and I remember it as like a fishbowl. The cafeteria was, you know, had the doors and everything where you couldn't see anything, but that room was all glass. It was like we were in there dancing and you know we were just having fun. We didn't care, but we could see people looking in at us, so it really felt like they were kind of just looking in. You know, then when our principal, at the time, had the conversation with us about you guys

are isolating yourselves. Yet, the issue of everybody staring and not wanting to join didn't come up, just the issue that we were on our own in there came up. So, we kind of stopped and we didn't have that whole conversation. It wasn't a conversation; it was more like an accusation from the administrator's point of view. We were just like, okay, maybe we should have fought back a little more, but, at that time, it was just like, what's the point. (Gloria)

Despite this observation, Gloria felt that she belonged as a contributing member of her community as her feminist identity evolved. Her feelings underscore the Mestiza experience of belonging to multiple worlds at once; the experience causes intense confusion because one relates to more than one world.

I definitely feel like I belonged because of the people I decided to associate with even though we were a really small school. So I feel like the network of people that I built there really made me feel like I belonged but, at the same time, I also stood out because I was always leading all of the diversity assemblies and always leading all of the conversations and it was just, sometimes I would hear, "Oh, my God, we're having another one of these assemblies, like what the hell!" and I would say, "Yeah, we need to have another one of these assemblies because, do you remember what you said in class the other day?" and I would kind of bring that back so everybody knew who I was and everybody knew that I was different in a sense. But, I still felt like I belonged because of the people that I kind of associated myself with and the network of people that I had and the support that I had from some of the educators and then different because they always saw me as that girl planning the diversity thing at the school. (Gloria)

Celia's awareness of her sense of belonging was not realized until she found herself at an Ivy League university with a very strong Greek culture, which separated people and pitted them against one another. In contrast, she says she realized how welcoming and inclusive her school, with a strong religious identity, had been. She remembers an adult member of her high school underscoring the importance of equity for herself and her peers. This had a profound effect on her and validated her self-worth.

You know, it's so funny because I only felt that I belonged afterwards. Going to college seeing everyone around me, and I mean like Ivy University, an Ivy League school, (where) people who could have money and might have gotten by in life because of their privileges and they'll never be aware of the realities of life. What it means to like say I have parents who work six days a week and stand up on their feet all day. Or, it's hard for me to study at home, because if they want to watch TV until 12:00 A.M. I'm going to let them watch TV, right, and I'll study afterwards when everyone is asleep. Like, I'm just like, wow, you know. But, I do feel like I belonged because even though it came afterwards, when I saw everyone else around me and how they didn't reflect my values and how they didn't feel the need that they had to help someone else. I remember in Christian Service (experience), (the teacher) said the worst thing you could say is, "Beggars can't be choosers." And people, like of privilege, having this mentality. My school taught you that everyone has dignity and, regardless of what your background was, you learned that. But, if you come from privilege and, you know, that's not to knock them down, that's not to say that their parents aren't working hard. Because there are immigrant stories of people who come and start

their own business and come from nothing and now they have everything, but it's like you can't forget and you have to make sure your kids know that. But yeah, no, I feel like I belong now because I came from a high school that, I don't know, I guess the way that I feel about the world, like spiritually me, even now....I feel like the need to reflect and other people not feeling that need that's what connects me back to my school, that's what makes me feel like I belonged, just those things. Like the core values that everyone else seemed to lack that I knew the people I graduated with I could have a conversation about. (Celia)

Emma's experience in a Quaker school parallels Celia's in that both communities consciously reinforced their school's mission of inclusivity and belonging. Because of this institutional support, Emma felt validated and empowered.

I guess my first reaction when you mentioned that question in the overview was if I ever thought that I didn't belong I made myself belong. I guess there are moments, it's interesting the fact that I attended a Quaker school made the environment feel a little different, than it might have felt had I gone to a more traditional New England boarding school. Because, as you may be familiar, the Quaker faith is they identify with God and everybody and that really resonated in the student body, but also in the community. So, I guess that idea that there's God in everybody and the fact that teachers, whether they're Quaker or not, really instilled that and you see it incorporated in the classroom, in the community, really allows for I would say a more embracing community. Where you could really try at least as best you can to embrace the other and respect where they come from and try to learn from them. I would say the fact that there was that

component in the school really allowed for me to flourish as a person. I felt that those ideals really supported my growth and were well aligned with my family values. That even though I don't come from a Quaker family, I felt that yeah that's very true, you know, you respect, "*Respetar a otros* (respect others)" just as we would say in Spanish and something my mom always taught the family. You know, at least, that allowed for me to, you know, if there were ever moments that I felt disrespected or that I felt weak in any sense that you know it's okay, I can count on my advisor, I can count on the faculty and the community. If ever, I am in such a situation it will be addressed and I am not alone in this and that is not correct, it's not all right, or appropriate behavior of any student who disrespects another. So, I think with that being said, that's sort of that's where that strength in me came from; I made myself fit. The times that I felt that I didn't fit were, yeah sometimes, I guess socioeconomically you see the difference of students that have and those that have not. So that's, I don't know if that allows you to understand a little better, when I say I try to make myself fit in. (Emma)

Carmen really struggled with the question of belonging. Her family's poverty utterly defined her in the years she attended independent school. Despite the fact that she was a fully engaged leader in her school community, she never quite felt she belonged, but was confident that she deserved to be there. Her experience is representative of the notion of bridging, characteristic of the Latina student experience, which contributes to the evolving identity Mestizas undergo. It is this bridging between cultures and ideologies which Latinas attribute to the disparity between access and equity.

Yeah, do a lot of people pause at this question? That's a good question. Freshmen year, great year, sophomore year, great year, I was voted back onto the student council after not having been there for a year (junior year abroad), which means like a year of a whole host of people who didn't know me, and yet they either voted for me to be on there, but again popularity contest, so that stuff made me feel like I belonged. Right, because I must have done something right and like I left an impact on people that I would be voted. Like that's, like that was huge right? I know my teachers all were happy with me and that they liked me. So belonging is an interesting term right, so like I feel like I was liked and I feel like I was impactful. I feel like I deserved to be there, like I worked really hard and I did well. Some things more so than others, but I did well. Belonging, why is that so funny? I think because it involves like this mutual relationship where someone wants you too; I didn't feel like I belonged, per se. I felt like I deserved to be there, but I didn't feel like I belonged there because I felt like I just stuck out especially after having been a year abroad, I was just so cognizant of how incredibly poor I was. How I didn't know how to manage it. My clothes were different. I spoke differently. My, I don't know, it was just really different. The white students, with the exception of like two or three, can't even say a handful, they knew who I was, you know, like obviously they voted for me like so that there was, there was something about me that was attractive. I just don't know what it was. I think it's cause I was different, I don't know, but we were never friends and that made me sad. We were never friends, like we never like sat around at lunch or like in the dorm we didn't like hang out in the dorm together

like we never and then we tried, but it was like what do we talk about? But we didn't have a relationship and so that's why I feel like I didn't belong, like there was something, like what was it that was holding us from that, you know?

(Carmen)

Julia had a very positive four years at her school and attributes her professional successes and contributions to education to her high school experience. Her awareness of the isolation poor students of color may have experienced from one another, however, came much later and was gained in retrospect. She conveys the complex layers defining Mestiza experience and evolving hybrid identity as one that included a sense of belonging, while still feeling like an outsider as a result of her socioeconomic condition, and the limits her reality imposed on certain aspects of her experience.

I did (feel like I belong). I really loved it here and yes there were challenges and I don't know that I could be the woman that I am today had I not come here and especially like thinking about the career that I've chosen thinking about the college that I went to and all of that had to do with experiences I had here. So it was a pretty transformational place for me. I'm always a little in awe when I realized that they were actually Black and Hispanic kids here before I got here, and we didn't know each other, right. But, you know, in the 60's they're obviously, I don't know that they were on scholarship in the 60's, it was more about kids who are Spanish, like literally from Spain, Puerto Rico, or Latin America, you know. But in the 70's, there were kids from (religiously affiliated middle school for scholarship students) I'm sure who came here, they came from the Bronx and you now know, because you went back in the yearbooks and you

see where kids lived, but there was no community built around that right and so I do think there's a sense of isolation. I'm just trying to think of being a Black Hispanic like how that sort of stood out and I think there was not a lot of that. But, yeah, I mean I always sort of equate more being the, I equate that sort of isolation, or whatever you want to call it, more being a scholarship kid and not having money and less to race, I think. (Julia)

Adela's experience was different from those of her peers who were new to their school communities in the high school years. Day schools in the independent school network make a concerted effort to diversify the school population in grades 9-12. Schools experience some attrition from students choosing to leave after ten years to attend boarding school, different day schools, and enter co-educational communities after being in a single-sex school. As a result, independent schools enroll new students from some of the access organizations placing students needing aid and representing diversity as well as others seeking a change. Because of this, it is often the first time that students experience socioeconomic difference in their schools. While Adela was very much part of her independent school community, she acknowledges the lack of diversity at the school before the high school years. She and her sister were among only a handful of students of color in the early years. She first became aware of socioeconomic difference in the summers when she was in high school causing her to question her place in the school community and heighten her sense of awareness of access versus equity.

In the summer, I always did something different (from school friends). When I was home, it wasn't in the city; it wasn't like Manhattan was. I worked at a day camp in the Bronx; I did the Step Program (math and science academic

achievement), which is like at Fordham. Well, I did it once at Fordham and once at NYU and it was just like work. It was just like a different group of kids and it was nothing like my school friends at all. My summer friends were so different and they were like so fun to me and I like thought that they were so much more exciting than my school friends. So I was like, “Oh, I wish I had gone to public school” and like I made a bunch of friends who went to the public school around the corner from my house and I was like, “Oh, this is what I want, like this is what high school should feel like, this is what people, real people do. I mean it was just that it just felt like school wasn’t a good match anymore. So, I was like, “Oh, I’m just going to leave really, I’m not going to go here (school) anymore” and my parents were like, “That’s like super unrealistic. Like, we always told ourselves from day one we’re going to send you to either a Catholic school or a private school. It was never going to be public school because they just have this reputation for being so horrible.” So I think that that was something that made high school much harder than the middle school because I finally realized like maybe this wasn’t the greatest choice. Like these aren’t people that are having the same experience that I am outside of school and like maybe it wouldn’t, it would be better to just be with people who were like in a similar financial situation, or like background situation, and just to have to work with fewer variables. (Adela)

Leadership. Positive decisions and involvement give adolescents a sense of control (Schneewind, 1995) in their lives, while also contributing to their sense of self-efficacy and success (Bandura, 2006). Participants described fully immersing themselves

in their independent school communities and wanting to make contributions. It is in this role that the sense of isolation from family had a very profound effect. Maritza was an active and enthusiastic athlete, in addition to her involvement in numerous activities on campus. She remembers those years with pride and a touch of melancholy at not having her family share and personally experience her accomplishments.

That's one thing that I always think about and my mom and I talk about it now, I mean, I played basketball for 10 years and that was my main sport in high school and I loved it, and I remember always looking out in the bleachers and never seeing my parents. You know, they maybe came to one game and hardly cheered for me and they didn't come more so because they were working, you know. It just wasn't an opportunity for them to be able to go. I guess, they didn't fully understand how much it impacted me not having them there. I think to a certain extent I became a little bit resentful of them because it's like I'm trying to show you the success that I'm having, the overall kind of holistic success I'm having that I know you're sacrificing things for and by you not being there even just clapping, or a small cheer, was impacting. So, I would get to school at 7:30 and sometimes I wouldn't leave until 10:00 or 10:30, or you know, somehow the dean's office loved me enough to let me stay for like a week at a time, you know, which to a certain extent the admissions office was now, after I graduated, they were like we don't ever remember you actually being a day student, because you were on campus all the time, you know. So, I kind of dove in headfirst and to the point where I was definitely way over my head in the things that I took on and whatnot. (Maritza)

Celia's leadership was very much defined by the school's mission and her passion for social justice issues. She too reflects the significance of the family in the Latina student experience.

