“The weight we carry in our backpack is not the weight of our books, it’s the weight of our community!”: Latinas Negotiating Identity and Multiple Roles

> *Para las mujeres chingonas y chillonas. The women who run things despite sadness, a broken heart, depression and anxiety. We, boss bitches with too many feelings, may we always be too much. (Yessika Salgado)*

My lived experience as a Chicana, first-generation college student informs my interest in exploring the narratives of Latina women in doctoral programs. When I started my undergraduate career, no one in my family had completed a bachelor’s degree. I am the first and only person in my family to earn a master’s degree and now the first to be in a Ph.D. program. These isolating academic experiences pushed me to question: why are women like me not in advanced degree programs and leadership positions? Pérez Huber et al. (2015) report that out of 100 elementary students, only 4 Latinas will go to graduate school, and only 0.3 percent will complete a doctorate degree. These numbers confirmed what I already knew to be true from my own educational trajectory—very few Latinas are earning advanced degrees. As a result, for my own master’s thesis in an Educational Leadership Doctoral program (Education Doctorate, Ed.D.), I focused on understanding the multiple identities, roles, racialized experiences, and resiliency of Latinas in an Ed.D. program.

From my own education experiences and the work of other scholars (Achor & Morales, 1990; Caballero, Martinez-Vu, Perez-Torres, Tellez, & Vega, 2019; Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006; Delgado Bernal, 1998, 2001, 2002; Delgado Bernal et al., 2006; Espino, 2014; Fernández, 2002; Gándara, 1982, 1995; Gildersleeve, Croom, & Vasquez, 2011; González, 2006, 2007; Hurtado, 2003; Gutiérrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012; Mares-Tamayo & Solorzano, 2018; Pérez Huber, 2009; Author, 2015; Ramirez, 2014, 2016; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano, 1998; Yosso, 2006; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009), I learned that Latinas in advanced degrees

face challenges such as discrimination, microaggressions, and hostile campus climates in their educational trajectories. Therefore, I wanted to know how women like me, who are the first in their families to go to graduate school, balance everything? I was interested in how women talked about their multiple roles in addition to being full time students. The research questions guiding this study are: (a) How do Latinas balance and negotiate their multiple racial, social class, and gender identities and roles? (b) How do Latinas balance and negotiate their first-generation college student identity and guilt? And (c) How do their identities and roles serve as motivation?

In the larger study I conducted, the tension around roles and identities stood out as a common theme among the experiences. This paper unpacks the conversations I had with twelve women around identities and roles. I found that the women described their role as doctoral students small opposed to their roles as caregivers, daughters, wives, sisters, and friends. The women described the later roles as taking precedence in their lives and also informing their educational and professional aspirations. The findings on identities and roles in relation to balance, negotiation, guilt and motivation are important because they illustrate how these women are able to create immensely powerful and life affirming ways of existing and thriving in oppressive and isolating educational institutions.

In the next sections, I discuss the literature that has documented the experiences of Latinas in doctoral programs and Latino/a Critical Theory and Chicana Feminist Epistemologies as the theoretical framings of this study. I discuss the life history interviews and introduce the twelve collaborators of this study. Finally, I present vignettes from our conversations to discuss how the women (a) balanced and negotiated their multiple racial, social class, gender identities and roles, (b) their first-generation college student identity and guilt, and (c) how their identity and roles served as motivation.

Socialization in Academia and Hostile Graduate Programs

Literature on Latinas in doctoral programs shows that their experiences are marred by academic socialization and hostility in navigating their graduate programs (Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Gonzalez, 2006, 2007; Ramirez, 2014, 2016). Academic

socialization refers to the “social inequity processes embedded in the social practice of doctoral education” which makes Latinas transition into their graduate programs difficult and often an oppressive educational experience (Ramirez, 2014, p. 167). Ramirez describes socialization in academia as being solely about introducing students to norms and skills highly valued in the academic profession. For Latinas in particular, if they are not socialized into the academy and mentored, then, the pattern of low numbers of Latinas in advanced degrees is repeated and the number of Latinas with doctoral degrees remains stagnant (Espino, 2014). In addition to facing inequitable socialization practices, Latinas face frequent questions about their competency and ability to be successful in doctoral programs (Achor & Morales, 1990; Ortiz, 1986).

Latinas also face a number of gendered and racial microaggressions in their educational experiences which often results in feelings of not belonging and imposter syndrome (Solórzano & Yosso, 2010). Microaggressions were first introduced by Chester Pierce (1970) as “offensive mechanisms,” feelings of superiority that are usually accompanied by contemptuous condensation toward a target group. Researchers such as Pierce, Pérez Huber, and Solórzano (2015) have concurred that these everyday acts of racism are only “micro in name,” and are a form of everyday suffering that has been systemically normalized and minimized.

