


Spring 5-15-2017

# The Chosen Tokens: Exploring the Work Experiences and Career Aspirations of Latina Midlevel Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

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The Chosen Tokens: Exploring the Work Experiences and Career Aspirations of  
Latina Midlevel Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education

By

Sofia Bautista Pertuz

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy

Seton Hall University

May 2017

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**SETON HALL UNIVERSITY**  
**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES**  
**OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

**APPROVAL FOR SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE**

**Sofia Bautista Pertuz**, has successfully defended and made the required modifications to the text of the doctoral dissertation for the **Ph.D.** during this **Spring Semester 2017**.

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## Abstract

Student Affairs serves as a viable career option for professionals working in higher education, including Latinas, who have increasingly entered as undergraduate students and found careers in student affairs. Latinas seem to be bottlenecked at midlevel, with few advancing to senior level leadership positions. According to the literature, negative work experiences and barriers related to identity have impacted advancement opportunities for Latina administrators. This qualitative study employed the methodology of narrative inquiry. Interviews were conducted with 26 participants selected by purposeful sampling of Latina professionals holding midlevel positions in student affairs. Data was analyzed using traditional coding methods of constant comparison and classical content analysis to identify overarching themes. The analytical framework was guided by components of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF), all contributing to placing the intersectionality of marginalized identities in context of higher education. Top themes that emerged were: (1) Latinas Find a Natural Fit in Student Affairs, feeling positive at the beginning of their careers. They were *chosen* as they brought valued and distinctive qualities to contribute to diversity at their institutions. (2) Latinas Move from Natural Fit to Misfit. They realized they were *tokens* as they were boxed into diversity roles, experienced microaggressions and were denied opportunities for promotion due to intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity. (3) High Aspirations Diminished by Barriers to Advancement. Expressing high career aspirations, Latinas experienced professional and personal barriers limiting opportunities, causing diminished hopes for advancement. Implications for practice are discussed, including suggestions for institutions, strategies for improving campus climates to better foster Latina professional capabilities and supportive advice for Latinas as they navigate careers in higher education.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my late father Baudilio Bautista who if I had the chance to tell him I finally completed my doctorate would have simply said, “*que bien.*” He would expect nothing less from one of his Bautista girls. *Que descanse en paz, Papi.*

I also dedicate this dissertation to my late mother in law Mary Diaz who has always been supportive of me, with the encouraging words, “*para atrás ni para coger impulso*” and is watching over us to ensure that we all fulfill our destinies. *Que descanse en paz, Mary.*

I also dedicate this dissertation to my mother Isabel Bautista, who always had high expectations for me and my siblings. Even with her second grade education, she knew that education was going to be the key to future success and a better life for her children, for whom she sacrificed everything she had to make our lives better. *Mami la quiero mucho y la aprecio hoy y siempre.*

I also dedicate this dissertation to Lynn Riker, one of the most influential and inspiring leaders whose integrity and work ethic are to be admired and emulated – something I have been working on for decades. Her support and kindest of words made a difference for me when I was a Graduate Assistant at Seton Hall University. She believed in me more than I believed in myself and has continued to be an amazing role model, mentor and friend.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the 26 amazing Latinas who bravely shared their stories with me and by highlighting their hopes and dreams, inspired me to believe in myself and my abilities enough to see what is possible and to aspire to advance and get out of my own way.

Finally, I dedicate and share this doctoral degree with my life partner Antonio Pertuz, who supported me in ways I can never quantify throughout this difficult and long process. He never gave up on me, always knew the right words to say and believed in me when I was losing hope. This accomplishment would have no meaning without him. I also share this degree with our daughter Ariana and son Joaquin who gave up playtime with Mami so that I could complete the *discommunication*. I wish for them both a lifetime of love, acceptance and fulfillment. Tony, Ariana and Joaquin this is your Ph.D. too. I love you and cherish you today and always.

## Acknowledgements

A special thank you to my family and first to my siblings who always told me I would get a Ph.D. Sending my love to Marta Bautista, Rufina Belthrop, Audy Bautista, Evelyn Bautista-Miller and soon to be Dr. Cindy Bautista-Thomas and honorary sister Jennifer Brown Jackson. I am grateful to my father in law Antonio Pertuz and family Fernando Pertuz, Martha Pertuz and Tomas De La Cruz, Luis Pertuz, Scott Miller, Tyrone Belthrop, Winston Thomas, Johaira Acosta, Natascha Vega, and all of my precious nieces and nephews – I appreciate your encouragement and love you for believing in me and helping me envision a Ph.D. in my future.

At Seton Hall University: I thank my dissertation committee for everything they did to help me achieve this goal that eluded me for so long. Dr. Eunyoung Kim, thank you for taking me on and really being an instrumental in my getting my dissertation completed. I COULD NOT have done it without you! Dr. Angelica Pérez-Litwin you were the spark that ignited the flame and kept the motivation for this dissertation going. You have been an amazing inspiration and incredibly helpful with your brilliant and thoughtful guidance. I would like to express a special appreciation to Dr. Joseph Stetar for having faith in me and welcoming the “Prodigal Daughter.” We got it done this time, Dr. S! I would also like to acknowledge my faculty members at SHU who supported and helped me along the way, Dr. Richard Ognibene, Dr. Elaine Walker and Dr. Martin Finkelstein. I thank Seton Hall alum, Dr. Demond Hargrove, who was supportive and whose dissertation provided an excellent formatting framework that I was able to use as a great resource. Sending a very special thank you to Dra. Omayra Arocho, who was my champion and cheerleader all along the journey, especially the final leg when I need the biggest push and her occasional “Pa’lante!” texts. Thank you for creating LUNA and I’m so proud to share the graduation stage with you, now let’s go get hooded together hermana!!!

At Hofstra University: I thank my supervisor, VPSA W. Houston Dougharty for his support and belief in me and for giving me the opportunity of a lifetime. I appreciate my excellent colleagues, especially future Dr. Jean Peden Christodoulou, the Student Affairs Leadership Team, TDR, and my awesome DOS leadership team for their support and patience with me while I was trying to do it all – Karen Lettini, Claudia Marin Andrade, Pat Montagano, Beth McGuire-Fredericks, Joseph Fitzpatrick and Heather DePierro. I send a special thank you to the DWD - Claudia Andrade (again!), Gillian Atkinson, Chermele Christy, Lorraine Massiah and Ava Danville – we will continue to look out for one another through our varied journeys!

I thank special friends and colleagues who encouraged me and gave me great advice along this journey: Kathleen Von Essen, Nancy Jefferis, Tara Hart, Dr. Jean Halley, soon to be Dr. Catharine McGlade, Maria Aponte, Juan Carlos Matos, Mary Zanfini, Madeline Sliger, future Dr. Curtis Wright, Dewayne White, Milton Velez, Lee Harrison, Ian Toberman, Dr. Greer Jason, Dr. Jennifer Mussi, Dr. O. Hugo Benavides, Dr. Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé, Boni Candelario, Dra. Nelly Cardinale, Dra. Mary Ann Benites Kaplan, Dra. Delmy Lendof, Dra. Angela Batista, Dra. Yettieve Marquez, Dr. Walter Diaz, Dra. Mary Jo Gonzalez, Dra. Michelle Espino, Dra. Silvia Mazzula, future Dra. Sherlene Ayala and future Dra. Nanette Vega.

The following individuals were instrumental in helping me get to the finish line. A very special thank you to Dr. Kenny Nienhusser who generously shared his time with me, giving me a master lesson in qualitative research design over the phone, which was absolutely influential as I prepared my dissertation proposal. I thank Claudia Marin Andrade who shared her time with me as I worked out the ideas for the conclusion of my findings and final formatting. Her insight was invaluable! And the amazing and inspiring Dr. Tamara O’Day Stevens stepped in when I needed the encouragement and advice for the dissertation defense. I am indebted to you all!



Some of my previous supervisors might read this dissertation and wonder if as a Latina administrator I might have experienced some of the negative considerations that came up in this study, which some might call “mesearch.” I assure you all that not only did you show me a vote of confidence by hiring me, but you also helped advance my personal and professional development by teaching me about myself and about higher education in one way or another. My sincere appreciation goes to: Jeffrey Hurrin, Dr. Karen Pennington, Dr. Leroy Thomas, Lynn Riker, Craig Allen, Dr. Laura Wankel, Linda Diaz, H. Pete Curry, Nancy Mackin, Dr. Pam Bischoff, Jim Mitchell, Dr. Anne Goodsell Love, Dr. Ruta Shah-Gordon, Dr. Richard Guarasci, Dr. Devorah Lieberman, Michele Burris, Jeffrey Gray and especially Jeannine Belton, who hired me as a Resident Assistant at SUNY New Paltz and gave me my first start in this Student Affairs thing. I am indebted to you all.

I could not have done this without the support from the inspiring mujeres in the Facebook group I created to help with this journey, Latinas Completing Doctoral Degrees, which was inspired by one of the most courageous things I did – starting a blog to share my journey through the doctoral dissertation. In this process, I met 3 amazing Latinas and we formed a writing group, “Grupo Cinco” during summer of 2014 to encourage and cheer each other on while we all completed our dissertations. I send a special THANK YOU and congratulations to these three Hermana Doctoras: Darleny Cepin, Daphnie Sicre and Shirley Leyro. Juntas podemos mas!!!