Thinking outside of the bubble that you're in, what is like your greater mission in life like what are you contributing to, why are you here. People forget why they're there, people forget why they're studying like what job do you want. Everyone thinks that, or even hearing like people saying like I need to get a job making money after college, but it's like what are you doing for the world. Like I want money, I need money, I want to get my parents a house, but I've accepted the fact that I'll probably go into like the government sector and I'll never have money and I'll never buy myself a Lexus. I'll be the person driving my Smart Car to work, but that's okay because I don't know, I realize like that's the person my high school made me and that's the person I want to be and people like haven't had that privilege (her school experience). It really was a privilege that I had. (Celia)

Emma's leadership positions were transformational and empowering. She recalls being shy upon entering boarding school and leaving with a sense that she could do anything she set her mind to doing; she remembers thinking, "I was unstoppable." Although she did not specifically equate her shyness to her home culture and the sense of empowerment and independence to the culture of her school, the two experiences illustrate another example of bridging the culture of the home and independent school.

When I came in as a freshmen I was very shy, but somewhere between the ending of my freshmen year and beginning my sophomore year something happened

where, all of a sudden, I saw the opportunity within myself and within the community for me to really step up my leadership. For me to really sort of push that boundary that always sort of set me back and helped me to be a very reserved and private person. So, spring of my freshmen year, I decided to run for class president and I guess I was voted by my peers to be one of the class presidents and then from there on it was all history. That shy girl that came in was no longer existent. All of a sudden, I was starting to really speak up and I felt that I had a voice, that maturity that I identified with even in middle school definitely resonated with my teachers here and then even with my peers. I felt that I was rewarded respect and people would listen to me and so I took advantage of that in a positive way. Sophomore and junior years I decided to run for prefect which is the equivalent of an RA in college, and I know other boarding schools as well call it prefects, they're essentially student leaders in dormitories. So, yeah and I think all of those sort of leadership positions that I held on the residential dormitory and then I also was head of a couple clubs, was involved with the tour guide heads, you know, really gave me a voice and really I felt very empowered all the while. That it's funny, by the time I graduated or a couple weeks prior, I remember having deep conversations with my roommate and telling her, "You know, I really feel why do I even need to go to college, I feel that if I went anywhere and interviewed for a job I was sure I would be hired," that's how empowered I felt.

(Emma)

Although Carmen doubted her sense of belonging in her boarding school, her peers and the school community recognized her contributions and leadership skills, which

they demonstrated by electing her to student council. Participants described their leadership and involvement in the school community as important in their evolving sense of belonging.

I think they recognized my leadership for sure (discussing being voted onto student council numerous times). It must take something to be able to, like I was able to spearhead and get people together and get people excited and do stuff and I was blinded by the excitement of it all and set a goal and let's do it. For sure, yeah, for sure, definitely and I think that they saw me in the classroom and I wasn't, you know, I was pretty sharp; so I think they definitely recognized that.
(Carmen)

Having attended her school since kindergarten, Adela's leadership opportunities collided with her need to be independent from her family. This impacted her experience quite differently from students who were new to the independent school world in high school. Although she wanted to be "involved in everything," her independence from her parents was more important to her. As an outlier, her leadership and involvement in her school community were impacted differently because, by the time she was in high school, she had had more time to develop her school identity.

I think a big part of it, because I think that it was very different from how both of my parents were raised, and they both did Catholic school a long time ago. So I feel like especially, I don't know, at my school it felt like there was so much going on, there was always like after school activities, or just like different things going on, and I wanted to be involved in everything. So, it was hard because it was like, if I had a performance, they'd be like, "Oh, I definitely have to go to that

and I was like, “No one else’s parents are going,” so, it was hard to kind of like, I felt like it’s in school, like I shouldn’t have to have my parents there, like the teachers are there, they’re close enough to parents, but for some reason my parents were like, “No, we’ll be there.” and that was when it was like, “No, I really don’t want to join this and I don’t want to do that because I don’t want, even if it’s in school, I don’t want to do it, because you’re going to be there”. Yeah, I mean I think definitely it just, especially with like everything kind of just felt like a process sort of. So, I feel like at first it like I wanted respect of the community because, like I said before, it was expected that it was a family thing and I think that as it became more of like an independent thing, it was for me. But, because of how my parents were, it was either like still a family event or a non- event. It was like I would much rather have it be like a non-event than have my whole family come. So, I don’t know, I mean I, my parents were like the only parents that came to every orchestra performance. So, I think as a part of the community, I’d rather like distance myself a little bit from it than be a total part of it. (Adela)

Access versus equity. Participants were very aware of the economic and social capital that set them apart from their peers and the benefits – both tangible and less obvious- derived from that access, while remaining proud of those differences and the social capital (Cavanaugh & Lopez, 2012) that they brought to their communities. Maritza offered a chilling observation about her peers that did not make it for one reason or another and had to leave; one day they were there and the next they were gone. “It was as if nothing happened. I mean it affected us, but in the greater community it was like as

normal as could be.” In her account of the different treatment of students who broke rules, she illustrates the contrast between access and equity.

Some of us didn't make it through, actually a large number of us didn't make it through for one reason or another, but the ones that stayed all four years, you know, we, I'm still good friends with them and they're still people I can connect with. My roommate for the last two years, you know, I boarded my last two years and so overall I look back on it and like I said there were some big changes in myself, my personality, how I spoke, you know, who I looked at as someone that I could trust. I look back at who taught me and there was one person that looked like me that taught me, and that was the Spanish teacher. So kind of thinking about how that has now affected me as an adult and in college and kind of the decisions moving forward in education. It was hard, I mean I think for us there was always the, you know, when students of color would leave, they would leave, it would be like nothing happened. I mean obviously it affected us, but in the greater community it was like as normal as could be. When there were other students, well one of two, some students would magically stay and brand new uniforms for the varsity, blah, blah, blah, team would be apparent the next season, or it would be like very dramatic and families would get involved and try to retain them. When it came to students of color, especially if they were first generation independent school students, the education or the awareness of how to go about the independent school world is not there. So, had anything happened to me while I was in school, I don't know what my parents would have done, because they literally took it day by day. Because they didn't, and even now that my

brother is a senior, they still, I don't think, fully understand it. I think they're not, I guess, the stereotypical is a negative, but the traditional, Latino parent who all they want is for their child to have a great education, no matter what cost to them or to their child, you know. They don't want to ruffle the feathers even though they know that there's part of the experience that is wrong, you know. And for me, nothing egregious happened to me or anything else, but anything that did happen, I had to handle, because they just were not equipped with the skill set to be able to manage that world, because it's a very complicated world for sure.

(Maritza)

Gloria's remark of her own moment of questionable equity, the experience in the cafeteria, reflects her role as a confident advocate in her community. It is prescient and relevant to Maritza's observation regarding access and equity in the privileged independent school world as they both experienced it.

It's hard for the people in power to give some of their power to the people that in a sense are powerless, so it was challenging to have those conversations with people, and kind of encouraged them to just listen to what you have to say. It wasn't even a give up your power, but it was just listen to this side of things.

You're always coming from here but, "How about approaching things at a different angle," and so that's what I always kind of wanted to do in leading, was just leaving things better than I found them. (Gloria)

Celia's way of bridging her school culture reflected the social justice mission that formed the foundation of her education and which she credits for forming her beliefs. Her

experience underscores the bridging between access and equity that was so prevalent in each participant's experience as well.

Throughout the years I learned to accept that it's not their (peers in school) fault that they're different from me, they're just different and I was never fully comfortable with that until I went to college. That's when I was around minorities one more time, like a greater number, even though it was predominantly white, and I could make white friends, I was comfortable with that. The summer before (entering her Ivy League University), I did a program called PSP and it was mostly minorities and it was just like for the first time in four years being around people who look like me who might have come from the same neighborhood, the same economic background that made me feel pretty again, that made me feel confident. That made me feel like smart for some reason like, while I was in high school like entering I thought I was smart, but then you know I never had the resources that other students have had, you know, like they might have had a tutor, they might have gone to a school that prepared them better. So, while I'm at home struggling with this textbook and I'm like trying to read and I'm like, "Oh, my God, why are these subjects so hard?" It's just like it's taught better, it's taught with better books. I don't know, I guess, like throughout the years my self-esteem, when it came to academics I thought I was kind of dumb or, for some reason, like everyone around me got like higher honors and they were naturally smart. I just thought everyone else was naturally smart and I was in a school with naturally gifted people and that's why I wasn't doing as well. But, I knew that there was something different that I had and it was like always the fact

that I felt all these emotions. Even though I didn't communicate it to my parents, or other people, the fact that I felt these emotions, I wasn't sure if that meant that I was great, but it just, it was comforting to me to know that I fought so much, or that I felt these things, if that makes sense. (Celia)

For Latina students, overcoming the challenges of living and succeeding in the milieu of the independent school community was made that much more difficult without the support of family. This underscores, once again, the importance of family to the Latina student.

Certainly, there were struggles. Academically, adapting was very difficult. I remember all of a sudden I wasn't a straight A student, I would get 80's and to me that was just heartbreaking. Like, how could I get an 88 or an 82! To me those were sort of low grades. I remember going home over Thanksgiving break my freshmen year and talking to my brother, having a crisis about it. But, that was something that I really had to learn, you know, the skills in my study habits and what needed to be changed, what I needed to do in order to make those B's- A's, or C's -B's, you know, and constantly working to get better grades. So, that's also certainly something that I picked up at a boarding school that, had I been home, yeah, sure I probably would have been challenged at schools I was applying to, which by no means were not rigorous, so I know I would have had lots of homework to do. But, it would have been different, because I would have been with my parents. I would have been in the comfort of home. All of a sudden, in boarding school not only do you have to worry about grades, about all of the things I mentioned, the school drama, friends, the teachers and stuff. Then,

you also had to keep in the back of your mind, all the time, how's my family doing and how's my mom and my dad and, you know, just always constantly calling back home. So, it was definitely very harsh at moments, but I'm very thankful that I went through this experience and would happily actually go through it all over again. (Emma)

Latina participants embodied the characteristics of the Mestiza living in the borderlands and learning to negotiate dissimilar worlds against insurmountable odds. Carmen's junior year abroad required an independence not frequently experienced by the majority of students spending a year abroad. She emerged with a fuller understanding of her cultural and socioeconomic identity.

So, when I was in France, my parents had to buy the ticket to go, to go and come back, and financially (the school) covered everything else. That was really hard for my parents by the way. When I heard that was, I think \$700, I felt bad. They couldn't afford anything else and I told them look I want this so bad, I have saved up money and I will, everything that I earn from my summer situation, I was a sophomore, I will take, that will be my spending money. Don't you worry, you will not pay for anything else and I think they just recognized that when I want to do something, I'll make it happen, and so they were okay with that. You know, it was also like with the school and they had learned to let me go, so this was just another instance of letting me go. But, that was my spending money, my summer money for the whole year I had to stretch out, that was a lot, like it was like I was on a \$50 a month allowance for myself, you know, cause like, that was it. There was one other girl from my school there who normally (we) didn't talk but we

became like friends there and then there was a group of girls who were her friends that I kind of tagged along with and we became friends and it was what it was. But, I remember one time I had just, I had grown so accustomed to rationing myself like it wasn't, it was just what I had to do, ration myself with my own funds. Yeah, so you get used to doing that you just, it is what it is. I've grown accustomed to like not having things and so not wanting for stuff because you just, it's like what's the point, you know. (Carmen)

Up to this point in France, her struggles were private and she weathered them with a unique stoicism. She recounts the time when that changed and reinforced the awareness that her economic status played in both her experience and her hybrid identity development.