Many studies have illustrated how gendered and racial microaggressions negatively impact the experiences of graduate students (Gildersleeve et al., 2011, Pérez Huber & Solórzano, 2015; Ramirez, 2014; Solórzano, 1998; Solórzano & Yosso, 2010). Mansfield et al. (2010) add that women in general tend to “work harder to be perceived as legitimate scholars” (p. 727). Not only are Latina graduate students questioned on the value of their work, their health and mental well-being are also affected. The book *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia,* is a collection of powerful essays that speak to the academic violence Women of Color face in academic settings. Authors share that being in academia is difficult for Women of Color because they are questioned of “even possessing intelligence and [seen as] volatile creatures dominated by their feelings and hearts” (Gutiérrez y Muhs et al., 2012, p. 43). This first edition of *Presumed Incompetent*

garnered a high response from Women of Color and a second edition, *Presumed Incompetent II: Race, Class, Power and Resistance of Women in Academia* is forthcoming (Niemann Gutiérrez y Muhs, & Gonzalez, 2020).

Within the literature on Latinas in higher education, scholars have reported that women face increased pressures of fulfilling traditional Latina/o roles (Ojeda & Flores, 2008). Some of these traditional roles such as motherhood and being caregivers, are seen as "additional duress" or "added barriers" to the experiences of Latinas in graduate programs (Maher et al., 2004; Segura, 2003). *The Chicana M(other)work Anthology* (2019), a collection of essays of mothers and daughters who resist deficit discourses of motherhood, push us to consider ways in which institutions can make space for mothers and families. Chicana M(other)work "privileges an intersectional analysis to show why and how mother scholars are pushed out of academia" (Téllez, 2019, p. 2).

Among the literature on Latinas in doctoral programs, resiliency has been cited as a common strategy of perseverance in graduate school (Achor & Morales, 1990; Castellanos et al., 2006; Ceja, 2004; Cuadraz, 2005; Espino, 2014; Fernández, 2002; Gildersleeve et al., 2011; Gonzalez, 2006, 2007; Ramirez, 2014, 2016; Yosso, 2006). Achor and Morales found that *resistance with accommodation* was one strategy the women utilized to succeed in their doctoral program. To illustrate this point, the authors found that Latinas used negative messages as motivational factors to work hard and prove them wrong. This finding is sustained by Gonzalez (2007), who found that Latinas shared a purpose for educational attainment that extended into the well-being of their communities. One Latina shared, "I feel like I'm betraying my community, like I'm wasting my time here. Am I going to get caught up in la la land writing these papers?" (Gonzalez, 2007, p. 297). When reflecting about the research and dissertation process, this woman decided that completing a doctoral degree was not only for herself, but for her community. By leveraging cultural practices, Latinas are resisting the hostile environments they navigate which shows another form of resiliency used by Latinas to persevere in their doctoral programs.

Latinas possess rich resources such as large community support, cultural traditions, and language, which they use as

mechanisms to survive graduate school. Yosso (2006), theorized *Community Cultural Wealth* (CCW), as assets Communities of Color have to be resilient. For example, Gonzalez (2007) found that another strategy of resiliency was the way in which women asserted their academic voice by gaining intellectual and social confidence. He adds that women strategically used Spanish in academia "to claim space and belonging among the Latina/o academic community" (p. 360). By using resilient strategies to navigate academia, Latinas are able to overcome and respond to the negative effects of microaggressions.

Theoretical Perspectives

This study utilized Latina/o Critical Theory (LatCrit) and Chicana Feminist Epistemologies (CFE) to explore the experiences of twelve Latinas in an Ed.D. program. Rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT), LatCrit critically examines the social and legal positioning of Latinas/os within the United States (Fernández, 2002, p. 47). CRT derived from Critical Legal Studies, as the work of "progressive legal Scholars of Color developing a jurisprudence that accounts for racism in American law to work towards the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination" (Matsuda, 1991, p. 1131). In one of the first studies that used CRT as a lens for educational research, scholars theorized education with as much racialized and racist cultural constructs as other fields (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). From this perspective, Solórzano (1997) identified five central tenets: (a) the centrality of race and racism and their intersectionality with other forms of subordination, (b) challenge to dominant ideology, (c) commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) an interdisciplinary perspective. These tenets are relevant to the study of race and racism in education that form the basic perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of CRT in education (Solorzano, 1997).

LatCrit theory addresses Latina/o specific issues which adds an important dimension to critical race analysis. For example, in addition to addressing race and racism in the everyday lives of People of Color, LatCrit scholars examine intersecting issues such as language, immigration, ethnicity, culture, identity, phenotype and sexuality that specifically

relevant to the Latina/o culture (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 311). LatCrit illustrates Latinas/os' multidimensional identities and can address the intersectionality of racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of oppression. Hernandez-Truyol adds, LatCrit has a strong gender analysis that "addresses the concerns of Latinas in light of both internal and external relationships in and with the worlds that have marginalized us" (as cited in Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001, p. 312).