Finally, I had the wonderful opportunity to meet Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor and shared my goal to complete this dissertation and she told me she believed I could do it. She was right and will always be a wise Latina I deeply respect and admire. She is a prime example that a Latina girl from the Bronx can dream big, aspire to do great things, go ahead and do them and then persist! Just like my favorite motto from Seton Hall University: *Hazard Zet Forward!*

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Beyond having the distinctive role of supporting the academic success and social engagement of students at institutions of higher education (HE), the field of student affairs (SA) provides a viable career option for many professionals. Latinas are one ethnic group who, like many others, stumbled upon SA as a profession (Gallegos, 2012; Garza, 1997; Lopez, 2013). As they progress in their career paths, Latinas learn about important career steps such as enrolling in graduate programs in student personnel or HE administration, gateways through which SA administrators typically enter the profession (Biddix, 2011; Blackhurst, 2000a; Stimpson, 2009). However, the literature demonstrates that Latinas face many obstacles along their career trajectories. These challenges begin with their pathway to HE and their undergraduate experiences and continue as they pursue graduate degrees and, later, employment in academia as faculty or administrators (Aldaco, 2010; Beck-Lethlean, 2008; Espino, 2010; Garza, 1996; Gonzalez, 2002; Mateo 2010; Montas-Hunter, 2012). Despite these challenges, many Latinas have advanced in HE and have made it to the highest posts, including being appointed Vice Presidents, Provosts, Chancellors and Presidents of colleges and universities. This clearly demonstrates that Latinas are talented and capable (de los Santos & Vega, 2008; Lopez, 2013; Maes, 2012; Muñoz, 2010; Savala, 2014).

Past findings in literature have demonstrated that gender, racial, and ethnic-related prejudices Latinas face in academia create barriers to career advancement (Crespo, 2013; Garza, 1997; Gonzalez-DeJesus, 2012; Hansen, 1997; Kravitz, 2006; Lopez, 2013; Massé, Miller, Kerr, & Ortiz, 2007). In light of this research, the objective of this study is to explore how Latina professionals in midlevel SA administration have negotiated opportunities throughout their

career paths and what their career aspirations might be beyond the midlevel, where a majority of SA professionals remain, not necessarily because they are stuck there, but because they enjoy their work (Young, 2007). However, some midlevel administrators feel stuck in midlevel and would like to advance to senior level positions. This study aims to explore this issue further by focusing on how gender, race and ethnicity impacted the work experiences, career advancement and aspirations in SA.

## **Background**

Student Affairs (SA) administrators are professional non-academic employees who serve students' needs outside of the classroom and support co-curricular experiences (Carpenter, Miller, & Winston, 1980; Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007). According to the organization NASPA - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, their members serve:

... a variety of functions and roles, including the vice president and dean for student life, as well as professionals working within housing and residence life, student unions, student activities, counseling, career development, orientation, enrollment management, racial and ethnic minority support services, and retention and assessment.  
(<http://www.naspa.org/about/history.cfm>).

The assortment of roles represented in SA requires a diversity of skill levels and credentials starting from basic positions to Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs). In 2015, ACPA and NASPA published shared professional competencies to provide guidelines for how SA administrators do their work for and with students. These competencies and work expectations are essentially the same for all SA employees (Bresciani, Todd, Carpenter, Janosik, Komives, Love, & Tyrell, 2010). Beyond positive evaluations for mastering competencies, one indicator of success for employees in any field is the ability to advance to positions of growing authority and responsibilities, often with elevated titles and increased levels of compensation.

Similarly, in academia, tenure-track faculty members usually advance by applying for and hopefully being granted tenure and professorial rank promotion based on the particular requirements at their institutions. Some faculty members move on to academic administration and begin career trajectories that have typically served as pathways to college and university presidencies (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001). On the other hand, non-academic administrators, including those in SA, have a variety of ways they can advance, including the possibility of moving up to executive-level positions such as directors, deans, and/or vice presidents, depending on institution type and size. Non-academic administrators also have the potential to move into the pipeline for college and university presidencies. A 2008 study of United States College and University presidents suggested that SA might represent another pipeline to the presidency (King & Gomez, 2008).

However, given the hierarchical structures that exist in HE, with fewer available executive-level positions, it is inevitable that most SA administrators will remain in midlevel positions for the entirety of their careers (Allee, 2014; Kimbrough, 2007). Many individuals are certainly content in midlevel positions and, accordingly, make lifelong careers there, still able to make major impacts on the successful functioning of their institutions (Taylor, 2007). Meanwhile, others aspire to secure higher positions but remain in midlevel administrative positions despite such desires. Although this predicament may exist for all administrators from diverse ethnic backgrounds, research has shown that this issue is exacerbated for administrators of color, particularly Latinas (Massé, Miller, Kerr & Ortiz, 2007).

The complexity of the Latina identity affects the experiences that they have in the workplace. Depending on the outward appearance and self-identification of Latinas, the kind of discrimination and microaggressions experienced may be gender, racially, or ethnically focused,

or a combination thereof. Latinas face additional challenges to career advancement compared to their White counterparts and, in turn, are concentrated in midlevel management positions with very little authority and minimal impact on institutional policy (Garza, 1996; Leon & Nevarez, 2007; Kravitz, 2006; Turner, 2010).

Indeed, some Latinas have advanced to top positions, including presidents of HE institutions (Lourido-Habib, 2011; Maes, 2012; Muñoz, 2008; Ramos, 2008). However, even Latinas in senior level leadership positions admit that their career advancement, while full of opportunity, included instances of sexism, racism, and cultural discrimination. These were often experienced through microaggressions, both subtle and overt in nature (Gallegos, 2012; Huber, 2010; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Maes, 2012; Muñoz, 2010). For example, in a study of Latina executive leaders (Gallegos, 2012), one participant illustrated how Latinas must navigate their workplaces differently from their White female counterparts:

A lot of White women at this level throw caution to the wind. They feel like they have arrived. I'm never going to arrive. There's no arrival. I always have to be cautious because they're always going to remind me that I'm not them. (p. 166)

This description of the experience portrays a trend in the literature suggesting that Latinas experience a mixed relationship with academia. On the one hand, higher education has served to elevate their status in American society as they earn advanced degrees. On the other hand, academia can act as a reminder that Latinas have to work harder to become integrated into predominantly White cultures (Gallegos, 2012; Garza, 1996; Turner, 2010).

My interest in exploring Latina work experiences developed as I advanced in my own career as a Latina administrator. It also developed from engaging in informal conversations with fellow Latinas who have been working in SA for many years, but expressed how frustrated they were to be stuck in midlevel positions and how difficult it had been for them to get there. These

colleagues and peers experienced many of the same microaggressions and noted how rare it was to see Latinas in senior-level leadership positions as their careers unfolded. As a result, I wanted to understand this problem beyond the accounts that emerged in informal conversations and document specific experiences and perceptions in-depth to get a better understanding of how the Latina identity may be impacting work experiences, career advancement, and aspirations.

In this chapter, the scope of the research problem and the importance of studying Latina SA administrators in midlevel positions is presented. This study profiles the Latina workforce in HE, specifically SA, and cultivates its role in future senior level leadership in HE. The following sections present the statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, and summary of the topic.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Latina administrators enter the SA profession much like other individuals; to gain work experience with a desire to follow a projected course of advancement to positions with increased responsibility, authority, and titles. It seems natural for Latinas to gravitate towards a profession with values that align with characteristics of the Latina identity, such as being caring, nurturing and community focused (Gallegos, 2012; Rudolph, Chavez, Quintana. & Salinas, 2011).

However, research has shown that hard work and the attainment of an advanced degree may not easily translate to the advancement of Latinas into senior leadership positions (Garza, 1996; Kravitz, 2006; Leon & Nevarez, 2007; Turner, 2010).

After many years of working in SA in a variety of capacities and reaching midlevel administration positions, Latinas realize that hard work and advanced degree attainment may not be enough to advance to Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) positions, so they remain bottlenecked in midlevel. In fact, research shows that few Latinas reach executive leadership

positions (de los Santos & Vega, 2008). When they do, the degree of sacrifice to secure such progression seems to be perceived as greater than other ethnic groups (Maes, 2012; Muñoz, 2010; Ramos, 2008). Furthermore, successful advancements that take place tend to do so at associate degree-granting institutions and not at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) or research-intensive institutions (Gallegos, 2012; Kravitz, 2006; Muñoz, 2010; Turner, 2010). The American Council on Education reported that in 2012, of the 3318 HE presidents, only 132 were Latina/o and only 52 were Latina, with most them serving at associate degree-granting institutions (ACE, 2012). In other words, Latinas comprised a mere 1.6% of college presidents (ACE, 2012). Although King and Gomez (2008) suggest that diversity in the ranks of SSAOs may proliferate opportunities for people of color to obtain presidential positions in HE, at present, Latinas still appear hindered in this regard.