So, these girls, I remember one time they sat me down and like we don't want you to feel, they were very well intentioned, we were just, we were like sitting down talking and we thought like we didn't want you to feel bad because we were taking all these trips and you weren't and we want you to know that we still like think of you as a friend. But, we were having this conversation and we wanted to let you know that. So, I was like, ugh, thank you, thank you, great, thanks, bye. I was like, yeah, at the time it hadn't even occurred to me that like they were excluding me, because they were saying we don't want you to feel excluded, we just go on these trips because we got it like that. Yeah, they were going to Amsterdam, some of them went to Italy, you know, and I was going to, I went, I had saved money, I was rationing myself at \$50 a month because I wanted to save enough money to get a bus ticket to go to Spain and see my advisor who had

returned to her country. I was going to spend some time there and I don't know, anyway so I did do that. I'm proud of the time and what I did, but that was a conversation that I had had with them and I again, really well intentioned, but my God, they sat down all together, they found time out of their busy schedules to sit down and have a meeting about how poor Carmen is, and how like all the ways that we are different, which is obvious that you can't all do the same things. Anyway, so when I went back to school after that year abroad, like after the year abroad where I wasn't Latina, I was American, and I was just obscenely poor, missing out on all the good times, I was having a good time, a good old time, but you know, I was obviously missing out on a whole lot. (Carmen)

Despite this challenge, Carmen valued the social capital she gained from her family. She took pride in their sacrifices, learned resilience from them, and grew stronger as a result.

I was proud of overcoming challenges and I was proud that my family was really hardworking and that they overcame challenge and strife, and that against all odds we were making it through. Like, I was really proud of that and I think my cohort, our students of color, were also proud of that. (Carmen)

Others reiterated their sense of the role poverty played in shaping identity with regard to the distribution of wealth in independent schools. They articulated their recognition of the disparity of opportunity and experience that this availed to other students. Adela placed this in an important context in her reflection; pointing out that socioeconomic status was relative.

I don't think that, I definitely could identify as like one of the poorest families in my school, but just compared to like the city absolutely not. Like my parents both have jobs, my parents have a house, we have a car, we eat every day, we wear clothes like, we are completely functional financially. But, compared to just like the sheer excess that some families had at my school it was just like yes, like I would definitely be in like the bottom like 10% of families, but compared to the rest of New York definitely closer to like, oh, like the mid line or like a little above that, so it was just interesting. That's a completely different story (with regard to the school's diversity initiatives) so don't worry about that and it was like something else that wasn't acknowledged. So, I think that it's hard to make a club for "poor" people to feel like they're being included in the school where their club kind of separates them further. So, I think that that's maybe not the best way to go about it and we had diversity assemblies and diversity club and it was kind of like a joke, it was like a mess. (Adela)

Julia's reflection connected both her recalled experience as well as her educational philosophy as an educator today. She discusses an incident where she got into trouble and was in jeopardy of losing her place in the school; that precarious moment that overshadows the experience of students of color fearing that it could all be taken away. Once again, this places the concepts of access versus equity in juxtaposition to one another.

I remember waking up the next morning thinking to myself, "Oh, my God, it's over, like I've lost everything, I've lost my scholarship, I'm going to get kicked out, I'm going to have to go to the public high school." I mean it was like I was

very, it was like, holy shit, what is going to happen and p.s. part of the reason Father (priest and advisor) had to drive me home is my father was drunk at home, so yeah. Something you can laugh about now. But, it's one of those moments where I remember thinking to myself, if I have another chance I am not going to blow it, So I was put on, I don't know, whatever they called it, probation or suspension or whatever, but then when I went through the college process it wasn't something that they included. But, it was a pretty defining moment, you know, again I'm very interested in social emotional behavior, and mental health wellness and now I think about that a lot as I'm working with (kids). That's what I talk about like it doesn't matter how many educational opportunities you give kids unless you're dealing with the social emotional issues and the effect of poverty on kids. (Julia)

Access and equity collided for Adela for the first time in high school; she was now managing her own social interactions, which in elementary school were managed by her family. Adela found herself at the crossroads of her two worlds far earlier than other participants because of her head start as a student going through the independent school experience from the beginning.

Well, I think geographically it started to hit me a lot. I've always lived in the Bronx and even though we moved in 8th grade it was to another house in the Bronx and my friends were terrified to come to the Bronx. In lower school, my parents like became close with other families and they would make an effort to come visit us in our house and they were like, "Oh, wow, you live in a house, we live in an apartment, it's like this is so cool." So, in lower school it didn't bother

me that much and I took the train and it was fine and then in middle school it was a little more like, oh, like okay, well you can just come and sleep over at my house, so like we don't have to go to the Bronx, but like you don't have to go home either, so it's not like we're leaving you out, but it's like you can't really be home, you have to like come hang out with us here. I think that since then it's kind of been like that and that I kind of got used to it. I was like okay, well I kind of prefer to be in the city anyways, because that's where my friends are, but to my parents it was like why don't you invite your friends over, why don't your friends come to our house. My parents were, "We need to call and ask 'Is it okay if Adela comes to your house, is it okay if she comes over and gets ready for the dance?'" Other people's parents are like, yeah, like of course, we'd love to have her, we'll feed her dinner. [Adela spoke about retreating from activities, rather than negotiating with her family over their protectiveness], "Oh, it's cool, I can't go, like I'm hanging out in the Bronx tonight." I'm like I wasn't doing anything in my neighborhood, because I mean to some extent I had friends, but it was not like people that my parents knew or like would feel comfortable with me going out with in the same way that they did with my school friends, so it kind of just was like okay like it kept getting more and more separate. (Adela)

Participants were required to negotiate multiple worlds as students in their independent schools. This negotiation was often in isolation without adults with the cultural competence to help them negotiate this complex terrain. In addition, the added complication, for all but one participant, was being without family in whom they very much were accustomed to rely on for support. Living in two environments with very

different approaches required Latinas to bridge multiple worlds. While students were eager to belong to their new communities and felt they earned their place there, they soon discovered that access to these new communities was not always the same as equitable engagement. Latinas' experience with socioeconomic difference created disparities with which they had to negotiate creating a significant element in their identity development.

Awareness/Conocimiento

The process of knowing, or understanding, is a complex, ever-evolving one and is repeated at different stages in one's life and under different circumstances. It is a very personal and individualistic experience. Anzaldúa (1999) felt very strongly that it was a necessary experience, which enabled one to cross the bridges between all the worlds that the Mestiza inhabits without the need to choose one over the other. *Coatlicue* is the Aztec name for the inner struggle necessary for the Mestiza to reach *Conocimiento*, which is filled with ambiguity aka *Nepantla*, an in-between state that is inhabited while achieving understanding. However, if the process is not undertaken and one remains in a state of *desconocimiento*, progress cannot be made and can immobilize the individual leading to paralysis and depression. As one negotiates individual reality, identity is influenced by experience. One participant described this process as "picking and choosing" from all of her experiences; what Anzaldúa (1999) called the *Nahual* state, or the process of shape shifting, bridging, and transformation. Overtime, the Mestiza enters the *Coyolxauhqui* state of identity formation and makes peace with her hybrid identity.

Coatlicue. Latina participants entering independent schools were forced to confront the contrasts in the lives they had at home with the independent school experience in their adolescent years. They often sacrificed friends, left family, and

constantly felt they had to prove themselves so that they could remain in their new communities. Overwhelmed by new and contrasting experiences, they doubted their abilities and self-worth. In addition, as they negotiated and were changed by these experiences, they struggled to find their place in both often “picking and choosing” what they found more relevant from each. Carmen’s experience abroad made the challenge all that more difficult.

Anyway, so when I went abroad to France and I’m also a really fair complexion, so in some ways I had that, I felt like I had that going for me at boarding school. I felt like in that it helped me navigate through social situations more easily than some other counterparts. But, when I went to France and I really wanted to distinguish myself from others it was hard to do that because I didn’t look very much different from the other Americans. (When describing oneself as Latina apart from being American) what does that mean, they were kind of confused, and they’re like why is that even important? Finally, I’m an American, God, like ... and anyway so that it flipped my world a little bit, I wanted to be a Latina in France and hold onto that and it was so hard to do that. Yeah, cause then what I realized was like how important, why was it so important that I hold onto a term, because at the time the term was Hispanic and I would fight, I hated the word Hispanic because “Spic” was in there and I hated that word, I hate it now and so I never liked the word Hispanic and I try to say Latina and like I can’t say Latina, like “*Latin*” and so I had to say Hispanic and I freakin’ hated using that, I hated that word and they were forcing, these Frenchmen were making me say that I’m Hispanic, oh my God. (Carmen)

Celia met her father for the first time when in high school. As she negotiated her school identity, she confronted her personal identity also, underscoring the importance of understanding both in the context of the Latina student experience.

We were in the living room and I said like I want to change my last name. I don't know what I want to change it to, I don't want to die a (father's last name) and here's where I'm conflicted. Like when my successes are not for him they're for my family and like do I change it? It's like, do I say, do I change the circumstances of my life? It's almost like rejecting it, like rejecting the entire family, but it's like saying I was born in this condition and, like, do I undo that part of myself? That feels almost like that's what I'm doing, like I'm changing the conditions of my life, but I should be proud no matter what. So I don't know, like recently I was thinking like, wow, what identity am I trying to go for? (Celia)

Adela acknowledged that having spent thirteen years in her school had a significant impact on her identity. Consequently, she was able to reflect on the ambiguity in her life with less angst than other participants. She was, however, often frustrated by the expectation that she was the "poster student" for diversity and expected to fit other's narrow preconceptions about Latino culture; a familiar situation echoed by participants.

I think that in that respect, yes, it was like a little bit of explaining. Like, I might come from, I might be Dominican and I might be Puerto Rican, I might be Peruvian, but it doesn't mean like in my house we eat burritos every day. My mom started (making) Tacos, because I came home from school and I was like we have to have tacos! My mom was like, okay, I've never made these before, and like my friends from school were like, oh, like that's what we're eating at your

house, whenever, I was like, no, we eat rice and chicken a lot, doesn't everybody, like what else do you eat? So, I think that was a little confusing to me at first.

(Adela)

Her recollection of a significant milestone in her life and having to choose among the many traditions she'd been exposed to is conveyed with a levity that does not often frame similar experiences for others. Adela provided her thoughts on this milestone.

I had my sweet 16 and the other people that had sweet 16's in my class everybody's was super informal and like these weird parties and whatever. So, I wanted mine to be very formal like a *Quinceañera*, the big dress and everything and then I was like, no way, like I'm nothing like this it is not at all like how I've identified for the last 15 years, let alone like the last year. My friends would be like, oh, I didn't expect that and then I decided against the *Quinceañera* and I had a sweet 16, but I had the big dress and I did the changing of the shoes and my family was coming (from the Dominican Republic) and whatever. It wasn't really the sentiment behind the celebration, because I had also wanted to have a Bat Mitzvah when all my friends were doing that and it was like this is amazing, this is like the greatest celebration in the world. When I was 13, it didn't even matter I wouldn't have to do Torah part because I'm not actually Jewish, but I felt I could do this, I could have my big party now. My parents were like, no, what is wrong with you? (Adela)

Nepantla. Personal struggle experienced in both cultures created the perfect storm of ambiguity for Latina participants. Initial responses at school were fiercely holding on to an identity that was defined by others and what one participant referred to as needing

to “fight the power” of the dominant class and resisting hegemony. Students wanted to define identity for themselves and at the same time not be limited in that definition.

Maritza was also getting pressure from home as she struggled on campus because others didn’t see her as “Latina enough.”

So, I related to them (African American peers) more on the experiences of what we collectively were going through at the independent school level, you know. Even though, obviously I’m light skinned and they’re African American, but still some of the things when it came to socioeconomic status and access, and even to a certain extent I mean preparation in terms of going to an independent school was what I could relate to them more than I could with anybody else. So, that was one of the biggest changes, especially for my parents. When I started to have my friend group shift to be with more African American students, you know, as immigrants coming from Mexico, where there’s not that huge of a population of Afro Latinos, they were beside themselves, they didn’t know how to do that and so I had to start to try to navigate my world at school and then at home and become kind of this double person. (Maritza)

Bridging. While this process is a constant when living in multiple worlds, it was particularly challenging when it came to socioeconomic status and the recognition that participants, sometimes painfully and at other times with a sense of pride, found beyond their control. Socioeconomic status was a constraint that was not surmountable. Bridging is a process that accompanies you, as Carmen discovered in France. Although Adela spent all her years in her independent school, she too had to negotiate the terrain. Both

participants reflect the process participants shared about their own experiences with their socioeconomic identity and represent a common sentiment shared by other Latinas.