LatCrit in this study captures the experiences of Latina women to better understand how different forms of marginalization take place in their educational trajectories that impede their persistence in doctoral programs. CFE served as a methodological tool to place the narratives of the women as the foci of this study. Dolores Delgado Bernal (1998), describes CFE as a methodology that allows for both theory and analysis and one that values the experiences and realities of narratives as "foundations of knowledge" (p. 558). CFE allows for the use of counter storytelling and *testimonios* to challenge and "expose human relationships that are not visible from patriarchal positioning or a liberal feminist standpoint" (p. 560). Although LatCrit as a theoretical framework aims to challenge dominant ideologies, a CFE standpoint (Delgado Bernal, 1998) is explicitly grounded in "the unique experiences of Chicanas," who lead lives with significantly different structures than even Men of Color (p. 561).

Delgado Bernal's (1998) *cultural intuition* extends this notion of having an intersectional perspective. She argues that Chicanas/Latinas' ways of knowing are a result of their learned experiences, which are also informed and shaped by their own communities' knowledge. She adds that cultural intuition "is achieved and nurtured through personal experiences, the literature on Chicanas, our professional experience and the analytical process we engage in when we are in the central position of our research and our analysis" (pp. 567–568). When coupled, LatCrit and CFE center the Latinas' voices, counter-stories, and the resilient strategies they employ to navigate different forms of marginalization within their doctoral programs. This theoretical perspective validates the experiential knowledge of my co-collaborators in this study and my own experience as a first-generation Chicana, also in a doctoral program.

Methods

The narratives in this investigation stem from a larger study conducted in 2016, that examined the academic trajectory of Latinas in an Ed.D. program at an urban university in Southern California (Camargo Gonzalez, 2017). To protect the identity of the site, I will refer to the university as SU. The Ed.D. program is part of a larger state university system. In 2005, there were a significant number of Latina/o students at SU, classifying it as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI).[1] The Latina/o population at this site is composed of 39% undergraduate students and 29% graduate/post baccalaureate students (Campus Facts Fall).[2]

I used networking and snowball sampling to recruit collaborators for this study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). First, I connected with the program administration which helped me disseminate recruitment emails through their list serves of current students and alumni of the program. Once I identified the first collaborators, I used snowball sampling to recruit additional women.

Collaborators

A total of twelve collaborators participated in life history interviews. A life history inquiry was used to focus on the life experiences of Latinas. Weider states that "life history interviews serve as a kind of witnessing that challenges and counters the 'official story,' through documenting voices silenced or ignored by the mainstream culture" (as cited in Seidman, 1991, p. 97). Seidman (1991) adds that researches that conduct life interviews are genuinely interested in the stories of individuals and understanding their experience.

The collaborators in this study (a) self-identified as Latina, Chicana, and/or Mexican American, and (b) were currently enrolled or alumna of the Ed.D. program at the SU campus.

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[1] Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are defined as colleges, universities, or systems/districts where total Hispanic enrollment constitutes a minimum of 25% of the total enrollment. "Total Enrollment" includes full-time and part-time students at the undergraduate or graduate level (including professional schools) of the institution, or both (i.e., headcount of for-credit students).

[2] The campus description is provided to provide context of the institution; however, the campus facts will not be cited to preserve anonymity.

Table 1 illustrates the racial/ethnic identity and roles of each collaborator. Identity in this study was constructed by the self-identification of racial/ethnic identity, gender/sexuality identity, immigration status, sexual orientation, religion, and the first-generation college student identity. Racial/ethnic identities in this study include Latina, Chicana, Guatemalan, Mexicana/ Mexican, Mexican-American, Native American, Chica/Rican, and Rican-Mex. All participants self-identified as first-generation college students. Other identities included Catholic, queer, immigrant, undocumented, and a *chingona* (badass). During the interview, participants were asked about their identity, and what roles they had in addition to being students in the Ed.D. program. The multiple roles in this study were operationalized as the different responsibilities Latinas had in their lives. The multiple roles mentioned covered a wide range: being a mother, a daughter, a sister, a wife, a friend, single, married, a woman, a professor, a doctoral student, caregiver, an activist, and a professional. Participants were also asked to reflect on their choice to pursue a doctoral degree, and the reason for choosing the Ed.D. program.

Ten of the interviews were held in-person on the SU campus and two were conducted via Skype video call due to collaborators no longer in close proximity or their schedules conflicted for an in-person interview. Each interview lasted from one hour to two hours. To preserve the anonymity of each collaborator, they provided a pseudonym for themselves. In 2016, when I conducted the interviews, seven of the participants were current students and five had already completed the doctoral program. As of 2020, all the collaborators of this study have successfully completely the Ed.D. program.[3]

TABLE 1. Collaborator Information

Name	Racial/ Ethnic Identity	Roles	Status at the time interview	Profession
Adela	Chicana	First-generation,	Current	Director of

[3] All life histories were conducted in the spring of 2016; however, I have kept in contact with most of the collaborators therefore I am aware of their graduations and new positions acquired.