Even so, barriers also exist at other levels in the field. For instance, NASPA's 2008 demographic survey data showed that only 22% of SSAOs were people of color, which comprised of all non-White identities, including Latinas (NASPA, 2008). In light of this, concern about Latinas and the relationship between SA work experiences, identity, and career advancement emerges. Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) summarized the problem as follows:

Inexorably connected with all of these issues is the specter of discrimination, past or present, covert or overt, recognized or ignored, which may have influenced individual aspirations as well as search committee and trustee perceptions in ways we do not yet fully understand. (p. 214)

Such instances of discrimination experienced by staff members of color directly relate to the issues that will be highlighted in this study. Specifically, how Latinas perceive the role of gender race, and ethnicity in career advancement will be explored.

In general, there is a strong need to encourage Latinas to pursue advancement to senior leadership positions in higher education because such roles set important examples for the

coming generations of Latinas. Although Latinas are the fastest growing group enrolling in HE in the United States, their degree attainment lags behind both Black and White women (Aldaco, 2010; Ortiz, 2004). In fact, college enrollment numbers for Latinas quadrupled from 222,000 to over 1.3 million between 1980 and 2009, while White women college enrollment expanded from over 6.2 million to 8.4 million. Meanwhile, the enrollment of Black women increased from 807,000 to 1.8 million. The disparity across these figures shows disproportionate, and possibly inequitable, growth in college enrollment between Latinas and Black women. Similarly, in terms of degree attainment, in 2010 Latinas lagged behind all other cultural backgrounds with only 14.9% having college degrees compared to 29.6% and 21.4% of White women and Black women, respectively (NCES).

These trends are worrisome because they eventually lead to the underrepresentation of Latinas at senior level leadership later on. For example, in 2007, Latinas held only 5.2% of senior level administrative HE positions, compared to 79.5% and 11.3% by White and Black women, respectively (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2010). These statistics parallel the bottlenecking of Latinas in midlevel SA positions - a problem that extends beyond the frustrations of personal career advancement to the overall well-being of Latinas in the HE community. Compounding the problem, the general status of Latinas limits the amount of influence they have over changing these conditions. Latinas in midlevel positions usually have low levels of authority and are not in positions to make policy decisions that could move the needle to increase the number of Latina students and administrators.

The experiences of Latinas as undergraduate students, graduate students, and faculty have been well-documented (Aldaco, 2010; Cerecer, Ek, Alanis, & Murakami-Ramalho, 2011; Cruz, 2012; Gonzalez, 2006; Vasquez-Guignard, 2010). However, the literature fails to portray the

work experiences of Latina administrators in SA in rich detail, with very few studies available (Beck-Lethlean, 2008; Crespo, 2013; Gallegos, 2012; Garza, 1996; Gomez de Torres, 2013; Hernandez & Moralez, 1999; Lopez, 2013; Mateo, 2010). Moreover, very little research has been specifically conducted on how the intersections of Latinas' gender, racial, and ethnic background affects how they navigate their career. Especially lacking are studies focusing on Latinas from Caribbean areas, including Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans. Chicana and Mexican-American women have been the primary participants of the currently available studies on Latina administrators in academia. This could be a result of the locations where studies have been conducted, mostly in the Southwest and Midwest. This is particularly the case in earlier studies (Acevedo, 1979; Duran, 1982; Esquibel, 1977; Lopez, 1978).

Nevertheless, the struggles are similar for Latinas and other women of color in higher education. To date, many studies of women and women of color in academia have uncovered common advancement barriers, including gender, racial, ethnic, and cultural discrimination, often not citing a particular aspect of identity being the direct connection (Gutiérrez, Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez & Harris, 2012). Importantly, Latinas experience these barriers in academia two-fold by being both female and women of color. In fact, Masse, Miller, Kerr and Ortiz (2007) argue that “in many instances, this group of professionals face challenges complicated by their status within racial or ethnic groups and nuanced by gender identity” (p. 155). This is especially true for Latina SA administrators who are required to circumvent various roadblocks associated with their identity in order to advance in their field.

While navigating the HE workplace, Latinas not only wrestle with professional barriers but also with personal barriers. Some professional barriers Latinas experience include unwelcoming campus environments, presumed incompetence, not being viewed as leaders due to



cultural biases and prejudices, lack of mentorship or sponsorship, and a lack of role models (Gallegos, 2012; Garza, 1996). Also, Latinas perceive personal barriers as preventing their advancement, including self-doubt, lack of self-efficacy, and loyalty to their students which leads them to have a desire to stay in entry and mid-level positions that more closely work with students (Gallegos, 2012; Garza, 1996; Lopez, 2013).

Although research on administrators has examined how the relationships between race, stress, and burnout differ by race, it typically focuses on comparing African-Americans and Whites (Lopez, 2000). Comparatively, little research exists on Latina administrator perceptions of work experiences and career advancement in the field of SA. In a Huffington Post article, Angelica Pérez-Litwin points out the lack of research available about Latina professionals and leaders and makes a case for exploring the ways that Latina leadership programs need to gather more research (Pérez-Litwin, 2012). Pérez-Litwin is not the only one to notice this dearth of literature on Latina administrators. Haro and Lara (2003) summarized the problem in saying, “the professional literature contains some important statistical and analytical studies on this minority population as students and non-teaching faculty, but very little has been done on their status as college and university administrators” (p. 153). As a result, this study addressed an important gap in the literature caused by a lack of research on Latina career advancement in higher education by contributing to the body of knowledge.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Latina professionals in midlevel Student Affairs administration have negotiated career opportunities and specifically, how their gender, race and ethnicity may have impacted their work experiences and aspirations for career advancement in Higher Education. Exploring the work lives and aspirations of Latina midlevel

SA administrators will shed light on the professional and personal factors that influence their career advancement in addition to provide a deeper and richer understanding of the Latina work experience in SA and the insights into the work lives of Latinas in midlevel administration. The information gathered from this study may help current HE leaders create work environments that facilitate improved career advancement and upward mobility for Latinas.

### **Research Questions**

The literature demonstrates that racial, ethnic, and gender-related prejudices may create barriers to career advancement for Latinas in SA. This study aimed to explore how Latina professionals in midlevel Student Affairs administration have negotiated career opportunities and specifically, how their gender, race, and ethnicity may have impacted their work experiences and aspirations for career advancement in Higher Education. Therefore, the research questions that guided this study are as follows:

1. How do Latina midlevel student affairs administrators describe their institutional experiences as they negotiated their career paths?
2. What is the impact of gender, race, and ethnicity on the career paths and opportunities for advancement of Latina professionals in student affairs?
3. How are the career aspirations of Latina midlevel student affairs administrators influenced by their institutional experiences?

### **Theoretical Perspective**

This study and analysis of the data collected were guided by components of three theoretical perspectives pulled together by the concept of intersectionality: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Critical Race Feminism (CRF). Each theory contributes to framing the higher education environment, providing context for what makes the

intersections of the Latina identity so challenging in the world of academia, which is seemingly not designed to ensure their success, starting with the undergraduate experience, continuing to graduate school, and branching into faculty and administrative lives of those who choose academic careers. Identity awareness strongly shapes how Latinas navigate spaces, as they experience marginalization, which then impacts their work experiences and ultimately, their career trajectories and aspirations for advancement. Elements from each of these theoretical perspectives served as the guiding framework for analyzing and interpreting the data collected for this study. More details on these theories, intersectionality, and connection to the data analysis can be found in chapter two, the review of related literature.

### **Significance of the Study**

Latinas/os are the largest ethnic minority group in the United States, accounting for 16% of the entire U.S. population (U.S. Census, 2010). Latina/os are also the fastest growing ethnic group, representing 43% of the population growth between 2000 and 2010, compared with only 10% for non-Hispanics (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). The Pew Hispanic Center (2011) reported that Latinas/os represent the second highest number of college-age students (18-24) enrolled in postsecondary education after White students. However, enrollment patterns differ as Latino students tend to work part-time jobs and are enrolled mostly in community colleges, factors that have likely lead to higher drop-out rates (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Other demographic statistics for Latinas in the United States are also notable. For example, Latinas are projected to represent over 30% of the U.S. female population between the age of 18 to 24 by the year 2060 (U.S. Census, 2010). Also, Latinas are entering HE faster than any other demographic and are completing undergraduate and graduate degrees at higher rates than previous years. Therefore, one of the most compelling reasons for increasing Latina/o representation in top-level HE

positions is that Latina/o college-aged students will potentially be a major group enrolling in HE institutions. Subsequently, it would be prudent to have more Latinas/os in leadership positions who understand this population and can serve as role models for Latina/o students, as well as other Latina/o administrators.

Student Affairs professionals play a major role in the experiences and success of students (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003). In particular, “the employment of Latina/o faculty and administrators in colleges and universities is viewed as an important means to increase the retention of Latina/o college students” (Castellanos & Jones, 2003, p. xvii). Latina SA administrators have the potential to have a significant impact on the experience of Latinas as they navigate HE inside and outside the classroom. Thus, the longevity and types of positions Latinas hold have the potential to have direct, daily influence on Latina students and their chances for success (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003).