I've grown accustomed to not having things and so not wanting for stuff, because you just, it's like, what's the point, you know. So, these girls (also in France for the year), I remember one time they sat me down and like we don't want you to feel, they were very well intentioned, we were just, we were like sitting down talking and we thought like we didn't want you to feel bad because we were taking all these trips and you weren't and we want you to know that we still like think of you as a friend. But we were having this conversation and we wanted to let you know that. So, I was, ugh thank you, thank you that was great, thanks, bye. I was like, yeah, at the time it hadn't even occurred to me that they were excluding me, because they were saying we don't want you to feel excluded, we just go on these trips because we got it like that. I'm proud of the time and what I did, but that was a conversation that I had had with them and, again really well intentioned, but my God they sat down all together, they found time out of their busy schedules to sit down and have a meeting about how poor Carmen is, and how like all the ways that we are different, which is obvious you can't all do the same things. Anyway, so when I went back to school, after that year abroad, after the year abroad where I wasn't Latina, I was American and I was just obscenely poor, missing out on all the good times, I was having a good time, a good old time. I always knew that I was poor, but I never felt underprivileged. I just, I never felt, I was proud of my poverty. That felt odd, but I was proud of overcoming challenges and I was proud that my family was really hardworking

and that they overcame challenge and strife, and that against all odds we were making it through. (Carmen)

Carmen and Adela were both impacted by their economic situations. It affected their outlook on priorities in their lives. They were often required to make sacrifices with regard to money, while their friends spent their parent's money with abandon.

So, I've seen both sides of it, because I've been in my house and I've been at friends' houses and I've been raised in this kind of environment, where it's, oh, you know, what's an extra \$50 on a dance. Well, it's like 12 year olds hanging out for two hours, \$50 is a lot of money and, yes it's going to cancer research, but how many of those are you going to go to a month?!

I think that I've seen both sides of it and it makes it easier for me to understand. (Adela)

Nahual. The process of crossing over does not imply abandonment of a previous identity; rather it acknowledges the complexity of hybrid identity forged by the experiences lived by an individual. It accepts the fact that one has been changed by one's experience. Thus, crossing over begins the process of letting go of limitations and guilt that are defined by other experiences and empowers you to create a hybrid identity that embraces all experience. Carmen's return after a year abroad forced her to recognize the changes in herself, while at the same discovering changes in others that she did not anticipate.

So, then (when she was back on campus), I had to think about why am I holding onto that (identity) so much. Apparently the only person that this means a lot to is

- me. Why does it mean so much to me? 'cause I can still carry on and I can still celebrate it and, I did in my room with my roommate, and whoever else, like my friends, because at that time I realized who my friends were. When I came back to, my senior year when I came back we had a party, a dance, I'll never forget, it was the first dance, first year I got back after being abroad, it was apparently a super popular song. All the kids knew it, all the students of color, these are my people right, cause it was students of color, these are my folks, these are people that held me down, we were all together and struggled a lot, everybody was like, then they were dancing funny to me because it was like it's OutKast is always they're a Black band, hip hop, but different and that was the appeal right there, doing things different and they're just dancing up and down. All the people, all the brown people okay, were bouncing up and down, but the way that the white students would bounce up and down when they're doing their dances, right, which is why we had bootleg parties to begin with. So, now they're doing it and I'm just what, what? I used to pride myself on the fact that I could dance, and like I could blend and do whatever, white, colored, whatever, doesn't matter. I'll have fun because you know I recognize the music and it's good. But, I didn't recognize the song. I recognized faces, but not the people. Who the heck was in this room? I was soon overwhelmed with the amount of difference and my place in the school, like I just didn't know where I fit in in that school anymore, I felt so much had happened. I didn't know anybody there. I knew that there was, obviously junior year is a very critical year, a lot of people went through all kinds of stuff. But, I didn't, not with them. I went through my own stuff, but not with them. Didn't

know what was going on, didn't know the culture of the school anymore, because the students create the culture of the school, students were all different - transformed. (Carmen)

For Gloria and Celia, *Nahual*, or crossing over, is captured in two similar encounters that caused them to wonder about the direction in which their lives may have diverted had they not had the opportunity for an independent school education. This was a transformative moment for them.

I just I felt guilty a lot of the time, and then I'm, no, but I worked for this and well if they (students she knew from her neighborhood) had access to it they could have worked for it too, you know what I mean? But I don't know, even to this day I kind of was enduring something the other day in my neighborhood. I saw one of the girls that I was extremely close to in middle school and she had two kids. It was awkward because we both looked at each other and neither one of us made an attempt to say hi to the other one. It was just, I felt so guilty after that. We kind of looked at each other and looked away because our lives just were completely different. They're completely different and I feel the main reason is because I had access to an independent school. I mean because I was able to leave my neighborhood and see a different world in a sense. (Carmen)

Celia also recognized the influence the independent school had on her life. Like Carmen, Celia saw how her independent school experience changed who she might have been, the opportunities she was exposed to having, and the direction her life is taking.

I don't know anyone in my neighborhood who's my age because my parents wouldn't let me hang out with them. They thought it was a bad influence. My

cousin lived down the street from me in an apartment building, I wasn't allowed to go out with her even to the movie theatre, but I could go out to the movie theatre with someone from school like Blanca but this is my family member from my father's side who's literally across the street, I pass her apartment building every single day. Then looking back on it, it's like she has a kid now, she didn't finish high school, what if, right? (Celia)

Coyolxauhqui imperative. To seek change the Mestiza must let go of concepts and ideologies that root her in a state of paralysis, *desconocimientos*, and accept her new reality, which has been forged by personal experiences and manifests itself in a hybrid identity. At this stage, the Mestiza puts the fragmented pieces of her identity together and emerges and transcends the pain, empowered and confident in her own unique identity emerging whole and complete.

I didn't, I think, anticipate becoming such a different person than my family and then everybody that I grew up around. I am completely different in my thought process and how I see the world from my mom, my dad and my brother, even though my brother has now gone through independent school, we don't see eye to eye on a lot of things and again my love for sports came in independent school and my family hates sports, you know, so I always kind of feel, like again, the outsider. (Maritza)

Maritza, Adela, and Emma experienced the emergence of their unique identities. They grew to appreciate where they'd come from and understand that their school experience was also influencing them. They began to accept how they were being transformed by their hybrid identity.

It makes it easier for me to understand that, but at the same time it's meant that I've sacrificed I think an identity element, and I think that I don't heavily identify with being a Latina anymore in a way that I might have, if I was in a different environment, where it was something that was encouraged and was something that was fostered. I'm like much more okay with it now than I think my mom is. My mom still kind of sees me and it's like you've lost so much, so much of your culture and so much of your family is gone because you're living like a different person. But I don't know, I feel like would I have gone to a different school? Yes and no, it's hard 'cause for lower middle school I don't think that I would have gotten the level of education, of social interaction and everything that I had if I'd gone anywhere else. But, in high school is when it started to hit me like this is not ... I've made my choice and this is it, this is like what it's going to be like from now on and these are going to be my friends and this is what it's going to be like versus like that's where it was like. You got two choices, you go back and you do what your parents did and you go down that route, or you go and you're like this new, like better life that is going to change and you know whatever. It's where I was comfortable and at the time it didn't seem like a sacrifice to me that I was going to miss out on this cultural awareness or cultural background. (Adela)

Emma explained her hybrid identity and the strength and empowerment she was beginning to feel, as a result. Her sentiments reflect the vision of *El Mundo Zurdo*, which Anzaldúa saw as the ideal global experience, where divisions are bridged to create alliances. As Emma grew into her hybrid identity she became more empowered and confident.

It's interesting because it's something that I haven't really had the opportunity just yet to share with other Latinas, younger or older, other than maybe my mom or my sisters, and my family, but I honestly believe that being whoever you may be whether you come from the Netherlands, whether you come from the Bronx or L.A., wherever. You have a story and you have your past experience whether you've sort of self-identified as XYZ or probably given it much thought, everybody has a story, right. But, in terms of identity in particular and as far as being a Latina at a boarding school at an independent school, I really do believe that there's a power in sort of asserting who you are and saying this is where I come from whether you identify as Mexican American or Puerto Rican, but I'm pretty much American, you know, whatever it may be, just really accepting sort of who you are, where you come from whether it's defined, clearly defined or not and just you know sort of sharing that with the community and not necessarily having to create a divisiveness, because I do not have, or because I am a minority, or a person of color. Putting yourself in those, sort of, predispositions and conditions of, oh, it will be a struggle and you don't understand. They certainly will be able to really contribute and just go at it 100% and say you know what, I don't care what you say, I don't care how you see me, how you think that that's a disadvantage or an advantage. This is who I am, this is where I want to go with my goals in life and I am going to go for it 100%. I may not turn out to be exactly what I had envisioned by it's a work in progress and I'm certain I'll get there at some point. (Emma)

Benefits of *Conocimiento*

Participants spoke of divisions and interconnections that were created as a result of what Maritza called the very “complex world” of an independent school. Maritza found herself going in and out of friend groups to please her parents. Carmen found herself drawn to the members of the students of color affinity group because they shared common experiences, leading others through her role as a leader in student council, and proud of the recognition given her by her peers and, yet, lamented that something prevented them from ever really being friends. All Latina participants reflected frustration that diversity work in schools was not understood or undertaken with the cultural competence necessary to guide students and educate the entire community.

Nos/Otras. The theory of *Nos/Otras* is another important post-Borderland Theory Anzaldúa (1999) developed to capture both what separates us and what links us to one another. The theory intentionally splits apart the Spanish word for the female “we” and creates a concept that captures two other Spanish words and their accompanying implication: *Nos*—Us and *Otras*—Others. This intentional split illustrates that we can still be separate and united. It captures the promise of healing divisive thinking and begins to consider the creation of a more unified way of living in community. Adela’s frustration at school had much to do with other people’s expectations, which she never validated because she saw herself as, “Many different kinds of Latina,” a concept her community did not seem to understand.

So I think that it’s hard to balance understanding and respecting and acknowledging a person’s culture without making them feel it defines them. I feel that’s the problem it either defines you, or it’s not a part of you at all, and there’s

no middle ground. I'm not exactly sure how you could put that into play (working to better understand identity) in a place, but it's definitely kind of, I don't know, I feel when they do acknowledge it, it's a one size fits all kind of situation, which clearly it isn't. (Adela)

Nepantleras. Participants reinforced their commitment to guide and support one another. They value the opportunity to improve the lives of other Latinas that come after them and enter independent schools. For some, like Gloria, this was realized early during the years in independent schools. For others, it helped direct and define their professional lives. Emma, Gloria, Maritza, and Julia all work in schools. Like Julia, who works with underserved populations, they believe that, "It doesn't matter how many educational opportunities you give kids unless you're dealing with the social emotional issues and the effect of poverty on them." Each of them attributed the direction their professional lives took to their school experience and feel strongly that their presence is a necessary and important one for students of color. Despite many school's sincere desire to begin the dialogue, participants found it was rather one-sided and seemed to be taught with a lack of cultural competence necessary to do the work, so that, "It just felt very forced and, oh, we're teaching you straight out of a book on diversity, that we read and don't understand!" (Adela) Participants concurred that independent schools need to do a better job at diversity.

The first day back on the dorm (after summer vacation), not even on duty, the first thing a student says to me after (learning Emma would be her dorm parent), "Wow, I've never had a Latina dorm parent!" What a welcome, but you know she really warmed up my heart. It was like, well, and I literally told her, I'm here

now. You know I've given it a little more thought and I keep coming back to that and I'm sure, all my life, I will never forget those words that she said to me, you know. But, now it's like I really reflect on it and it's really powerful just how charged those few words were. Like, wow, to have somebody who kind of even just merely looks like you and potentially you could relate to and develop a close relationship with. So you know, I definitely feel as a professional now and, especially after also going through two (People of Color) conferences how I look around and it's like, well yeah, maybe there's one, you know. (Emma)

Emma's first professional encounter with the power and influence that she was having on a student influenced her profoundly. Carmen underscores the value and need of considering the role of Latina's on campus as adult role models for our students of color.