		mother, daughter, sister		education center
Andrea	Guatemalan, Latina	First-generation, mother, daughter, sister, wife, immigrant,	Current	Assistant Director of Educational Access Center at a four-year institution.
Dr. Ana[4]	Latina	First-generation, daughter, wife	Alumna	Full-time professor
Elena	Mexicana	First-generation, eldest daughter, sister, immigrant, *chingona* [badass]	Current	Full-time coordinator for a Student Success Initiatives program
Estella	Latina	First-generation, daughter, granddaughter, queer	Current	Full-time coordinator for an Undergraduate Research Opportunity program.
Maya	Chicana, Latina, Mexican American	First-generation U.S.A. born and college student, daughter, queer	Alumna	Full-time faculty
Monica	Mexican-American, Latina,	First-generation, mother, daughter, sister, wife, professor	Alumna	Full-time faculty at a community college
Nancy	Latina	First-generation, mother, daughter, sister, wife, friend, full-time manager, part-time adjunct professor at a community college	Alumna	director of a non-profit head start program
Nina	Chicana/ Native American	First-generation, daughter, sister	Alumna	Full-time professor
Nora	Latina, Mexican, Chicana	First-generation, mother, daughter, sister, wife,	Current	Part-time lecturer
Reyna	Rican-Mex., Chica/Rican, and/or Latina	First-generation, daughter, sister	Current	Full-time Director of early child care services center
Victoria	Latina, Mexican	First-generation, mother, wife, catholic, immigrant from	Current	Full-time student

[4] This collaborator requested that her pseudonym include the doctor title, therefore I have decided to honor her request by calling her Dr. Ana.

		Mexico, undocumented		

Analysis

For the purpose of this article, my analysis is centered on conversations pertaining to identity, roles and balance while in the Ed.D. program. Each collaborator shared how their identity and multiple roles inform their educational aspirations and professional careers.

Interview data was analyzed using a two-cycle coding method on Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software. In Vivo coding was used for the first coding cycle. In Vivo is an accurate coding method for a qualitative research because it aims to prioritize the voices being represented in the data. Complementing LatCrit and CFE, by focusing on the collaborators' experiences, In vivo codes are applied to passages of text which more likely "capture the meanings inherent in people's experience" (as cited in Saldaña, 2015, p. 106). A second coding cycle was performed to refine findings from In Vivo coding into themes. Focused coding allows for developing themes or larger categories from the first coding cycle. Focused coding is "shifting through large amounts of data and deciding which make the most analytical sense for categorizing the data inclusively" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 138). From this analysis, three larger themes emerged: (a) balance and negotiation of racial, social class, and gender identities and roles; (b) the first-generation college student identity and guilt; and (c) identity and roles as motivation. These themes point to the nuanced ways these women negotiate their multiple identities and roles as doctoral students.

Extending Delgado Bernal's (1998) cultural intuition theory, the criterion used in this study ensured the collaborators had similar identities which I could potentially identify with to better understand their experiences. I am a first-generation college student, an immigrant from Mexico, the eldest sibling, a daughter, a partner, and a friend. Since I also fit this profile, in this paper I am allowing myself to insert my own testimonio in conversation with the findings from the life history interviews. Aida Hurtado (2003) chose to adopt a style of writing that

communicated to her readers the admiration she had for her respondents. She followed Gloria Anzaldua's call for "putting ourselves more into it" (p. 36), referring to our research and writing, as a form of enhancing our collaborators life stories by not denying our own. I do this by presenting an analysis of the findings through vignettes, using the aforementioned theoretical perspectives, and drawing from my own experiential knowledge.

Findings

The findings from this study are presented into three larger subsections: (a) balancing family and career as a Latina woman; (b) first-generation college student identity and guilt and; (c) identity and roles as motivation. Findings indicate that identity and multiple roles were salient and central to each woman's life. To remind the reader, participants self-identified as first-generation college students, as Latina and at least one other ethnic and racial identity. Additionally, the multiple roles in this study included: being a mother, a daughter, a sister, a wife, a single woman, a professor, a doctoral student, caregiver, an activist, and a professional. All participants shared at least one other role they had in addition to being a full-time student in the Ed.D. program. The examples presented in this paper were selected because they most clearly represent how negotiation of roles emerged on the lives of the woman participants, however different layers of each experience are in conversation with many of the narratives shared across the twelve interviews.

Balancing Family & Career as a Latina Woman

Throughout our conversations, the women often talked about their identities and roles as being intertwined with each other, but also as a negotiation act that often overlapped. At times these overlaps were empowering and at others contradicting. Negotiating in this study is conceptualized as the multiple responsibilities these women balanced in addition to being full-time students. In our conversations, I learned that the women were often balancing competing responsibilities such as family, career and school.