There is a significant gap between the need for Latina senior level representation in HE administration and the number of Latinas actually occupying those positions. Leon and Nevarez (2007), concerned about the “alarmingly low representation of Hispanics in the upper echelon of higher education administration” (p. 357), suggested that SA administrators might be a possible source for presidents and other executive leadership positions in HE. They propose that while faculty often prefer to remain in their disciplines, administrators are usually more likely to aspire to advance in their career paths to positions with elevated titles and additional responsibilities as they gain more experience and competencies (Leon & Nevarez, 2007). The findings will not only shed light on the individual challenges that Latina SA administrators face when advancing in their careers but also more global social concerns that could inform campus administrators to consider institutional policies and practices that eliminate the barriers facing this population.

Finally, to reduce or eliminate the barriers to advancement, it is imperative that Latina administrators receive support for their professional development and career advancement. Learning about the experiences and career aspirations of Latina midlevel SA administrators is important because they can provide unique insights that others cannot. Besides, they can offer nuanced suggestions or advice to facilitate professional development opportunities for all SA administrators, especially Latinas, aimed at targeting key skills that would lead to more executive leadership opportunities, including college and university presidencies.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Ethnicity.** “*Ethnicity* is defined as a membership in a group with shared socially defined cultural characteristics such as a common language, genealogy, ancestry, heritage, and religious practices and beliefs” (Lendof, 2013). For this study, the use of the word ethnicity refers specifically to Latina because it is identified as a selection criterion for all study participants.

**Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU).** This term refers to any college or university established before 1964 whose main mission was (and is) to educate black Americans, and were accredited--or made strides toward being accredited--by nationally-recognized agencies (Higher Education Act of 1965).

**Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs).** This term refers colleges, universities, or systems/districts where total Hispanic enrollment constitutes a minimum of 25% of the total enrollment ([http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HSI\\_Definition.asp](http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HSI_Definition.asp)).

**Latina/o or Hispanic.** The terms *Latina/o* (in this format to be inclusive of gender) and *Hispanic* are used interchangeably to represent all individuals in this identity category. The terms *Hispanic* and *Latina/o* refer “to a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race” (Ennis, Rios-Vargas & Albert,

2011). Individuals who identify themselves based on this definition will be referred to as *Latino* or *Latina* in this study, although the term *Hispanic* or *Chicana/o* will be utilized when appropriate or if quoted directly from the literature.

**Latina.** For the purposes of this study, the term refers to women who self-identify as such and will be used interchangeably with Chicana or female Hispanic.

**Latino.** Latino will be used only when referring to men who identify as such and will be used interchangeably with the term Chicano or male Hispanic.

**Microaggressions.** “Racial *microaggressions* are brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Holder, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). This term is used in this study to refer to the negative experiences that the Latina administrators described, that pertain to their gender, racial and/or ethnic identity.

**Midlevel Administrator in Student Affairs.** A midlevel SA administrator is defined as having “minimum of five years as a full-time student affairs professional and responsibility for the direction, control, or supervision of one or more student affairs functions, or one or more professional staff members” (NASPA, 2017).

**Predominantly White Institution.** Predominantly white institution (PWI) is the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment (<http://sk.sagepub.com/reference/africanamericaneducation/n193.xml>).

**Race.** “Race is a socially constructed identity that describes a group of people with similar socially defined physical characteristics” (Lendof, 2013). For this study, the similar

physical characteristics refer to skin color, black (dark-skinned) or white (light-skinned) as participants described themselves.

**Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO).** Although the term Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) is often used, this study will use this term to refer to the senior leader on campus charged with leading the student affairs division of an institution, and may include the title of Vice President, Vice Chancellor, and/or Dean for Student Life or Student Affairs (<http://www.naspa.org/about/history.cfm>).

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore how Latinas in midlevel Student Affairs administration have negotiated career opportunities and specifically, how their gender, race and ethnicity may have impacted their work experiences and aspirations for career advancement in Higher Education. Their experiences of gender, race, and ethnicity related discrimination and resulting challenges have influenced their career trajectories and may have created barriers preventing advancement and limiting career aspirations. Using a sample of 26 Latinas in midlevel SA positions, this qualitative study captured these experiences in order to shed light on how these aspects of their identities have impacted Latinas as they navigated their careers in HE. The Latinas included in this study's research sample could be part of a pathway to the HE senior level positions if they are properly mentored and provided with professional development and opportunities for advancement. Therefore, this study aimed to not only shed light on the systemic problems causing challenges for Latina SA administrators, but also identified professional development needs that may also be helpful for executive-level HE administrators who are working on strategic plans to address the growing population of Latina/o students and administrators.

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into six chapters. The first chapter includes an introduction to the topic, a description of the scope of the research problem, the research questions, purpose and significance of the study, definition of terms, and summary. The second chapter reviews the literature on career advancement of SA administrators, work experiences and career advancement considerations for women, administrators of color, and women of color, and career experiences of Latinas in SA administration. The third chapter describes the research methods utilized to collect and analyze data to address the research questions. The fourth chapter provides an overview and description of the 26 study participants, including individual participant profiles, and observations about their commonalities and differences. The fifth chapter contains a narrative of the findings organized by the three research questions and three major themes that emerged from the data collected from the participants. Finally, the sixth chapter consists of a discussion of the findings and implications for the field of SA, suggested policy considerations and professional development ideas and recommendations for future research.



## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Related Literature**

#### **Introduction**

This study explored Latina professionals in midlevel Student Affairs (SA) administration and how they have negotiated career opportunities in higher education (HE). Specifically, I sought to understand how gender, race, and ethnicity impacted the work experiences, career advancement and aspirations of Latina administrators. In the previous chapter, I provided an introduction to the topic, statement of the problem, purpose, and significance of the study, the research questions guiding the study, theoretical perspective, definition of key terms, summary and organization of the dissertation.

This chapter provides an overview of related literature about Student Affairs career pathways and the influences of gender, race, and ethnicity on the career advancement of women, administrators and women of color, including Latinas/os, and finally, a focus on the career advancement of Latina SA administrators. Chapter two is divided into four sections. The first section introduces the field of SA in HE and reviews literature on the career progression of SA professionals as they enter the field and advance to midlevel. This section also describes pathways to Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) positions and introduces the concept of SA as a potential source for the recruitment of college presidents. The second section discusses literature related to how gender, race, and ethnic-related issues influence the work experiences and career advancement of women, women of color and administrators of color in SA. The third section focuses on Latinas in HE, starting with historical context for Latinas/os in HE, Latina/o administration in HE job searches, career advancement of Latinas in SA, and ends with a section on Latina college presidents.

## Student Affairs in Higher Education

Student Affairs (SA) has been a growing field of higher education in the United States tracing its origin in the colonial era when *in loco parentis* was the doctrine of colleges who had faculty who lived on campus, supervised students, and arranged for their well-being outside the classroom (Long, 2012). Early scholars described SA administrators and their roles on campus in a variety of ways. For example, Chickering and Reisser (1993) described the role of Student Affairs as college and university employees who:

... assist students in moving through the institution and enrich their in-class experiences with developmental co-curricular activities; they include academic support services, career development, life and personal counseling, educational programming, recreational, athletic, and cultural activities, health services and wellness programs, student government and organizations, residential life, child care, support groups, and developmental mentoring. (p. 438)

Chickering and Reisser (1993) also offered a poignant metaphor to highlight the important role SA staff play in college student success by describing the faculty as “the bricks” and student development staff members as “the mortar” and added that “both must be in good condition or the building will crumble” (p. 427).

The earliest SA professionals were deans of men and women whose roles have evolved as institutions and students attending colleges and universities have diversified (Nidiffer, 2001; Schwartz, 2003). Brazzell and Reiser (1999) noted that “student affairs deans evolved in the late nineteenth century in the United States as an ad-hoc community of developers, enforcing conduct codes, organizing and advising extracurricular activities, and presiding over residence halls” (p. 157). The functions of SA divisions now differ among institutions of higher education, addressing the unique needs of students at each campus community and evolving as student

populations and their expectations change, and in response to legislation and trends in higher education.

Consequently, the field of SA has increased exponentially as it has been professionalized, with increasing focus on student development, learning outside the classroom and professional competencies guiding the work of SA administrators (ACPA/NASPA, 2010; Carpenter, Miller, & Winston, 1980; Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Munsch & Cortez, 2014). Today, as institutions have become more complex and co-curricular services available to students have increased, the ranks of SA administrators have grown to facilitate these services to enhance students' academic success and social engagement.

Currently, there are over 22,500 SA administrators across the United States that can be counted as members of the two leading professional associations of SA administrators, with NASPA – Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (formerly the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) consisting of 15,000 members at 2,100 institutions and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) consisting of nearly 7,500 members at 1200 institutions, ([www.naspa.org/about/membership](http://www.naspa.org/about/membership); [www.myacpa.org/who-we-are](http://www.myacpa.org/who-we-are)). These SA administrators hold a variety of titles, working in numerous functions and departments designed to support the co-curricular experiences of college students. Many of these SA administrators develop their skills over time, and some aspire to advance in their careers.