So, I'm noticing that of these boarding school cultures, if we only have, if we have people representing, if we have Latinas in our schools where do we have them and what are they doing? I think that's really important too. I remember as a student I don't remember, I think the only Latina that was in the school was a Spanish teacher and she was from Spain, who because of the issues I just said (recognizing Spanish from Spain as the only legitimate form of the language) in terms of the language really wasn't able to support me in the way that I needed it 'cause it wasn't through the lens that I had. (Carmen)

El mundo zurdo. Is a concept in post-Borderland Theory that strives for co-existence between groups as an alternative to separatism or assimilation expanding on the work of José Vasconcelos (Keating, 2009), a Mexican philosopher from the twenties. It

strives for a world that does not limit identity to binary constraints created by others in the desire to perpetuate power, control, and validation of narrow preconceptions. This brave new world celebrates individual identity and recognizes the bonds that unite us to the community of humankind. For the Latina graduates of independent schools interviewed for this research, the independent school may have been instrumental in their taking the first step in achieving the ideal Anzaldúa envisioned.

I don't think I could have done that (getting into an Ivy League University) going to a different school and sometimes a name makes a difference and I think realizing that, but still being able to say like the person that I am, fundamentally, and it's so weird to say that, how can you love high school afterwards. I had become that person where I'm like high school wasn't that bad. I wish I could do it all over again but this is what made me, who I am, where I can say this is what I feel, these are my opinions. Honestly, my opinions of the world and of people and how they should be treated influence what I want to do with my life. So I think it was a huge benefit. (Celia)

La familia. The importance of family was a constant in the lives of participants. Negotiating this important role was an added challenge in participant's lives. Students found themselves influenced by as well as resisting family in the process of their growth. In the end, all were influenced by the independent school experience.

But anyway, I just was like I think he (father) got to a point especially when he wasn't talking with his mom, where he realized that we were his family and that he wanted love, and that he missed me. But, he was like, man, I miss the fighting and I was like, well, I don't. It wasn't because you missed the fighting, it was

because you missed the conversation, you missed the discourse and we can have that without fighting. There's a lot more to be exchanged there, and again I was only able to have that kind of introspection because I was away and he was only able to have that kind of introspection because I was away. (Carmen)

For both Carmen and Emma, the distance and loss they felt from their families at the beginning was transformed positively as their relationship as adult children took shape within the family. Their maturity and compassion are evident in both accounts.

Yeah, I guess you know certainly those were some of the sacrifices losing that time, that time with your family and sharing moments of old times, but there certainly are things we gain from that. I would always tell this to my siblings as well that whenever I go back home I would argue less with my mom, for the most part I would hug her more, on the phone it would always be like see mommy, "*Te quiero, mucho*, I love you!' It was a very amicable relationship and definitely it was so much more appreciation for my parents for the sacrifices they made in order to get me through this experience, it was financially, emotionally just in every respect. (Emma)

Despite the challenges of negotiating the culture of independent schools, participants were confident and secure in their identities and felt fortunate to have had their independent school experience. Overtime, participants crossing the bridges between home and school developed their Mestiza identity. Having the insight of independent school experience, they recommend that schools develop their cultural competence to better serve their students.

Summary

This chapter presented the data gathered from student testimonials to answer the research questions about the Latina student experience in independent schools. It explored the process of identity development, the student's awareness of the process, and offered an analysis of how the awareness of identity development might benefit students and schools enrolling Latina students. Students described their personal experience developing their hybrid identity first explored by Anzaldúa (1999) in her *Borderland and post-Borderland epistemology*. Student experiences underscored the importance of recognizing that identity development is a complex, individualistic, and very personal process, which cannot be narrowly classified into binary categories. Participant experience validated the need to consider the triadic loci of gender, ethnicity, and class as factors that both influence and must be considered in our understanding of participant experience in independent schools. Socioeconomic status emerged as another significant factor in hybrid identity development. Family also evolved as a very important influence in the student experience and was evident at every point in the process. Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of the findings, the limitations, and recommendations for planning, designing, and executing inclusion programs in school communities.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Traditionally, identity is thought to be binary: If I am this, you are that. Binary thinking allows those in power to maintain their position and possibly keep others in a subaltern state. In contrast, hybrid identity is considered a liberating theory in that it acknowledges that we are shaped by all of our experiences and these experiences form our identity. It allows one to transcend a subaltern state of victimhood and become empowered through agency. Consequently, the individual defines identity; others do not dictate it. Borderland theory developed by Anzaldúa, (1999) acknowledges the process of identity development the Latina undergoes as she navigates across the borders of her home and the world in which she lives. Latina students in independent schools live in multiple worlds and are defined by their school experience, their home life, the socioeconomic status in which they find themselves, and their families. Seven Latina participants in the research shared their unique experiences crossing the bridges between each of these worlds and offer an important perspective to guide schools and other students in the future. The research findings validate Anzaldúa's Theory of hybrid identity development and its relevance to the school context. This chapter will discuss student experiences, the implications of the research findings, the research limitations, and offer recommendations for future studies and program modifications that may improve the Latina student experience.

Implications of Findings

Participants in the research were eager to share their experiences as students in the years they attended independent school. They spoke of never having the opportunity to do so, or feeling that they could share their experiences. Familism, the sense of obligation to family, and a strong cultural directive to never share family matters outside of the intimacy of the home, caused students to weather their difficulties alone. The triadic educational loci of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomics are factors, which influenced the independent school experience for all Latina participants negotiating their experience at school and at home. At home, participants struggled with the ramifications of their newfound confidence on *marianismo*, or the good daughter expectations. At school, they constantly felt different, either because of their ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. These differences required them to constantly struggle to overcome other's expectations and reconcile their place in the new community. Socioeconomics had the most profound influence on all participants' experiences; Latinas entered the community to discover they may not have had some of the academic and social capital that others had, often requiring them to work harder to achieve. They felt they had to prove their worth and right to be given access, yet felt confident in their own merits and believed they deserved to be in their schools.

Because Latinas frequently negotiated the complicated world of independent schools without the benefit of guidance or culturally competent mentors to prepare them, the process caused great discomfort and additional challenges. Negotiating all these factors corroborate Anzaldúa's (1999) Borderland belief that it is through the pain that the hybrid identity of the Mestiza is forged. The research offers evidence that this is true.

Although each participant struggled and overcame individual challenges, the process of hybrid identity formation articulated through the lens of *Conocimiento* is common to all. This awareness is often gained in hindsight, however, after all the pain and struggles have been conquered. It is a necessary part of the process of *conocimiento*, or knowing, and leads to a hybrid identity that Anzaldúa describes as putting back the pieces of a fragmented life.

While the pain of hybrid identity formation may be a non-negotiable part of a necessary process, Latinas offer important acumen to guide others and inform schools, so that we can do a better job of serving students in the future and improving the independent school experience for all.

Latinas, family, and school. The absence of family in the life of school is one that has an impact on students. They understood that, once again, socioeconomic status often prevented the family's full-engagement. For participants living hours away from home on campuses, the cost of their traveling home or families visiting campuses was unaffordable. Day and boarding students also recognize that work obligations prevented families from coming to school to lend support at a game or a performance, yet it still had an impact. While they are cognizant that families made many sacrifices to allow them to attend their schools, they wish they had shared more of the daily accomplishments and triumphs that made them proud and honored those sacrifices. Emma lamented the fact that her parents witnessed the final product – an empowered, accomplished young women – but not the daily process of that success. For Julia and Gloria, the limited English proficiency that their parents have made it a challenge to participation as well.

Ironically, Adela wanted to see her parents at school less because they had already experienced everything in the early years. She wanted her final years to be her own; a reflection more in keeping with the autonomy her friends seemed to have. Yet, she was equally aware that her best friend, an accomplished musician with her sights on a professional career in the arts, never once had her parents at a school event. Parental engagement in school activities is an area that schools need to consider and explore further if schools care to serve their students equitably.

Finally, while participants were sensitive to both the financial and emotional sacrifices families made in supporting them in attaining and sustaining the independent school experience, there was, yet, another burden to shoulder. There is guilt associated with having the opportunity of an independent school education, especially if a sibling did not have the same experience. Newly acquired knowledge and the empowerment that results, threatened family dynamics as well. Gloria and Carmen both talked about the confidence with which they could now engage in conversation, with their fathers in particular. These encounters went against the expectation of *marianismo*, because that confidence also meant disagreeing with previously held beliefs. Gloria's emerging feminism caused her to protest washing the dishes because her brother was never asked to do the same. Her father's reaction was that she was being lazy. While family matters may be private, schools are not doing enough with regard to preparing families or students for this transition, nor are they supporting them through it. Because families play such an important role in the lives of Latinas, schools would serve their students better if they considered ways to include families in the life of the school.

Rethinking diversity work in schools. Latinas describe the diversity and inclusion work in schools as sincere attempts to help students adjust to their new environment. However, the lingering frustration conveyed in the stories of their experiences underscored the impression that efforts often follow “well-intentioned but misguided approach.” Adela’s comment that diversity work is “a joke taught by people who read the book, but don’t understand it” is a clarion call to rethink the current approach. The current curriculum has often been described as a “heroes and holiday” approach to diversity work. These are token celebrations designed to heighten awareness of new groups, which inadvertently underscore stereotypes. Adela’s account of eating tacos for “the first time because we had them at school” and her mother not knowing how to cook them would be funny, if it weren’t so sad. This binary approach to identity perceptions lumps all Latinos into a narrowly defined group and assumes commonalities that just don’t exist. It dismisses the possibility of hybrid identity altogether.

Adela, for example, articulates that in high school, she became more keenly aware that the Latina students entering for the first time in ninth grade, with which she was assumed to have a lot in common, “were more different than alike.” The hegemonic nature of schools dismisses an important social justice mission to give voice to the oppressed. We must avoid the assumption they cannot speak for themselves. Collaborating with those we serve, we avoid creating programs and writing curriculum that miss the mark and inadvertently reinforce hegemony, because the students are not included in the dialogue. We need to implement a better, more relevant approach in our schools. More importantly, student voices need to be heard, so that we are actually meeting the needs they have articulated.

We must consider also what Carmen said, “Where are your people of color and what are they doing in our community?” as we begin diversifying the professional demographic of our schools. As all participants note, seeing people that reflect you in the community and understand life “from the same lens” has a “huge impact” on the community and in the lives of our students of color who attend. Latino representation is currently so small in independent schools as to be almost marginal, a reality that was clearly evident to all participants when they were students. Even years later, as working professionals, they have witnessed very little change.

Enlisting Latina students in diversity work. One of the most striking outcomes of the research underscores the fact that Latinas developed and emerged with a hybrid identity as a direct consequence of the independent school experience. The constant bridging between experiences at school and at home makes Latinas comfortable with the ambiguity of these multiple experiences. It transforms one into a *Nepantlera*, a Mestiza, with the experience and the desire to help others through the same process. *Nepantleras* have undergone the process of spiritual healing and emerge from the internal struggle they experience into a world in which they are eager to contribute and improve.

Schools would be wise to explore ways in which the current student population can contribute to their communities by enlisting them in the process of auditing, planning, and developing diversity initiatives that reflect and honor their experience. They must discard well meaning, but disingenuous, symbolic efforts that do not speak to the experiences of the students they wish to serve.

Diversity work is to everyone’s benefit. Diversity work is a challenging process that must be undertaken by the entire community for the benefit of all. Too often

participants expressed frustration that celebrating events with which they have no connection is unproductive and inadvertently reinforces stereotypes. Adela, whose experience as an outlier was different, did find it odd that the community would celebrate the cultures of the students of color, but her friends were not celebrating those that represented their roots. When the full school community engages in this work, students can arrive at planning decisions themselves, while also gaining a better understanding of what work needs to get done and why.

Socioeconomic status. The implications of socioeconomics on the Latina student experience while in independent schools have significance from the onset. Latina students arrive on campus with different baggage than their more affluent peers; a fitting metaphor for what is experienced at the start. Latina boarding students may arrive on campus with a suitcase or two, while their peers unload carloads of belongings. Trips into the city or excursions to foreign locations with peers are prohibitive and in stark contrast to spending school vacations in the Bronx, NY or Newark, NJ. Participants who attended day schools also marvel at the fact that their classmates spent hundreds of dollars monthly traveling around the city in taxis, while they traveled daily by public transportation into and out of the city to the outer-boroughs. Latinas were proud of their families and never lamented their circumstance, yet they struggled with the alterity that overshadows daily experience for them as a result. Julia, who currently works with underserved students reminds us that, “It doesn’t matter how much opportunity is given to a student if you do not address the implications of poverty on their experience.”