First, I introduce Andrea, who was born in Guatemala and moved to the United States at age 15, where she finished high

school in the Los Angeles area. While she was a first-year student in the Ed.D. Program, Andrea worked full-time as an Assistant Director of an Educational Access Center at a four-year institution. In addition to her professional roles, Andrea is also mother to a young girl, a wife to a licensed vocational nurse, a daughter, and an older sister to a brother who is a lawyer, among many more roles. Andrea admits to having a difficult time setting boundaries for herself when it comes to family and career; she can never say no. One way that Andrea has tried to balance her time is by strategically blocking out time in the week to complete her coursework. She made herself unavailable during those blocks of time and will answer calls only from her husband and daughter.

Andrea explained that alongside their mother, she felt supported by her brother, who had earned a JD and therefore understood the rigor of doctoral study. On the other hand, her father would continue to demand familial support despite any other responsibilities she has. Andrea's parents own a liquor store, therefore whenever they need help, they call her. She feels pressured to answer her father's calls, regardless if she is in class. Andrea also shared that her father just does not understand why she should get an Ed.D. She also helps her parents by translating documents and assisting in any paperwork processing. In addition, when Andrea's father is not in town, she and her brother wake up at 4am, drive to Downtown and load supplies for the store. Andrea elaborated:

> . . . Sometimes we [brother and her] don't get each other. We're like lawyer-doctoral student. All right. But those are the things we have to do, you know. I have to take care of my mom's doctor's appointments. And then the drama in my husband's family, so there's a lot I have to do with that. If something happens back in TJ [Tijuana . . . they don't call him. They call me! If my mother-in-law gets sick, they call me. You know, something happens to my sister-in-law, they call me, or they'll text me.

Andrea touched upon the complexity of how her roles overlap across her immediate family and her husband's family. She has a leadership and caregiver role in both families, helps manage her parent's store, and of course balances all the other roles previously mentioned. She described her familial roles as events

that “just happen,” “it’s life, so it is not going away,” and “it just needs to get done.” I do not suspect that Andrea is complaining about helping her family, but rather choosing to share the nuanced ways women allocate their energies among their multiple roles. Similar to Andrea, Nora’s narrative also speaks to the balancing and negotiating of time and energy.

Nora, a Chicana, Mexican, mother, wife, daughter, sister, first-generation college student, and part-time lecturer at a Community College, also spoke about the tensions she worked through while being a doctoral student. Like Andrea, Nora was a current student in her third and final year of the program when this interview was conducted, and today has successfully earned her Ed.D. degree. Nora was a stay-at-home mother for most of her doctoral program and grappled with being a doctoral student and a working professional simultaneously. At the time of the interview, Nora was also finalizing her dissertation. She took two years off from work to care for her newborn child. When she decided it was time to go back to work, she quickly realized that the employment gap in her resume was seen as a deficit in her professional career. Nora stated:

> I have struggled with this idea of “how do I balance my professionalism with being a mother?” And it is through this program that I was able to talk to some other females that were Latinas who were working in the colleges and some of them were actually in human resources. I was struggling at that time to get a job. And I said, “hey I have been a stay-at-home mom for two years; how do I put that on the resume?” And she [colleague] was like, “sadly, we don’t.” They don’t want to see that and that just like broke my heart. It’s like how are you going to tell me that these two years that I have been a mother, it is hard work, and a student is for nothing?

During the hiring process, an employer questioned Nora’s gap in her employment history, and when she replied she was a stay at-home mother for two years, the employer shamed her for taking time off. Nora said that her husband was supportive during her time as a student transitioning back to work, but choosing daycare for her child was yet another challenge she had to face.

> I’m teaching part-time because I still want to have that balance to see my son because it is hard when you grow up in a

> community and a culture where you don't send your kids to daycare. So I'm already getting a lot of backlash from my family on, why are you sending your son to daycare? Even if it's two days a week, it's just this guilt that I am facing from my family and it is like I need to balance being a professional and being a mother at the same time. So, it is one of the most difficult—hardest challenges of my life that I have been experiencing, but it is something that needs to be done.

Nora adds that it is unfortunate that women have to go through this experience of having to choose whether to adhere to academic and professional expectations while caring for her son. In addition, she faced challenges when returning to work because her family was not on board with her taking her son to daycare. Like Andrea, Nora and many of the women in this study felt inclined to talk about all the things they do for their families as a means of illustrating the nuanced layers of roles throughout Latinas' experiences.

The majority of the women in this study are the eldest in their families, and with that came certain expectations from parents and siblings, mainly around being a source of guidance and support. Monica, a first-generation college student, mother, daughter, wife, full-time professor, and the eldest sister of four siblings, extended this conversation of being the eldest. Monica shared:

> I was always the first one to go off to college, so I've always been a role model as a sister. Now I have kids who are teens but when I started, they were little . . . . It was hard to be honest, but I got through it. And my parents are very happy that I made it . . . . There's no such person just as a full-time student. They [cohort peers] were all working, and some people are parents. My parents are older—they're sick—we take turns sharing like the responsibility of taking care of my parents. So, we all had those roles to juggle.