### **Career Advancement Pathways in Student Affairs**

#### **Entering Students Affairs**

There are many ways in which administrators enter careers in SA. Most of them take advantage of campus services available to them during their undergraduate years, and many of them work as student employees in a variety of leadership roles, including resident assistants,

orientation leaders, admission tour guides and much more (Long, 2012; Taub & McEwen, 2006). These leadership roles became an introduction to SA for individuals who had never been aware that such a profession exists (Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Long, 2012; Taub & McEwen, 2006). Entry level SA professionals were often encouraged and supported by SA administrators who counseled them about possible careers in SA. The administrators also informed them about the gateways through which SA administrators typically enter the profession, mostly by enrolling in graduate programs in student personnel or HE administration and interning in graduate assistant positions while they complete their master's degrees (Biddix, 2011; Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Long, 2012; Stimpson, 2009; Taub & McEwen, 2006).

As with any profession, an indicator of success for individuals is the ability to advance to higher ranking positions with increased responsibilities and elevated titles, such as directors, deans, and/or vice presidents, depending on the institution type and size as administrators gain experience and expertise (Corral, 2009). The career path may vary for each person as they make decisions about how they want to spend their time and the types of positions they seek to pursue. One commonality is that with time, all SA professionals gain experience and make decisions about their career trajectory as their workplaces change and their colleagues change positions and move to other positions (Findley, 2007; Fleischer, 2012; Miner & Estler, 1985; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988).

Unfortunately, career path guidelines for promotion and advancement are not as structured as they are for faculty who usually receive guidelines about their tenure and promotion process from their institutions (Rosser, 2000). Decisions about career progression may include: deciding whether or not to leave SA as a profession and seek employment in other parts of academia or leave higher education altogether; remaining in SA in midlevel positions; or seeking

advancement to executive level positions, such as the highest SA position at each institution, commonly referred to as the Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) and operating under a variety of titles to be explored in a later section. In the next section, the intent to leave and decision to leave the field of SA is discussed.

### **Leaving Student Affairs**

About half of student affairs professionals leave before they reach midlevel positions (Frank, 2013; Tull, 2006). Therefore, it is appropriate to discuss SA professionals who decide to leave the SA profession instead of seeking advancement. Scholars have been concerned about attrition and the impact on the SA profession for many years (Evans, 1988; Frank, 2013; Johnsrud, Heck & Rosser, 2000; Lorden, 1998; Tull, 2006). As in any other occupation, it is inevitable for entry level staff to try out the profession for a few years and then decide that it is not what they expected, so they choose to leave and try another profession (Frank, 2013).

There are studies in which scholars have tried to figure out why SA professionals leave. Lorden (1998) reviewed literature on the subject and found that there may be misconceptions about new professionals' reasons for leaving. Some of the reasons included: generational changes that make finding opportunities outside your original course of study acceptable, transferability of SA skills to other industries, and limited career mobility in the entry level position. Thus, it makes sense that the primary reason for leaving entry level positions that Lorden (1998) found in the literature was to seek advancement. Lorden (1998) suggested that there be further exploration of master's students' intentions to enter the field of SA and what kinds of options they might have found that were more attractive to them and whether their SA skills were transferable. Exploring the idea of advancement opportunities contributing to attrition would also be useful.

Tull (2006) studied the connection between intent to leave and supervision in a quantitative study of 435 respondents who had worked in SA for less than five years. Negative supervisory relationships were found to be strongly correlated with intentions to leave (Tull, 2006). A notable finding was that having a female supervisor contributed to more positive supervisory relationships (Tull, 2006).

Frank (2013) conducted a qualitative study of 24 SA professionals working in Academic Advising, Multicultural Affairs, Residence Life, and Student Activities to uncover reasons why they left SA. What was distinctive about this study was that Frank (2013) interviewed SA professionals who had left the field and was not just looking at their job satisfaction or intent to leave. The main findings of factors contributing to their departure included personal, meaning connectivity, balance and professional, meaning job opportunity. SA administrators who choose to stay in the SA profession have choices with regard to advancing to midlevel positions and beyond. Some SA administrators remain in their midlevel positions and some aspire to advance to senior level administration. The focus of the following section is on midlevel administration in student affairs.

### **Advancing to Midlevel in Student Affairs**

Given the hierarchical structures that exist in HE, there are fewer executive-level positions available, so it is inevitable that most SA administrators will remain in midlevel positions for the entirety of their careers (Fleischer, 2012). A midlevel SA administrator is defined as having “a minimum of five years as a full-time student affairs professional and responsibility for the direction, control, or supervision of one or more student affairs functions, or one or more professional staff members” (NASPA, 2017). Johnsrud, Heck, and Rosser (2000) defined midlevel administrators as “nonacademic employees classified as administrative,

professional and technical staff members, who are in positions below the Dean level” (p. 44). Many administrators working in SA are concentrated at midlevel. These are leaders of institutions who are essential in supporting the goals and mission of higher education institutions (Rosser, 2004). Many individuals are content in midlevel positions and are still able to make major impacts on the successful functioning of their institutions and on students and decide to make lifelong careers in midlevel (Taylor, 2007). SA professionals remain in midlevel, not necessarily because they are stuck there, but because they enjoy their work and find fulfillment in their roles (Young, 2007).

Student Affairs professionals face several challenges as they gain experience and advance in their careers. Blimling and Whitt (1999) identified five specific challenges for SA administrators, two of which included the changing student populations and the evolving faculty, staff, and student roles. They contend that SA administrators in midlevel positions have been exposed to both changes, stating how “an increasingly diverse student body challenges colleges...and Student Affairs professionals in particular, to provide all students with the assistance and opportunities they need to achieve their educational goals” (Blimling & Whitt, 1999, p. 4). One major concern with the midlevel is that employees might become stagnant in their positions and possibly get bored with their work while staying in the same job.

Findley (2007) looked at the *career plateauing* of 344 administrators at three public universities in the southeast in a quantitative study that aimed to explore the influence of demographic variables and perceptions of social support and career plateauing on staff members’ intent to leave their institutions. Career plateauing was defined as “constricted job mobility” when employees in midlevel positions might feel stuck in their roles if they are not challenged (Findley, 2007). Positive connections to co-workers was found to be the most significant factor

contributing to the respondents' intention to remain at their institutions, but colleagues do not always stick around for the duration of an SA administrator's career lifetime and this change might also contribute to a dynamic work environment (Findley, 2007). Once a midlevel administrator does decide to stay in their positions and at their institutions, they may find ways to keep themselves motivated and still progress professionally by changing positions within their institutions.

Position change is the primary way that SA professionals increase their salaries, professional status, and authority (Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988). Even if an administrator is given additional responsibilities and compensation at their same institution, it still fundamentally changes the position originally held. Miner and Estler (1985) made a case for *accrual mobility*, a way administrators advance internally at their institutions by moving into newly created positions with increased responsibilities. Institutions can take advantage of highly competent employees by acknowledging how administrators have mastered their current positions, gaining additional skills and adding to their responsibilities by restructuring and creating new positions. This process is different from the traditional career trajectory that assumes administrators will advance into higher positions that already exist. Instead, a new position is created that benefits both the institution and the administrator because it gives the employee a new title and responsibility and it gives the institution an opportunity to address a gap in their service offerings for students (Miner & Estler, 1985).

Not every SA professional will be promoted within the same institution where they hold entry level positions and may instead need to leave and move to a new college or university for career advancement. Unfortunately, creating new positions and providing opportunities for internal promotions may not be possible depending on the financial situation or the politics at



each institution. Therefore, to advance, SA administrators may need to look for positions outside of their institutions, which means geographically relocating for many SA professionals. At midlevel, SA administrators are usually in the position consider advancing to senior level leadership. Many midlevel administrators aspire to secure higher positions but remain in midlevel administrative positions despite such desires, which can cause negative work experiences for midlevel professionals. For example, Blackhurst, Brandt & Kalinowski (1998a) found that the longer women remained in midlevel assistant and associate director positions, the lower their reported levels of organizational commitment. Midlevel SA administrators must become familiar with the qualifications and pathways to advancing to senior level leadership in order to prepare and pursue those positions. In the following section, I describe the typical pathways to senior level leadership positions in SA as found in the literature.

### **Advancing to Senior Student Affairs Officer Positions**

The Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO), also commonly known as the Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) at colleges and universities is considered the highest-ranking SA professional on each campus and there is usually only one. There are various titles for the SSAO position, including Vice President for Student Affairs, Vice Chancellor and on some campuses, this position is the Dean of Students (Tull & Freeman, 2008; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Sometimes the position reports to a provost or chief academic officer and sometimes the position reports directly to the president of the institution (Stimpson, 2009; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Wesaw and Sponsler (2014) found that 72% of the respondents of their survey of SSAOs reported directly to the president, 16% reported to a provost or chief academic officer, and the remaining 6% reported to an executive or senior vice president. The position of SSAO is ultimately responsible for student services that support the co-curricular lives of college and

university students and spends the majority of time performing administrative tasks, handling personnel matters, interacting with students, strategic planning and managing crises (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014).