Exploring privilege without guilt or rancor. Affinity groups are created on campus as forums for students of color to congregate and find camaraderie with one

another. Participants found comfort and support in these groups, although they also observed that they were drawn together by their common socioeconomic condition and sometimes not much else. Carmen found the peers in her affinity group encouraging her to succeed academically and offered her the license to embrace her intellect rather than suppress it as she had grown accustomed to doing in her Newark community. Adela struggled with establishing affinity with the new students because she had been there all the years before and felt allegiance to her school and the friends she already had. What she and other participants recount regarding affinity groups is that too often they are not led by culturally competent adults, so that they become forums for expressing anger without the guidance to direct these feelings productively or channel feelings into action. Students must never feel obligated to attend these groups, however, as they are on some campuses. The choice needs to be the student's decision.

Adela offered another important observation regarding the ineffectual outcomes of her school's diversity initiatives. She spoke about the biggest differences being those associated with socioeconomic status but that "no one is going to create a club for poor people." Conversations about privilege are crucial. However, success in community is contingent on the guidance and the sensitivity of a culturally competent adult, who has built positive relationships in a community and can guide these efforts competently, productively, sensitively, and purposefully. Unless all community members participate in diversity initiatives, equity will remain marginal because all voices are not being heard or addressed.

When Latinas, or any students of color, alone are the ones required to explore their identity in the context of the school, while others in the community are not, the

message that is conveyed is that only certain capital is appreciated. Consequently, students may remain on the margins feeling that they do not belong or are not as valued as other members of the community; the feeling of alterity is thereby reinforced.

Figure 5.1 graphically depicts the distinct factors and connections that create intersections between the primary influences in the Latina student's life, which shape her hybrid identity. Each of the intersections is a bridge that is necessary to cross. At first the crossing might be shaky but, over time and after many crossings, confidence will build and the crossing will become more assured.

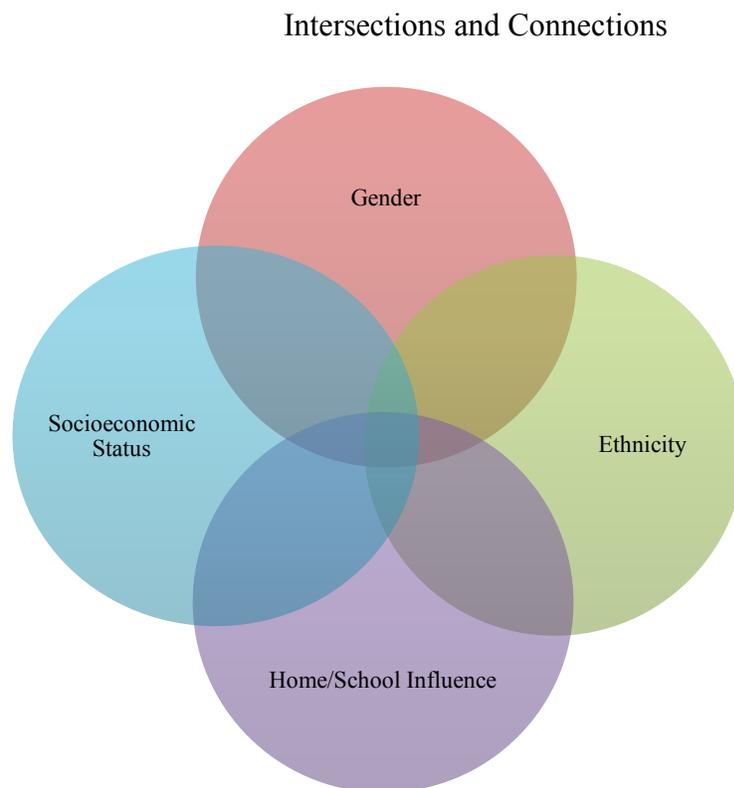


Figure 5.1. Intersections and Connections. Fenix Volando.

It is evident that, although characteristics are separate entities, they do not exist in isolation. It is within the nexus of the experience, where all experiences coalesce that

energy is stored, however. At its core, the Latina gathers strength to take flight and confront the challenges that she encounters, empowered by her experiences in each of the worlds she inhabits. As she bridges all of her experiences, the Latina will grow in her awareness of the role that being a female has on her as a daughter and sister in her family, and as a student in her community and her school. She will learn to reconcile the realities of her socioeconomic status with that of her peers and learn to sacrifice when necessary, yet embrace her reality with pride, not shame or doubt. She will grow in confidence in her hybrid identity even as others insist on defining her from a binary perspective. She will move in, out, and among the home and school experiences with confidence and never question her rightful place in each. The Mestiza is our future and Anzaldúa would rejoice knowing that Latinas in independent schools may model the way to *El Mundo Zurdo*.

Figure 5.2 illustrates a working model for schools to consider as they guide Latina students who are developing their hybrid identity in independent schools. Each of the steps is shown touching to illustrate the need for intimacy. The work of creating a Master Narrative must be based on trust and be free of judgment. Trust is the first step toward establishing a commitment to doing this important work; a commitment that will sustain those involved through the challenging process of exploration, or *Conocimiento*, so that despite difficult conversations, no one abandons the work along the way.

At the center of the model is the goal of *El Mundo Zurdo*. We want the empowered Latina to be transformed into *Fenix Volando* and take on the important work of a *Nepantlera*, so that the cycle continues.

Model for Hybrid Identity Work with Latina Students

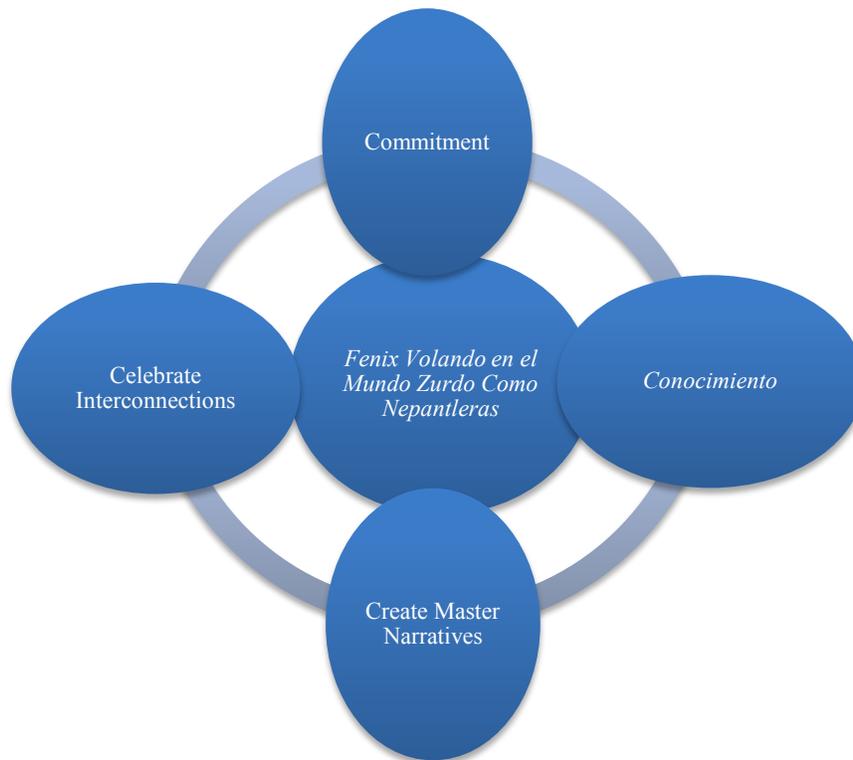


Figure: 5.2. Model for Hybrid Identity Work with Latina Students.

Limitations

Any research that includes one perspective is limited. Personal experience is individualistic and Borderland Theory asserts that recalled memory is valid in conveying feelings and emotions at the time an experience is manifested (Anzaldúa, 1999). However, when that experience includes observations made about others, it behooves one to consider the counter-perspective. So much of the Latina student experience is influenced by her responses to the perceptions of others, especially with regard to the characteristics associated with her identity: ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomics. Understanding the perspective of others and exploring how those perceptions and

predispositions develop is equally important. Carmen reminds us that too often we are not educating our children to “understand and appreciate difference,” which is relevant to all members of the community.

This research only explored the Latina student experience. Future research should consider understanding the perspective of others in the community, the family, and the hybrid identity of young Latino students as well. They too should engage in creating a Master Narrative. All stories need to be welcomed and appreciated.

Auto-historia teoria. Anzaldúa’s (1999) *Auto-historia teoria* encourages the expression of a Master Narrative as another means of reclaiming one’s voice. Participants were asked to contribute additional media, if available and they were willing to share. The constraints imposed by a tight schedule, however, and the time-lapse between participants’ experiences and today may have been the reason for students not creating nor retrieving additional media reflecting their identity development. The small sample size may have been a factor in these limitations as well; a larger sample size may have yielded different results and should be considered in the future. It is also possible that personal writings or journal entries may be too intimate to share. With more time, developing rapport and establishing a greater sense of affinity with and to one another, results may have been more successful.

Recommendations

Any work with Latina’s in the formative years of adolescence must consider the implications of the three main theorists, illustrated in Figure 5.3, upon which this research was based. If one hopes to guide students in the creation of a Master Narrative (Anzaldúa, 1999), a relationship built on trust must be the foundation of all efforts.

Creating a Master Narrative

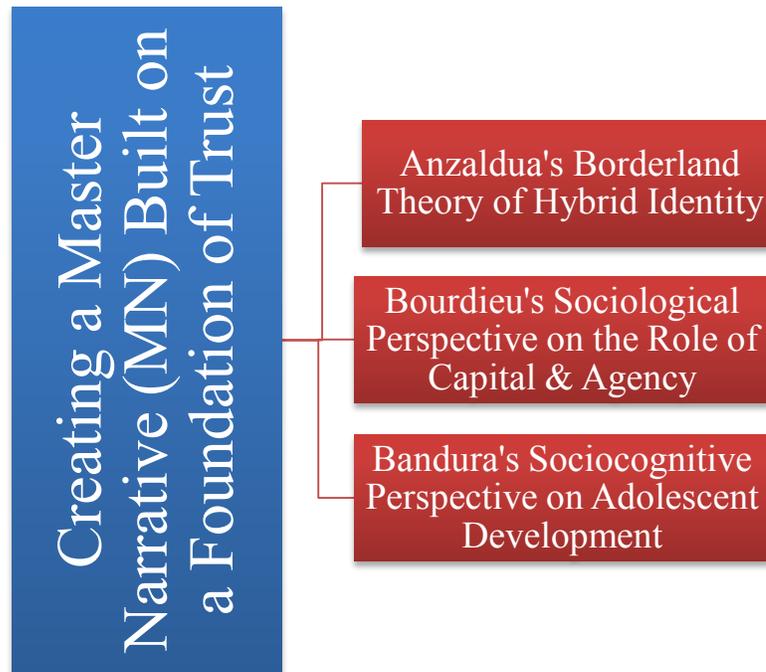


Figure 5.3. Creating a Master Narrative.

When the process of identity development takes place in adolescence, there are multiple theories to consider. While Anzaldúa's Borderland Theory (1999) is particularly relevant to the Latina experience, Bourdieu's (1986) sociological perspective and the role of capital and agency on experience complements it, especially when one considers the socioeconomic implications on the Latina student experience on independent school campuses. Furthermore, because most Latina student experience is during adolescence when most enter independent schools, the process of hybrid identity development needs to be explored from Bandura's (1977; 2006) Socio-Cognitive Theory as well.

Policy and practice. Table 5.1 shows what this process would look like in schools. It is important that the community strive to achieve trust amongst one another, so that no one is threatened by opposing views. At the same time, each individual must be open to growth and be willing to learn from one another. Trust is foundational to the success of understanding hybrid identity development.