In Monica's vignette, there are two roles not touched upon by Nora and Andrea. Monica talked about the pressures of being a role model to her younger siblings and having to physically provide care for her elderly parents. Monica acknowledged that everyone in her cohort had multiple things going on outside of their program and that it often took precedence over their coursework. At the time of this interview, Monica had already

finished the program, but remembered quite vividly all the times she was late to class because of her commute from work and all the workshops and retreats she had to miss because she had "family stuff going on." It is quite interesting that even in an Ed.D. program that is structured to meet the needs of working administrators and professionals, there are still many loops and gaps in the ways that support is available to its students.

To further clarify, these findings, as explained later, are not indicative of the women's inability to be successful in their doctoral degrees or professional roles. On the contrary, they highlight the experiences of women who are full-time practitioners and students. In the next section, I further discuss how the first-generation college student identity and consequent educational achievements lead the women to ponder tensions and guilt.

The First-Generation College Student Identity & Guilt

All of the women in this study identified as first-generation college students. In our conversations, the women shared about being the first to go to college and how significant it was for them to pursue a doctoral degree. However, acquiring an advanced level of education brought up situations in which they grappled with being in the academy and balancing their personal lives. For Nancy, feelings of guilt emerged when having to decline or miss family events because of her academic responsibilities. As a daughter, sister, wife, friend, full-time manager, part-time adjunct professor at a community college, and first-generation college student, Nancy described how she fulfilled the obligations and competing demands in her life. Nancy is family oriented and one who likes to commit fully to everything she does, however, this was not always possible when she was a student:

> So there were times and instances where I do remember that I had to, what I call, sacrifice certain things. One of the examples that comes to mind is my husband and his family. They typically tend to go camping once a year. And when I was in the program, I wasn't able to do that. Because it would take too much time away from me being able to—typically weekends are my time to really do homework. To read and so forth. And so it was difficult but at the same time I learned ways to be able to

> manage. It required a lot of discipline. And at times, felt stretched very thin.

Although Nancy always tried to "make it all happen," there were many times where she had to miss family events. For Nancy, sacrificing certain things brought her feelings of guilt for having to say no. Furthermore, all the women shared similar sentiments, since their Ed.D. program is structured to work around the schedules of full-time practitioners, classes would be held on Wednesday evenings and on a bi-weekly basis on Saturdays. Nancy was a full-time practitioner and having to miss family events on the weekends created profound feelings of guilt.

Estrella also shared feelings of guilt. She is a queer Latina, daughter, granddaughter, first-generation college student, and full-time coordinator for a research opportunity program. Her greatest regret is not being close to home. She lives about a six-hour drive away from her family and is not able to visit them as often as she wished. Estrella detailed:

> So holidays are always hard, my mom and my aunts, they get the fact that I can't just drop everything and come home. My Nana doesn't get it at all, right, so I have to remind her. So I'm driving home from school, and I notice I had a voicemail from my Nana. I called her back. And she was like, "Oh mija, we're going to the eleven o'clock Mass tomorrow, so make sure you're here on time." And I was like, "Nana, I can't come home this weekend." She was like but it's Easter weekend. And I said, "I know, but I have class on Saturday, and I can't" . . . I couldn't come home.

For Estrella, having to say no to her grandmother was hard. Estrella elaborated that she felt guilty because she did not know when she would "get the call"—the call that her grandmother had passed. Therefore, she did not want to miss the opportunities to be with her and celebrate holidays with her.

Nora also shared experiencing feelings of guilt. Her research is on first-generation students and how guilt plays out in their lives. She described this interest as "me-search," because of her own story and feelings of guilt as a first-generation student. For Nora, feelings of guilt arise in regard to achieving a certain level of socioeconomic status that differs

from her parents. Nora shared how she is constantly facing the contradictions and guilt of achieving an advanced degree and feeling more and more disconnected from her family:

> It has been something that I have struggled with myself, this idea that the more education that I obtain the harder, the wider the gap got between myself and my family. I now go home and the only thing that we talk about is the weather and it is so hard —and it like eats at me. And I considered not getting a doctorate degree because I didn't want to feel different than my family. I now live in a suburb of Los Angeles, and my family still lives in the same area, which you know is probably considered a hood or ghetto or whatnot. So, it is like how am I supposed to feel good about where I am right now, when my family is still in the same spot? I'm not making enough to get them out of poverty, you know, I'm still living a better life than they are, so it is this guilt that I have to face for going and getting my education and being successful.

In this part of our conversation, Nora brought up multiple layers and discussion points around her feelings of guilt. She felt as if she can no longer have substantive conversations with her family, and even considered not pursuing a doctoral degree because of this difference she perceives. Across my conversations with the women, they all shared a similar sentiment of not being able to translate their research and academic jargon to their families, especially to their Spanish-speaking only family members. This is something I also have wrestled with, especially with trying to explain to my parents my Ph.D. process, when I myself do not know what I am doing. As a first-generation student, we are always having to find ways to decode academia and research for our communities and make it more accessible. In my experience, when I do talk to my parents about topics like microaggressions, they know well what they are because they experience them, but they just do not know the academic term for it.