Biddix (2013) studied the pathways by which SSAOs reach those positions by collecting and analyzing resumes of SSAOs listed in the 2008 *Higher Education Directory*. From the total population of 2,871 SSAOs, 403 responded (214 men and 189 women). The four paths determined by Biddix were the most common source and positions previously held by those serving as SSAO were in order of number and the orders were: Director (total 289, 72%), Dean (total 47, 11.7%), Doctor (total 46, 11.4%) or Diverger (21, 5.2%). The results from this study were supported by Wesaw and Sponsler (2014) who conducted a profile study of SSAOs from a survey sent to all SSAOs at the 2844 NASPA member institutions with a response rate of 30.35%, for a total of 863 respondents. They found that the majority, 27% of the respondents, reported that they held a “director-level” position prior to being appointed in their SSAO role, with deans being a close second at 23% of the respondents (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). These results demonstrate that midlevel administrators most likely have the experience and positions that place them in the pathways to SSAO positions.

Aside from the years of work experience, the other qualification needed to be placed in line for the SSAO position was to have a doctorate (Biddix, 2013; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). In the study by Biddix, 64.5 % of the SSAOs had obtained a doctorate, and another 19% were pursuing a doctorate, while in the study by Wesaw and Sponsler (2014) 56% of the SSAOs had an earned doctorate and another 4% held a professional degree. Based on these numbers it was possible to advance to SSAO positions without a doctorate, but a doctorate was often strongly

preferred in SSAO job postings and would become more desired in the future (Komives & Taub, 2000).

Moving from entry level to mid level and then to SSAO may lead to even further progression in academia. The highest administrative position available in the United States in higher education is the college and university president or chancellor (Birnbaum & Umbach, 2001). Therefore, a case can be made for SA to become a pathway to the college presidency and recent studies have explored the pathway to presidencies with college president appointees who had previously served as SSAOs (Doman, 2016; McGoey, 2004). Appleton (2011) suggested that SSAOs have the same skill sets that presidents need, so it would be appropriate for SSAOs to consider themselves as preparing for the possibility of a future college or university presidency.

Birnbaum and Umbach (2001) suggested that there should be alternative paths to the presidency and that increasing diversity in the presidency would have to be part of the plan and SA would be an ideal way to get there. Several studies suggest that SA would be a good place from which to draw future presidents (King & Gomez, 2008; McGoey, 2004). Wesaw and Sponsler (2014) asked their SSAO respondents about their aspirations to the presidency and found that the non-White SSAOs were more than twice as likely as their White counterparts to aspire to the presidency. This was not the same for women, who were half as likely to aspire to the presidency. It seems that identity makes a difference with who is in these senior-level positions, with almost 77% of SSAOs self-identifying as White and 51% self-identifying as male (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014).

Although King and Gomez (2008) suggest that diversity in the ranks of SSAOs may proliferate opportunities for people of color to obtain presidential positions in HE, at present,

Latinas are barely reaching SSAO positions and remain concentrated in entry and mid-level positions in SA. Since people of color, especially women, are not entering the pipeline, the first step would be to change recruitment approaches for SSAO positions to be sure those ranks are diverse enough to be able to diversify presidencies. Doman (2016) conducted a qualitative study of the few African American male presidents at Historically Black Colleges and Universities who were able to leverage their SSAO role to position themselves into the pipeline for the presidency, so it is a real possibility, but it starts with entry and career advancement in SA. The next section explores how identity, specifically gender and race influences the career advancement of SA administrators.

### **Career Advancement and Identity in Student Affairs**

Career advancement in SA is impacted by each person's identity, meaning race, ethnic background, and gender, which influences the way that SA administrators navigate their institutional experiences and opportunities (Doman, 2016; Wolfe, 2016; Woodard, 2009).

Women and administrators of color have unique challenges that impact their work experience and pathways to advancement to SSAO positions (Massé, Miller, Kerr & Ortiz, 2007; Rosser & Javinar, 2009). As higher education has become more diverse, so have students, faculty, and administrators. Thelin (2011) put this diversity into context when he stated that:

Policy discussions about equity and minorities became increasingly complex in the 1980s as more constituencies asserted a distinctive heritage and political presence. To speak merely of 'minorities' was no longer adequate, now that demographic and educational data on such groups as Asian American, Native Americans, Hispanics, and gays and lesbians had elevated awareness of the growing diversity of both the United States as a whole and its potentially college-bound students. (p. 349)

Chickering and Reisser (1993) list 11 items they contend represent a climate of best practices in undergraduate education. They wrote "The institution successfully recruits and retains minority

faculty, staff, and students” but falls short of encouraging upward mobility for this group by only including that “institutional publications should reflect the diversity of the student body, faculty and staff” (p. 462). Later, in their lists under *Academic and Student Support Services*, Chickering and Reisser (1993) identify another eleven items “from the Institutional Inventory suggesting some of the ingredients worth recognizing, and can be related to competence, managing of emotions, mature relationships, and identity.” However, the one that is the most relevant to diversity states: “The institution trains faculty, staff, and students to deal with student diversity” (p. 469), making no reference to faculty and staff diversity.

Chickering and Reisser (1993) listed as the second of three admonitions, “recognize and respect individual differences,” clearly making the assumption that those involved would not already do that, something that might not be assumed about underrepresented populations who have to compare themselves to the White majority who may not be aware of the differences (p. 471). Chickering and Reisser (1993) go on to state that “coping with diversity in academic preparation, socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, national origin, age, and gender has become our most significant challenge” (p. 473). A lack of diversity among the faculty and staff has not gone unnoticed by Latina/o undergraduate students, who have demanded that HE leaders make efforts to diversify their administrator and faculty ranks since the 1960s (Ortiz & Santos, 2009).

### **Career Advancement and Gender in Student Affairs**

Student affairs scholars have studied the impact of gender on the career advancement of women in SA. They have found that there were differences in the way women experienced their work environments and how they navigated their career trajectories, presenting women with challenges and impeding their advancement while men continued to be the majority in the SSAO ranks (Biddix, 2011; Blackhurst 2000a; Corral, 2009; Johnsrud & Heck, 1994; Marquez, 2014;

Marshall, 2009; Terrell & Gifford, 2005). Starting with entry into the field of SA, Taub and McEwen (2006) found that there were no significant differences with how men and women entered the SA profession. As a matter of fact, female SA administrators were often in the majority in entry-level and midlevel ranks of SA administration (Taub & McEwen, 2006).

Robbins (1996) studied the first-year transition from graduate school, entry, and socialization of 11 White women into SA by interviewing them at the beginning, three months in, and at the six month mark. These women worked in a wide variety of areas in SA and experienced dissonance between what they learned in their graduate programs, what they expected from their SA positions and the reality of the kinds of support and feedback they received from their supervisors (Robbins, 1996). The study by Robbins (1996) focused on the lack of support the women received from students and their supervisors during their transition, but there was no mention of how mentorship might have played a role..

Mentorship was a topic of exploration for many researchers who were making connections with how having or not having mentors impacted work experiences and advancement, especially when it came to gender differences. Blackhurst (2000b) conducted a study of women in student affairs administration to determine the relationship between mentoring and role conflict, role ambiguity, organizational commitment, career satisfaction, and perceived sex discrimination. With a response rate of 61%, 307 women working in all levels of SA participated in a survey, most of them in midlevel positions. Blackhurst (2000b) found that mentoring was beneficial to women SA professionals who needed someone who can help them reduce ambiguity and role conflict in their work settings, which in turn helped to increase their institutional commitment. There were, however, differences with how White women and women of color were impacted with regard to mentorship (Blackhurst, 2000b). Blackhurst (2000b) found

that only one in three participants reported having a mentor at any level of their institution.

Women of color were the most negatively impacted by not having a mentor and were more likely to report higher levels of role ambiguity and perceived higher levels of sex discrimination than White women with or without mentors. The problem with this study is that 82% of the respondents were White women as compared to only 18% women of color. Although there were 39 African American women in the study, there were only 5 Asian American and 6 Latinas. Latinas were such a small number that generalizing the results for women of color is not appropriate.

Several studies explored the career paths, challenges, and successes of women in SSAO positions and found some common influences and factors for their success, including finding supportive supervisors, cross-gender mentoring, obtaining advanced degrees and being promoted in their midlevel positions (Marquez, 2014; Stimpson, 2009). However, there were also challenges women in SSAO positions experienced that became roadblocks for women in SA as they advanced in their careers, including family considerations and work-life balance. Family considerations and motherhood was a recurring theme for women in student affairs who were trying to find a balance between their demanding positions and dedicating time to plan for and take care of their families (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes & Terrell, 2005; Hughes, 2004; Joyce-Brady, 2004; Marquez, 2014; Marshall, 2009; Terrell & Gifford, 2005).

In a study of male and female SSAOs by Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, and Terrell (2005), gender differences were significant with regard to family considerations. Female SSAOs reported feeling less balanced and less satisfied than male SSAOs due to the stress of managing work and family. Women often hid this stress because they did not want to be perceived as less competent (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes & Terrell, 2005). In addition, women SSAOs perceived

higher expectations about their roles at home, pressure from their families, and shared how their partners often made negative comments to them about their high levels of after-hours work commitments. This increased their stress levels further and made them feel guilty about being away from their families (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes, & Terrell, 2005). Stimpson (2009) and Marquez (2014) found that female SSAOs struggled more than male SSAOs with balancing work and family life and that these were challenges that the women had to overcome along their career paths and continue to deal with in their senior level positions.