Table 5.1

Steps Undertaken in Hybrid Identity Work Creating a Master Narrative

Commitment	Exploration/ <i>Conocimiento</i>	Creation of a Master Narrative (MN)	Celebrate Our Interconnections
To guide Latina students through the process of hybrid identity development.	Enlist all individuals in the community in the process of auditing, planning, and program implementation of the awareness of hybrid identity development.	Encourage multimedia expressions of individual MN illustrating their personal story.	Respect difference and celebrate commonalities: within the community and in individual lives.
To mentor students, both Latina students and all others, through their evolving awareness of identity development.	Create a timeline for the goals that have been set. Do not rush the process and be realistic. Trust needs time to be established. The process of identity development is individualistic. Therefore, each school must create programs that are relevant to its own community.	The use of journaling can be used as an important early part of the process.	Encourage leadership development and offer the necessary support to <i>Nepantleras</i> as they guide others.
To support families in their understanding of hybrid identity development.	As trust is established, culturally competent adults and student leaders should guide conversations.	As important as this work is, no one should be forced to take part.	Involve families to take part in this important work.
To support the school with relevant and sensitive curriculum and program development.	Students must have an equal voice in the process.	Consider a school/community event to showcase efforts.	Assign a culturally competent adult to be a liaison between the family and the school.

Future research. A future goal is to embark on a longitudinal Participatory Action Research (PAR) project that documents the Latina student experience in real time with the possibility of following up and comparing Latina students' recalled experience years later. This would allow a greater understanding of the process "the way it is now" and the residual impact it may have in the future. This effort would contribute to the limited literature available on identity formation from the student perspective. Results gleaned from a PAR project would be an asset to guiding Latinas through the process of identity formation and negotiating the hegemonic culture of an elite school. Encouraging self-expression so that the Latina speaks from that liminal space, as she creates her own Master Narrative and contributes her voice to school efforts is vital. PAR may also support students when confronting contrasts between her family experience and her reality at school, so that she no longer navigates between her worlds in isolation.

Anzaldúa's (1999) Borderland theory reminds us that when the work of *conocimiento* is not taken on, it is paralyzing and keeps one rooted in a state of victimhood and *desconocimiento*. Future research on the implications of *desconocimiento* on inner city youth and their identity development in the context of the epidemic of violence in communities among youth, and with regard to bullying, might shed light on this important connection.

Keeping families connected. Greater effort needs to be made to understand the role of the family in the Latina student experience. Although families may not be able to participate in events that are in conflict with their work schedules, a sensitive community takes this into consideration. Planning day events, communicating frequently via phone, email, or snail mail will keep families informed and connected to both their daughter's

experience and the community. Enlisting culturally competent liaisons between the home and the family will confirm a sincere desire to improve the lives of our students and respect the cultural capital that so defines Latina students.

Overview

Latina participants embody courageousness in recounting the years on independent school campuses, not often witnessed in the experiences of the typical adolescent, despite personal and private struggles of bridging multiple worlds. Their identity journey is complex and painful, made more complicated by the challenges of adolescence and the alterity they experience in independent schools. Research outcomes underscore the fact that identity is not a linear, neatly defined process with a finite end. In contrast, Latina experiences confirm the complexity and challenges involved in forging a Mestiza/hybrid identity. However, hardship has its rewards. Latinas emerge empowered and with the cultural competence and perspicacity to cross bridges and navigate among and between all the different worlds in which she is a member.

Participant lens. Although all Latinas living in multiple worlds develop a hybrid identity, all experience is not the same. Rather, experience is a result of the particulars of each experience. Student experience is influenced by the environment in which they live, their country of origin, the traditions they practice and are important to them, their peers, the school environment, the opportunities afforded them, their age, their gender, and their socioeconomic status. Identity development is complex. Although efforts are well intentioned, schools are looking for simple solutions to complex processes in addressing diversity on their campuses.

Adolescence, the time that all but one participant entered the independent school world, is a time that is particularly sensitive. Before this important time in a person's life, identity is passed onto the individual directly and received without question (Bandura, 2006; Phinney, 1989). In adolescence, however, students begin to question their place in the world causing the disequilibrium that participants describe characterizes the early years of their school experience. They begin to relate more directly with their peers and want very much to belong. When alterity is confronted daily and students are unprepared for it, the situation is made more complex for the adolescent. Leaving families with which they were very close "flipped their world" forcing them to negotiate the "very complicated world of independent schools" on their own. As Carmen described, it is an "incredible burden" for a young person to endure. Yet, it is precisely because of the ambiguity of the experience that the Latina is forced to confront identity from the perspective of the Borderlands. Going in and out of cultures enabled participants to become very adept at dealing with contrasts they experienced at home with family and in school among their peers. This requires the Mestiza to figure out how to do this and empowers her when she discovers she can successfully navigate both worlds after all.

This is not an easy process, nor is it linear. In fact, it may even have to happen more than once. Carmen's experience was a perfect example of that. She was determined to get to France in junior year and she made that happen. As a sophomore, she worked during the summer, so that she could save the money that she would need to budget as her spending money for an entire year. Conquering an obstacle caused by her socioeconomic status, over which she had little control, empowered her and as she recalls, "I was never ashamed of my poverty. I was proud of it. I was proud of all that

my family had to overcome.” Yet, when in France, she was painfully confronted by well-meaning, if somewhat misguided peers, who forced her to confront her poverty and acknowledge the differences between her experience and theirs. The implication, although not the intention, was that she was less than they because of this difference. This scenario painfully illustrates that despite how one may see oneself, how others see you has a significant influence as well. In the elite environment of independent schools, this reality is a constant reminder to students that both causes them to question their worth and requires them to negotiate around it as it also shapes their identity.

Soy mi cuento. While participant experiences underscore the validity of Anzaldúa’s (1999) Borderland theory in the process of developing a Mestiza/hybrid identity, each journey is different. All participants struggle in one way or another negotiating their lives at home and at school; crossing bridges between the different worlds they inhabit. Latinas describe frustration in needing to dispel stereotypes, often feeling that they are expected to be representative of diversity and by their very presence to define it as Gaztambide-Fernández’s (2009) discovered in his research on elite boarding school campuses as well. They are frustrated by the fact that distinctions between cultures is never understood or appreciated, so that attempts to celebrate diversity on campuses are generic and misunderstood. This is a form of binary thinking that attempts to neatly categorize groups without considering the individual or, for that matter, recognizing that all Latinos do not fit into the same group. Emma sadly asserts what should be the obvious; “We all have a story, right?”

For the three participants who attended non-secular schools or worked in them, the spirituality rooted in communities with a strong mission or religious affiliation was

more closely aligned to the values that they appraised and were familiar with at home. This emerged as an important and unexpected research finding that offers distinct advantages to Latina student experiences. Although they too confronted many of the same challenges as their peers, knowing that the community valued the individual and expected the community to live its mission was a significant benefit to them. The support from the community was instrumental; inspiring confidence in their sense of self and empowered them to continue to move forward with fewer obstacles in their way. Julia and Celia, who both attended the same school more than twenty years apart, attribute their spirituality to their schools and have been guided in their professional lives and aspirations by the experience. For Carmen, her short tenure on a non-secular campus as a working professional still resonates very positively with her today. All participants said they had no regrets and would happily attend independent schools again, although as Carmen said, “I’d do it a bit differently.” They are keenly aware of the benefits of an independent school education and in particular the academic and social capital gained as a result.

Julia posed an interesting question in the course of her reflection. Despite her very positive experience, she wonders aloud whether there may be an advantage to being in a school with “all Brown faces.” Although she did not offer a definitive answer, she did add that it would have to offer the same amenities and opportunities as independent schools and then there may be some advantages. Her conclusion, however, is chilling, “We are not there yet, not yet!” This underscores an important concept emerging from the data as well. Despite feeling that they deserved the opportunity availed to them,

Latinas found that access is not quite the same as equity and very much shapes the story as well as the identity that emerges for the individual.

La familia. For most adolescents in mainstream culture, the high school years are times that find them asserting their independence from their families and creating an identity distinct from them (Bandura, 2006). For the Latina student, this concept is counter-cultural to their upbringing. The concepts of familism and *marianismo* so define expectations. Familism requires one to place family above everything, including oneself. *Marianismo*, a complementary concept, places additional burdens on females and the expectation that to be a good daughter one obeys and is self-sacrificing. Latinas acknowledge that independent schools offer opportunities for “a better life” often one that opens doors and leads one down very “different” paths and to what families feared might happen – a physical, experiential distancing from them. These observations made by both Gloria and Adela contributed to the ambiguity Latinas need to negotiate while students, which causes great conflict. Celia and Emma characterized that first year in independent school as a time they worried so much about their family, while struggling with their own challenges in silence. Throughout the school experience, the influence of family was at the forefront of student life, even when not physically present, and cannot be divorced from the student experience, if their experience is to be understood.

Latina participants value their strong allegiance to family, observing that they grew closer while at the same time were moving apart precisely because of the school experience. Carmen attributes the healing of a riff between her father and her to the physical distance necessitated by her move to her boarding school. Adela admits that she

lost some of her Latina identity in the process and that it saddens her mother, but admits, “This is the way it is now.”

Fenix Volando en el Mundo Zurdo. Undertaking the important work of forging a hybrid identity is a step in the direction of creating the ideal world Anzaldúa envisioned. The world of *el Mundo Zurdo* embraces our commonalities, while valuing our differences as well. This is the perfect antidote to separatism and assimilation, which are no longer relevant perspectives. This ideal recognizes that to be in community we must recognize individual contributions with equal value and be open to ways in which we can all benefit from different perspectives. *Nepantleras* have undergone the challenging work of hybrid identity development to emerge as empowered as the phoenix of ancient mythology.

Anzaldúa knew that her theory, like the *Mestizaje* identity, would not be static and would change over time. She welcomed contributions to it. *Fenix Volando* is a small contribution to the seminal Borderland theory developed by Anzaldúa (1999) and much like the process of developing a hybrid identity; it is another bridge for Latinas in independent schools to cross on her way to *el Mundo Zurdo*. The historical mythological *Fenix* rises from the ashes triumphant as well as transformed. Taking direction and borrowing from Anzaldúa, the “el” male article is removed to create a gender-neutral word. *Fenix* symbolizes the outcome of the Latina journey through independent schools. Despite the challenges of alterity and isolation, the implications of socioeconomic status on her experience, and the changing relationship with her family, the Latina triumphs and emerges with a new hybrid identity, a *Mestizaje* identity, intact. She is ready to take on

the world as both a contributor and role model for others, knowing full well that she will continue to grow and be influenced by the experiences that await her.

Risking the personal is a post-Borderland directive that Anzaldúa issued to her biographer and friend, Ana Louise Keating, which is what I have decided to do in summing up the research. The *Fenix* is traditionally adorned in purple feathers and has a gold tipped tail. Purple has always had special meaning for me. It captures a profound moment in my life and one that has influenced my commitment to working with Latinas. When I was a child, my mother went to a realtor to see if she could secure an apartment for my adored grandparents in the neighborhood where we lived. The realtor looked at my mother and asked, “So, what color are your parents, sweetie?” I remember this moment vividly and my immediate uncensored response as I blurted out, “They’re purple!” Just moments before I bolted out the door. Because of this life-changing event, the day I lost my innocence, purple has always symbolized power as well as reminding me to honor my ancestors, who also shaped my identity. When I remembered that the *Fenix* had purple plumes, I considered it an important sign and have chosen to use it to capture the triumph of the Latina as well as pay homage to participants for the grace and candor with which they contributed valuable insight from their perspectives adding so much to the research.

The Mestiza, like the *Fenix* used to symbolize her journey, emerges from the ashes ready to take flight and crash the glass ceiling of limited expectations. She has taken the first, important step toward creating, contributing, and realizing the dream Anzaldúa envisioned in *el Mundo Zurdo*, a truly global world, where we live in harmony amongst one another. She has weathered insurmountable odds, lived in multiple worlds

traversed back and forth between them, and created her own path in the process. She is not easily defined because she is not a binary entity. She is a complex, multilayered, confident, and empowered Latina. Her identity is fluid and ever changing. Yet, because she is comfortable with ambiguity, she is at home in all worlds. She is eager to share her wisdom, but not to impose it upon others. She knows that the journey to create a hybrid identity is unique to the individual. She can encourage and guide others, but she cannot dispel the pain. Each of us will need to feel discomfort to emerge equally victorious.