Nora also shared feelings of guilt in her social economic mobility as a result of her professional and educational achievements. She expressed discomfort in having a more comfortable lifestyle than her parents, and not being able to help them. Because Nora is well-informed on academic literature, she calls this oppositional culture, the idea of not wanting to be seen

different in your culture (Ogbu, 2008). Furthermore, Nora reflected on her positionality and stated that she is trying to unpack these tensions within herself, and in the end just wants to give back to her community and serve students who come from similar backgrounds.

Similarly, Dr. Ana, a wife, sibling, first-generation college student, and full-time professor captured the essence of why there are feelings of guilt among first-generation students:

> It's hard . . . . I tell my students, we come from what I call a WE base. What we do affects everybody. And when we stop or do something, we feel we're letting everybody else down . . . . And the weight that we carry in our backpack . . . it's not the weight of your books; it's the weight of your community, your family, you know, your church, your support group, everybody. And if we feel that weight getting too much, it's a tremendous guilt that, you're going to let everybody else down. And . . . I know. Believe me, I know.

Dr. Ana, illustrated a metaphor of weights in our backpacks, and what it means to carry your community with you into academic spaces. Guilt emerged from feeling like a failure or an imposter in spaces that may not value the experiences of first-generation students from working-class backgrounds. Dr. Ana shared having a hard time living away from home as an undergraduate student and feeling lonely in the process. She confided that at first her family was upset with her moving out for college and saw it as her wanting to leave home. At age 31, as a master's student in counseling, Dr. Ana still had a hard time explaining to her father that she had to move to pursue her program. Dr. Ana operates on a "WE" base, meaning that everything she does is considered a community effort, such as WE are going to college and WE are going to succeed. Therefore, Dr. Ana always felt as if her community was with her and if she failed, then she would have failed her entire community, and if she succeeded, so did her community. Nancy, Estrella, Nora, and Dr. Ana's vignettes capture many of the sentiments echoed by the women in this study.

In my own experience, I myself have grappled with feelings of guilt. My family, parents and sisters live over 300 miles away, and similar to Estrella, I cannot visit as often as I wish I could. I have missed countless birthdays, holidays, graduations,

welcoming of new family members, and the list goes on and on. It is hard to feel grounded in my purpose and reason for wanting to pursue a Ph.D. when my main supporters are far away. My parents have expressed their joy in seeing me accomplish my goals, and if I am well and in good health, then they are well, too. Despite being proud of me, they sometimes wish I had never left for graduate school because they fear I will never return home. In the final subsection, I discuss how the women's identities and roles are also a source of resilience and motivation for their professional careers.

Identity and Roles as Motivation

This theme emerged as the women shared their motivations for pursuing an Ed.D. and the strategies they utilized to balance their roles and identities. For Reyna, a Rican-Mex, daughter, sister, first-generation college student and full-time director of an early childcare center, it is important that Latinas are in professional leadership roles. She shared:

> We're all directors or principals or deans or something, that have major responsibilities. And some students, you could tell they come tired to the doctoral program, because they've worked all day. Maybe sometimes I put in twelve hours a day, and I still make it to class, because I work at a nonprofit, and you can live at work and nobody will notice it. It's just a hard job, but it's so rewarding because I'm making a difference for the familia. The Latino familia, you know. I really believe in helping Raza.

Reyna explained that in her line of work, she finds rewards in being able to directly help families from low socio-economic backgrounds. In our conversation, Reyna further discussed that she became motivated to pursue an Ed.D., to have authority and agency when working in her center. She wanted to use her degree to gain power and advocate for Families of Color in her community. Similarly, Elena—a Mexicana, eldest sister, immigrant, first-generation college student, a coordinator for a student initiative program, and a *Chingona*—shared that when she was deciding to pursue an advanced degree, she wanted to find an option where she could still help her family and provide for her siblings while also helping her community. In order to

accomplish all of this and find balance, Elena draws from her mother's *dichos* or sayings. Elena shared that her mother calls her a *Chingona*, and ever since, she has attached the word to her identity:

> I'm a *Chingona*, and I think it encompasses a lot of what my mom taught me to be which is independent, and hard worker, and a fighter, and the fact that it's *Chingona*. It's that Spanish [language] because I attach that to my identity, to my language, and my culture, and so *Chingona* just encompasses everything. Encompasses the ability to be resilient, and a leader, and being a badass, but in Spanish, so I love that.

For Elena, identifying as a *Chingona* allows her to bring in her culture and language into the academic and professional spaces she operates. In addition, Elena shared an experience in which she was ready to quit as an undergraduate, and her mom offered a Spanish idiom: "*No, no, no. A rajarse a su tierra, y esta no es tu tierra asi que vas a terminar* [there is no turning back, only moving forward]." This saying motivated Elena to finish her degree because she held on to her greater motivation for going to college in the first place. Like Elena, many women shared sayings or *dichos* that motivated them and helped them work through the tensions of being in higher education and balancing multiple roles. All of the women arrived to the conclusion that they had pursued a doctoral program to give back to their communities.