Closely related to family considerations, geographic mobility was another barrier that women faced more than men when deciding on advancement opportunities. Lepkowski (2009) found this to be the case in a study comparing the difference in career aspirations of men and women in SA administration. In a quantitative study of administrators ranking in positions of Dean of higher in the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities system, Lepkowski (2009) noted how despite similar levels of career aspirations, career planning, and participation in leadership development programs among men and women, the most significant barrier to advancement was the prospect of having to move geographically in order to be promoted. Despite being closely matched in their desires to advance, women were more likely to feel bound by their geographic location and therefore, ended up with more limitations in their advancement opportunities than men (Lepkowski, 2009).

Geographical considerations was the second most significant challenge for the 15 female SSAOs Marquez (2014) discovered in a qualitative study that sought to explore the career trajectories and lived experiences of women SSAOs at four-year public colleges and universities. Marquez (2014) found that the women SSAOs had to seriously consider whether or not to advance because they did not want to disrupt their families. Since there are fewer SSAO



positions that open up than midlevel positions, women may remain in their positions longer or pursue lateral moves rather than relocate and cause stress in the family dynamic (Lepkowski, 2009; Marquez, 2014). Overall, it was clear that women navigating careers in student affairs experienced challenges that were different from men, putting them at a disadvantage for career promotions and reaching senior level positions in student affairs.

### **Career Advancement, Gender, and Race in Student Affairs**

In addition to gender, race is a factor that has impacted the work experiences of SA administrators of color. In the January 13, 1993, issue of the Chronicle of Higher Education, Yolanda T. Moses wrote about the roadblocks or barriers that administrators of color faced in higher education. Moses (1993) stated,

Just as students from minority groups are often treated as strangers and outsiders, no matter how much they try to adapt to the existing campus culture, so many minority-group administrators are hired as tokens and then isolated. They find themselves in dead-end jobs, see their diverse perspectives ignored, and have their authority and leadership challenged. (p. B1)

There were three roadblocks or institutional barriers Moses (1993) described. The first institutional barrier was universities not being ready to reorganize to deal with issues of cultural diversity. The second institutional barrier was an inherent resistance to change regarding the idea that cultural diversity would disrupt the status quo at institutions of higher education. The third and final institutional barrier Moses discussed was the stereotyping of administrators of color, resulting in these administrators experiencing microaggressions.

Moses found that administrators of color were tokenized and relegated to positions with very little decision making power. Slightly over fifteen years later, in 2009, the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), published a report about the barriers faced by administrators of color in higher education, describing very similar barriers to what Moses

described, specifically the one about the tokenization of administrators of color (ASHE, 2009). Not much has changed over the years with regard to challenges faced by midlevel administrators of color, which have been well documented, particularly for women of color, with many of them feeling underrepresented, unwelcome, marginalized, and disadvantaged with regard to promotions (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Massé, Miller, Kerr & Ortiz, 2007).

A major challenge for administrators of color in higher education is underrepresentation in the administrative ranks. In 2005 approximately 19% of full-time administrators in higher education were administrators of color, yet 35% of undergraduate students were students of color, so administrator demographics are not matching student demographics (Betts, Urias, Chavez & Betts, 2009). Massé, Miller, Kerr, and Ortiz (2007) contend that hostile and unwelcoming environment causes underrepresentation, but there is much more in the experiences of administrators of color that cause workplace challenges and barriers beyond the numerical representation, which in itself is problematic. For example, Turner, Myers & Creswell (1999) discussed the underrepresentation of faculty of color in the Midwest. They found that certain barriers within academia discourage faculty of color from becoming productive and satisfied, a product of unwelcoming and unsupportive work environments. They found that faculty of color felt that they were being expected to work harder than Whites and were “constantly scrutinized and held in the spotlight” (Turner, Myers & Creswell 1999).

Although people of color have faced numerous problems in the academic workplace, women of color have had particular difficulty navigating academia. Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) refer to the experience of women of color in SA as a “double burden” that means they have to deal with issues of racism and sexism as they navigate their work lives and negotiate their career paths and advancement opportunities. The challenges for women of color can exist

as undergraduates, faculty, or administrators. For instance, Bowman (1998) explained how minority women faced unique challenges and additional stressors in the workforce because of their membership in two or more underrepresented or marginalized groups as women and people of color. According to Bowman (1998), minority women were treated as invisible or as a broader representative of their entire race/ethnicity.

Bowman also established that minority women often get placed on committees that usually do not come with “extra perks of any kind” (p. 418) and detract from their job responsibilities. In fact, these committees can place minority women’s jobs at risk because they can fall behind in their other work (Bowman, 1998). These issues were all consistent with the findings in a study by Sobers (2014) who examined the lives of four Black female SSAOs who experienced many “unspoken expectations” in their token roles as either the only Black woman or one of the few women of color at the PWIs. Different than Bowman (1998), Sobers (2014) found that the Black female SSAOs were actually not invisible and stood out with higher visibility on their campuses, which then became an issue as they were scrutinized and expected to be the diversity experts on their campuses. Finally, appearance mattered as the four Black female SSAOs felt that they were expected to dress and wear their hair in ways that conformed to the mainstream expectations to help them fit in at their institutions (Sobers, 2014).

There were two similar studies conducted about Black women administrators in midlevel positions, one focusing only on Black women (Coleman, 2002) and the other studying Black women and men (Belk, 2006). These two quantitative studies found that there were barriers to advancement for Black women depending on the institution type. Coleman (2002) surveyed female administrators in Alabama and found that women at PWIs experienced higher levels of perceptions of career advancement barriers than their counterparts at HBCUs. In the study by

Belk (2006), Black women were more likely than men to perceive being victims of discrimination and to be held to higher performance standards than their White male counterparts. Both of these studies highlight how Black women experienced their workplaces in ways that made them feel targeted, but due to the nature of the methodology, being quantitative studies with surveys, it is not possible for the respondents to go into details about their experiences. Lloyd-Jones (2009) did offer a qualitative study employing the single case study method examining the lived experiences of one African American senior level female administrator working at a PWI. This administrator shared her perspective on how the intersections of race, gender, and social class influenced her career advancement and how she experienced discrimination from her colleagues due to her multiple identities (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). The most significant finding in the study by Lloyd-Jones (2009) that was relevant to the experiences of women of color was how the ideas of meritocracy, working hard and earning credentials, did not seem to matter as the female senior level administrator navigated her career, constantly being scrutinized and feeling as if she had to work harder than her White counterparts to be recognized.

Consequently, women of color have faced considerable unfair obstacles in their pursuit of career advancement, and discrimination appears to still plague women of color as they navigate their careers in SA (Belk, 2006; Blackhurst, 2000b; Coleman, 2002; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Sobers, 2014). To date, many studies of women and women of color in academia have uncovered common advancement barriers, including racial, ethnic, gender, and cultural discrimination, often not citing a particular aspect of identity being the direct connection (Belk, 2006; Coleman, 2002). Administrators of color and women of color in SA have faced discrimination and barriers to advancement throughout most of their careers and still do. Latinas are usually grouped in with

the experiences of all women of color in SA, but face unique challenges influenced by their race and ethnicity. The following sections introduce research on Latinas/os in higher education, followed by a particular focus on Latina SA professionals.

### **Latinas in Higher Education**

Latinas experience challenges in academia two-fold by being both female and women of color. Masse, Miller, Kerr and Ortiz (2007) argue that “in many instances, this group of professionals face challenges complicated by their status within racial or ethnic groups and nuanced by gender identity” (p. 155). There are very few studies about the career advancement and barriers faced by Latinas in student affairs. The following section provides an overview of Latina/o participation in higher education, first inclusive of all genders, then focusing on Latinas as students, as faculty and finally as SA administrators.

### **Historical Context for Latinos/as in Higher Education**

Education has served as a critical role in elevating Latinas/os to better career and leadership positions that raise their socio-economic status. Higher education has provided many opportunities for upward mobility of minority groups, including Latinas/os. Latinas/os have been able to take advantage of earning degrees and pursuing careers in academia as faculty, administrators, and staff at colleges and universities (Villalpando, 1996). Although research on administrators has examined how the relationships between race, stress, and burnout differ by race, it typically focuses on comparing African-Americans and Whites (Lopez, 2000). This section describes the role Latinos have played as they have increasingly entered and moved up the ranks of higher education administration.

Latinos, in general, and Latinas, specifically, are seriously underrepresented in faculty and administration positions and are typically absent from executive leadership positions in

academia (Haro & Lara, 2003). More importantly, there are very few Latinas and Latinos currently serving as presidents of institutions of higher education in the United States.