Conclusion

As independent schools increase the Latina student population to more closely reflect their numbers in the nation, they must address the best way to serve them. Because Latinas navigate between three principle domains of identity: gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, it is both important to understand the challenges this may pose for students and guide them as they steer through the process both at home and in school.

As Latinos approach the largest student population in our nation, independent schools are committed to increasing representation in their schools. Independent schools offer students the possibility to gain important capital and narrow the opportunity gap underrepresented students currently face. Educating Latinas is particularly important because of their role in families. As Gándara and Contreras's (2009) research indicates, educating Latinas will have a ripple effect on families and communities. They will serve as role models as well as contribute to the economy in the future as better educational opportunities lead to more professional opportunities. As students in our schools however, negotiate the triadic educational loci of identity from the three primary areas of her experience: gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, it is important to understand

how awareness of identity may influence hybrid identity development and Latina experience in independent schools. Borderland theory (1999) developed by Gloria Anzaldúa explores hybrid identity as a pertinent alternative to assimilation and separatism, because it is an empowering alternative that leads to agency and to the creation of the student's Master Narrative.

Because schools are signifying systems, which convey the social order (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), when students not representing the mainstream culture enter, they are expected to conform to the dominant culture. Gaztambide-Fernández's (2009) research findings on a boarding school campus confirmed this to be true. Elite culture breeds elite culture in an effort to maintain the power that it has. When this is the case, the subaltern is left muted (hooks, 2000; Kramarae, 1996). Binary thinking with regard to identity development reinforces this point of view by attempting to define individuals in this limited way. This perspective creates divisions with the implication that there are only two ways of looking at identity and that one is right, the other wrong.

Anzaldúa's (1999) Borderland theory of hybrid identity offers a means to right this disparity. One of the important steps in this process is the recognition that one needs to divert from a binary perspective of identity development and embrace the concept of hybrid identity. Hybrid identity recognizes that we are shaped by all of our experiences. This may threaten the social order but it is a concept rooted in social justice. It gives voice to the subaltern and, in turn, empowers them.

Because Latinas negotiate experience from the triadic educational loci of their gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status there are three main theorists framing the research. Bourdieu's (1986) sociological perspective considers the role that capital and

agency play in defining who Latinas are becoming, while Bandura's (1977; 2006) sociocognitive theory considers the stages of adolescent identity development, which is applicable to the experiences most Latinas have in independent schools at a time when their identity becomes more salient. Anzaldúa's (1999) Borderland theory offers the context that is most relevant to the Latina experience in our schools. It also validates the process of bridging between the ideologies of the three main theorists as student's hybrid, Mestiza, identity is formed.

As the Latina population in independent schools grows to more closely reflect the growing demographic in the nation, it is important that educators understand the unique experiences of the Latina student, who must negotiate her identity development in the two principle domains of her experience: the school and her home. Arriving at a clearer understanding of the challenges that Latina students face and must prevail over has the potential to make policy and practice recommendations, so as to better serve and guide students to maximize their independent school experience. More importantly, demonstrated Latina success will pave the way for others to follow in her footsteps. In so doing, representation in independent schools may one day more closely reflect the demographic reality of the nation.

The three questions guiding the research explored the process of identity development, the awareness of identity development, and the implications on independent schools in understanding identity development. In answering these questions from the perspective of Latina graduates, we are exposed to an important first-hand account of their experience in independent schools.

Enlisting Latina graduates of independent schools in the process of understanding their independent school experience offers the student, the community, and the family insight that may help guide them through the process. Latina participants in the study articulated with both emotion and candor the profound and arduous trial of hybrid identity development, which they faced as students in independent schools. This insight offers an important opportunity to understand the Latina student experience and the challenges they confronted along the way. It answers the paradox of how, despite all odds against them, they were able to successfully overcome these obstacles and graduate successfully.

Latinas are the lowest performing students in the nation often in poorly funded; low performing schools with little opportunity to move beyond their current situation. However, independent schools offer students the opportunity to gain important academic and social capital. Rigorous curriculum and small class sizes benefit students and prepare them for continued academic success. Offering students the opportunity of an independent school education, as an alternative to failing schools, is an important option to consider as the Latina student population is expected to grow increasingly over the next few decades. Despite the growing demographic of Latinos in the nation, they still remain underrepresented in independent schools. Understanding the unique experiences of the Latina student in the context of the school and the family offers important insight to help guide them to maximize their experience. The literature underscores the importance of understanding the relationship of the Latina to her family. Familism connects the Latina to her family with an intense sense of obligation as she tries to live up to the cultural expectation of *marianismo*. Participants validate this association and

reinforce the relevance of including family and appreciating its strong influence on the Latina student experience and her identity. Latina participants also emphasized the ramifications of their socioeconomic status on their experience. In fact, socioeconomic status emerged as an equally important component of the Latina student's identity.

Anzaldúa's (1999) Borderland theory of hybrid identity development goes beyond the constraints of binary thinking and offers an alternative to previous notions of assimilation and separatism, which limit thinking to linear, static, and simplistic terms. Because the Latina in independent schools bridges between multiple worlds, she is influenced and adapts to her multiple experiences. Each of these experiences helps to frame her identity.

It is imperative to underscore that the most salient aspects of the Latina student experience are her family and her socioeconomic status. Participants in the research all held this connection in common.

Borderland theory and post-Borderland theory have the most relevance to the Latina student experience in independent schools. It is a very personal journey that necessitates negotiating the ambiguity she is constantly exposed to at home and at school. *Conocimiento* is the process of becoming aware of the bridging that is necessary between all the worlds to which the Latina student belongs. Over time, she learns to cross bridges between her experiences so that she feels comfortable in all the realms she inhabits.

Testimonio proved to be a valid methodology for this type of research because it offers participants the opportunity to share their independent school experience for the first time. The random participant sample yielded a range of representation that was unanticipated but welcomed. Because of the variety in the small research sample, the

findings of hybrid identity formation are valid. The independent schools participants attended are all different; each with its own culture, traditions, and approaches. Because of the variety of contexts, the participant sample confirms the credibility of seeking answers to the research questions through narrative as well. While the process of identity development is individualistic, the stages of the process are similarly undertaken. *Testimonio* yielded rich nuanced voices from contributors. This allowed the research to emerge authentically, while satisfying an important social justice mandate to give voice to the oppressed.

Recalled memory may be less accurate with regard to the specific details of an event or time, but it captures the vivid sentiments of the moment in which the event took place. Latina participants expressed sincere emotions when recollecting difficult incidents in adjusting to their new school communities: the isolation when distanced from their families, the guilt they felt when reconnecting with peers that had not been afforded the same opportunity, and the sense of doubt they belonged in their school communities when recognizing they did not enter with the same academic capital with which many of their peers entered. These themes emerged consistently and naturally from participants as they remembered their very personal experience.

Testimonio is as varied as participants and underscores the observation of one participant that “there are many different types of Latinas” and that identity is not a one-size fits all concept. Asking open-ended questions, while assuring an unbiased approach, requires blind faith, however. While listening to participant responses, a lot of restraint is necessary because it is not always clear that the information one hopes emerges is actually happening. It was not until immersing in the data and beginning the coding

process that the excitement and witness to significant results emerging becomes evident and validates the choice of *testimonio* as the correct approach to answering the research questions.

Participants in the research all successfully graduated from independent schools, where they had opportunities for leadership, rigorous academics, and exposure to many new experiences. Participants were solicited through multiple mass emails to professional organizations affiliated with independent schools. Once validating the protocol requirements that participants were graduates of independent schools, self-identified as Latinas, and received scholarships to attend, participants were interviewed in face-to face encounters.

Interviews were transcribed professionally and coded to search and uncover overlapping themes. Living with the data enabled the themes to emerge organically and uncover connections that evolved and connected participants to common experiences. The themes that were uncovered validated the parallel experiences between participants and their hybrid identity development. Students all spoke of their crossing bridges and selectively choosing aspects from their experiences that were most relevant to them, which contributed to their Mestiza identity development.

Latina graduates all shared common experiences regarding their evolving identity in their independent school communities. They described feelings of isolation, pain, and transformation. Their experiences confirm Anzaldúa's (1999) Borderland theory that hybrid identity development is a challenging process, undertaken by individuals living in multiple worlds. However, challenge is ultimately rewarded as it empowers the Latina to

gain confidence and comfort in multiple worlds and among different people and communities.

In Borderland theory parlance, this process involves going from a state of confusion, through a process of discovery, emerging in spiritual healing – *Coatlicue*, *Conocimiento*, and *Coyolxauhqui*. The process empowers the Latina and brings her closer to the ideal Anzaldúa envisioned of *el Mundo Zurdo*. *El Mundo Zurdo* is a world that unites individuals to one another in a celebration of commonalities despite individual difference. The Mestiza is uniquely qualified to initiate this work because of the work that she has undertaken to form her own hybrid identity.

She has emerged from the challenges she has faced in navigating her independent school experience with fortitude to guide others in the process transformed into a *Nepantlera*. Anzaldúa believed that *Nepantleras* could guide others through the process of crossing bridges serving as their mentors. It is a natural role for Latinas to inhabit as they have spent their lives dedicated to the obligation of family, an organic transition for her to make as she guides her Latina sisters toward their own success, so that they too enter the realm of *Fenix Volando*.

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Appendix A

Initial email to research participants

Hola, de Lillian,

I am thrilled to report that I received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College granting me permission to initiate my research and participant interviews. As I must follow strict protocol, I have attached a formal letter explaining the purpose of the research and a protocol questionnaire to assure that all participants meet research criteria. Please read the letter and answer the brief questionnaire, scan, and return to me via email.

Once I receive the responses to the questionnaire, I will then send the official *Informed Consent Form*, which must also be signed and returned. We will then be able to schedule interviews between the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. Please know that I am extremely grateful and interested in continuing to collaborate once the research is completed. However, due to institutional time constraints and the challenges that this busy time may present scheduling interviews, it will be possible to interview only a limited number of interested participants before the end of the year, so that data can be analyze and the dissertation completed on schedule.

However, remaining participants will be asked to interview in the new year for a publication that I am proposing, if still interested. Finally, I will reach out again to all to share the research, continue the conversation, and explore future collaboration as advocates and mentors to our younger Latina sisters.

Paz y apoyo,

Lillian

Lillian Diaz-Imbelli

Appendix B

Protocol Data Questionnaire

Are you a female? ____Y____N

Do you self-identify as Latina? ____Y____N

Did you attend an independent school as listed in the NAIS membership directory?

____Y____N

Did you receive financial or merit assistance? _____Y_____N

Did you graduate? _____Y_____N

Appendix C

November 23, 2013

Dear Latina Independent School Graduates:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Ed. D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College conducting a study about the Latina student experience in independent schools; the proposal has been reviewed and approved by Internal Review Board (IRB) of the college. My research involves asking you to be interviewed regarding your experience and identity development while a student attending an independent school. I will ask you to describe the ways you changed while a student in your school; how your family responded; whether you felt you belonged as a member of the school community; and whether you believed you made sacrifices and/or benefitted from this experience. Your name will not be used in any final reports. Individual participants will be identified using pseudonyms and general information about the location and type of independent school attended; the name of the school will not be divulged. Any information gathered will remain confidential.

You are asked to participate in the study because you have graduated from an independent school. As a participant, you will be asked to spend 1.5 – 2.0 hours in a face-to-face interview or via SKYPE if distance is an issue. Interviews will be recorded to facilitate transcription and precision. All participants will be offered the opportunity to review transcripts to assure accuracy and enable any additional information added that is relevant to one's experience. Once interviews have been transcribed, audio recordings will be destroyed. No identifying information will be used in the dissertation. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline this offer or withdraw at any time, for whatever reason. Should you decline or withdraw, there will be no risk or consequence associated with the decision. In the event you chose to withdraw during the course of the study, any information you previously provided will remain completely confidential.

Thank you most sincerely for your consideration in becoming a participant in the study. Your contributions will be valuable to future Latina students in independent schools, educators, administrators, and policy organizations seeking to improve the educational experiences of all students. The information that participants provide for this study will be shared with other participants, educators, school leaders, and policymakers through publications and conference presentations, while maintaining participant trust and privacy.

Sincerely,
Lillian Díaz-Imbelli
Doctoral Candidate