Victoria spoke directly to how her roles and identities motivate her to get things done. She is a mother, wife, daughter, Catholic, immigrant from Mexico, and a first-generation college student. Victoria stated:

> Being a mom, that really pushes me to do things and kind of motivates me. Same thing with being a wife and a daughter of immigrants that at one point were undocumented. So that plays a big role, and I think for me it's a big, sort of responsibility that I have put upon myself to make sure I finish my studies, and make sure that I succeed at my education and professional field. I would be the first one in my family to reach this level of education. So that kind of also helped kind of to create a path for my kids and my nieces, and the rest of my family members.

During my interview with Victoria, she described how her identities and roles have always informed her educational experiences and career choices. She talked about her roles and identities going hand-in-hand and propelling her forward when she faced obstacles in her program. In particular, as a mother, Victoria is motivated to be the best version she can be for her children, in the hopes that they too can one day achieve their dreams. This belief was shared among all the women—they are all interested in becoming role models and leaders for their loves ones and the communities they serve. Like Reyna, Elena, and Victoria, all the women shared their strategies of resilience and how their identifies keep them motivated to pursue a doctoral degree.

Motivation and Advice

At the end of each interview, I asked participants to share their advice for Latinas and Students of Color who were interested in pursuing higher education or a doctoral degree. This allowed participants to reflect on their educational trajectories and use their experiential knowledge to provide guidance for future generations. The vignettes presented in this section stem from questions concerning each collaborator's identity and how their multiple identities played a role in their doctoral student experiences. All the women in this study shared similar feelings of motivation to pursue a doctoral degree and engage in research that countered deficit narratives of People of Color.

> We are strong, very well capable women. Know that you can, know that you will. And stay focused, and you know, we're very resilient people. We can accomplish whatever we set our minds to. And I think if we remind ourselves of that, the voices inside, the negative voices they start fading in the background until you no longer hear them. (Victoria)

> Don't underestimate what you can do. Because the hardest part was getting to your bachelors and doing that. Your master's is really just about applying your knowledge, and your doctoral degree is really about your passion and what you want to do. That's going to open up doors, and it's going to create a sense

> of upward mobility for you. But eventually it will create a sense of upward mobility for those around you. (Andrea)
>
> You've gotta have your village—and whatever that village looks like to you is what it needs to look like. It doesn't have to be your biological family. Sure as heck isn't for me. So you've got to know your why. You've got to know that there's going to be challenges, and you've got to have your village. (Estrella)
>
> What's really important is that you don't shy away from asking for help. Don't shy away from knowing who your professors are and getting to know them. Because you'll find out right away if they're going to be supportive or not. But just because one closes the door on you . . . know that other doors will open. Don't try to figure it out on your own. Don't do that. Because you cheat yourself, because there is help out there. And you gotta have *ganas* (will), that mindset to pursue and don't give up! (Reyna)

These vignettes were chosen among many more pieces of advice because they highlight some of the motivation the women shared in supporting future students. There is a power in sharing advice and support for those who come after you. They believe that no student should have to navigate their educational trajectory in silo, but rather provide advice about forming their own community of support.

Limitations

The narratives presented detail the experiences of twelve Latinas at one particular university in Southern California. Therefore, the experiences of Latina Ph.D. students in different geographic locations and disciplines can differ greatly. More collaborations are needed to bring nuance to this research. Moving forward, this study could be expanded by incorporating more testimonios of Latinas in different graduate programs such as J.D.s, Ph.D.s, and so forth. In addition, this study cannot be generalized to understand the Latina doctoral experience; however, it can serve as a discussion point to comprehend the nuanced experiences of women who simultaneously hold academic and professional titles.

Discussion

The narratives presented in this paper are centered around the findings from the research questions guiding this study: (a) How do Latinas' balance and negotiate their multiple racial, social class, and gender identities and roles? (b) How do they balance and negotiate their first-generation college student identity and guilt? And (c) How do their identities and roles serve as motivation?

The first theme discussed the balancing and negotiating of family and career obligations that the women balance. The second theme spoke to the first-generation student identity and the guilt associated with being the first and sometimes only person in one's family to achieve a certain educational and professional level. The last theme touched upon the women's identities and roles as motivation in their educational and professional trajectories.

To be clear, this web of roles and identities is not to be mistaken as a deficit in their professional trajectories. Rather, it should illuminate all the leadership roles that we partake in, in addition to fulfilling our academic expectations. For us, for our families, for our friends and our communities, we make it happen while also balancing the demands of higher education and the challenges we face as Women of Color in academia. As the findings presented in the last subsection demonstrate, Latinas are strategically using their doctoral degrees to give back to their community and affect social change. Moreover, by supporting Students of Color at all stages of the educational pipeline, we are investing in the future of these communities.

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