Furthermore, those who are in these positions are concentrated mostly at community colleges and for-profit institutions (Haro & Lara, 2003; Hernandez, 2013). In fact, regarding careers in higher education, Latinos seem to be disproportionately concentrated in service oriented positions, perpetuating stereotypes and assumptions about Latinas only being able to fulfill these roles on campus and not being viewed as educated professionals (Alvarez, W., 2011).

It is unclear when Latinos were first integrated into administrations of higher education institutions due to definitional inconsistencies mislabeling the Hispanic population. For example, Latinos in higher education could not have been categorized as “Hispanic” or “Latino” any sooner than 1980 or 1990 respectively because that was when the U.S. Census first used those labels as self-identifying demographic descriptors (U.S. Census Form 1980; U.S. Census Form 1990). Before this, each person of Latin American descent would have had the opportunity to self-identify as “Other” or “National Origin” (U.S. Census Form 1960). On the other hand, Latino is not considered a race according to the way that the U.S. Census (U.S. Census Form 2010) collects information. It asks “Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?” and offers the choices “No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin” or “Yes.” It is followed by more specific nationalities from which to choose, including “Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano” or “Puerto Rican” or “Cuban” and then a box that allows for entering origin. Meanwhile, The Pew Hispanic Center (2005) describe the Hispanic/Latino identity as:

... not a racial group, nor does it share a common language or culture. The single overarching trait that all Hispanics share in common is a connection by ancestry to Latin America. This population, in fact, traces its origins to many countries with varied cultures, and while some Latinos have family histories in the United States that date back centuries, others are recent arrivals. Some speak only English, others only Spanish, and many are bilingual. (p. 3)

This definition adds to the inconsistencies between and among the nationalities that fall under the label of Latino or Hispanic because it ignores race and that racism exists within the Latino culture (Torres-Saillant, 2003; Hernandez, 2003).

Historically, as administrators of color, Latinas/os have been stigmatized by misperceptions about their language capabilities that fosters discrimination shared similarly by Asian Americans, but not necessarily by African Americans (Davila & deBradley, 2010). Davila and deBradley (2010) introduced how a disregard for Spanish speaking abilities has been prevalent in the U.S. public education and “have been historically misunderstood as disabilities, leaving Latina/o students at a disadvantage” (Davila & deBradley, 2010, p. 50). In fact, being able to speak multiple languages should be seen as an advantage, as Latinas/os have access to more of the population with regard to communication. Negative perceptions about the multi-language and other ethnic attributes hamper the ability of Latinas/os to secure fuller integration into higher education administration because they are not viewed as beneficial to the leadership of Latina/o administrators.

Despite the issues with language and terminology surrounding the identities of Latina/o administrators, four early scholarly studies focused on the experiences of Latina/o HE administrators using the term *Chicano*. In the first study, Esquibel (1977) looked at factors that explain the increase in Chicano administrators in academic administrative leadership positions at five institutions in the southwest. Esquibel found that the four factors that influenced their appointments were: (a) political involvement and contacts, (b) pressures by Chicano students and community members for more Chicano administrators, (c) the Chicano concentration or ethnic composition of the respondents institution and community, and (d) affirmative action plan the requirements. While the positions of the Chicano administrators ranged in level from coordinator

to Vice Presidents to Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), only 10% of the administrators responding to the survey were Chicana, but there was no mention of gender differences in the discussion of the study results.

A year later Lopez (1978) explored the way Chicano administrators at community colleges in the southwest perceived their roles. The most significant findings were that Chicano administrators in this study felt pressured to perform at higher levels than their White counterparts, they felt the need to straddle two worlds by being both an advocate for Chicano students and a representative of their institutions, and while they experience conflicts about their roles within their institutions. This was not a problem for these Chicano administrators who believed struggles were necessary to effect change within their institutions (Lopez, 1978). A special note about gender in the Lopez (1978) study is that from the 175 respondents, 9.7% were Chicanas.

A third early study that was different from the quantitative studies by Esquibel (1977) and Lopez (1978) was a qualitative study by Acevedo (1979) that explored the socialization process of Mexican-American midlevel HE administrators in Texas. Several challenges emerged along the paths of socialization for the Mexican-American administrators trying to figure out their roles within their institutions. While full integration of Mexican-American administrators into the Texas HE institutions was found to be minimal, it seemed that the ways that they were socialized and regarded on their campuses was in ways that reinforced the status quo and did not move toward socialization actually happening (Acevedo, 1979). The Mexican-American administrators came in with limited experience in navigating higher education, they were continuously placed in midlevel roles with very little decision making power, they took on ethnic activities through their involvement and mentoring of students of color, they lacked mentors and



sponsors to assist them in their career development, and despite earning doctoral degrees, these administrators were not promoted into senior level positions (Acevedo, 1979).

Finally, building on the work of Lopez (1978) and Acevedo (1979), Lopez (1984) conducted a mixed methods study focused on the socialization of Chicano Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) and how they reconciled their ethnic roles at the institutions they were leading. Along with review of documents, Lopez (1984) interviewed 14 of the potential 16 Chicano CEOs at two and four-year public institutions. Similar to previous findings, Lopez (1984) discovered that the ethnicity of the Chicano CEOs brought them additional identity related responsibilities, caused them to have conflicts with other Chicanos at their institutions, and sometimes put the CEOs in conflicted positions when they had to balance the concerns of their institutions with the demands from their minority students and staff members.

All four of these studies by Esquibel (1977), Lopez (1978), Acevedo (1979) and Lopez (1984) provided important early data about Latina/o administrators at institutions of higher education. However, these doctoral dissertation studies were limited to Mexican-Americans and Chicanos located in southwest states and did not fully reflect the experiences of Latina/os from other nationalities or geographic areas. Nevertheless, these studies are still very much relevant today and sadly, contain similar themes that are indicative of the experiences of Latina/o administrators currently working in higher education.

### **Latina/o Administrators in Higher Education Job Searches**

As Latinos advance in their careers, there are issues that arise during their job searches that may be limiting their opportunities. Haro (1995) conducted an ethnographic study of Academic Vice President (AVP) and presidential searches and found that minority candidates and Latinos, specifically, did not receive the same confidence and assumptions of competence

afforded to White males or White females. The only time Latinos were found to bring a level of recognized competence was in managing environments with union and collective bargaining in which previous experience was valued. This makes sense because public and community college institutions where many Latina/os are employed are more likely to have union environments than private liberal arts or research institutions (Haro, 1995).

Another example of presumed incompetence arose when one interviewer of job candidates explained his reasoning for not believing in the writing skills of a Latino candidate. The interviewer took this position because they thought English might not have been the interviewees' native language. In fact, Haro (1995) found that Latino and Latina candidates were described to be less articulate than the White candidates, a perception reserved only for this group. In addition, Latinas applying for senior leadership positions seem to be regarded as less competent, inarticulate, and criticized for characteristics that go overlooked for other candidates (Haro, 1995). When asked to describe Latinas in the search process, search committee members described them mostly by their outward appearances, listing descriptors such as pudgy, fat, or wearing too much makeup (Haro, 1995). By contrast, these comments were not used to describe the White candidates for the same positions for which they also applied. This is one example of the difference in treatment that Latina/os experience as they explore opportunities in higher education administration.

Additionally, Latina/os in academia receive conflicting messages and advice about how they should present themselves and their identities during their interview processes and once they start new positions. For example, Ballesterro (2008) shared some disturbing advice to Latinos in higher education leadership positions. He suggested that candidates for administrative positions not appear, "too Hispanic," a direct contradiction to a previous statement he made in

the same chapter when he stated that “there is no need to disguise your ethnicity and cultural background” (p. 201). If Latinos are unable to navigate the identity prejudices for themselves, how can they expect non-Latinos to support Latino leadership? Although these contradictory words of advice seem to arise from concern for the scarcity of Latinos in leadership at top positions even at HSIs, Ballesterro (2008) identified that the same issue does not emerge at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). However, to his credit, he does redeem himself a bit when he suggests that “once you obtain your appointment, do what is right for *raza* and everybody else” (Ballesterro, 2008, p. 202).

Early studies focused on the representation and socialization of male Latino administrators in the southwest with very little mention, if any, of Latinas (Esquibel, 1977; Lopez, 1978; Acevedo, 1979; Lopez, 1984). When discussing job search for Latinas/os, Haro (1995) found that Latinas were discriminated against with regard to their appearances. However, Latinas faced many of the same representation and socialization issues as the Latinos described in early studies, but were discussed in the literature in detail until much later. The following section reviews literature on the career advancement of Latinas in student affairs.

### **Successes and Challenges for Latinas in Higher Education**

Latinas have encountered challenges in HE and their undergraduate experiences and continue as they pursue graduate degrees and, later, employment in academia as faculty or administrators (Aldaco, 2010; Beck-Lethlean, 2008; Espino, 2010; Garza, 1996; Gonzalez, 2002; Mateo 2010; Montas-Hunter, 2012). Despite aspiring to advance to senior level administration, administrators of color, particularly Latinas, tend to more likely remain in midlevel (Massé, Miller, Kerr & Ortiz, 2007). The literature demonstrates that gender, racial, and ethnic-related prejudices Latinas face in academia create barriers to career advancement (Crespo, 2013; Duran,

1982; Garza, 1997; Gonzalez-DeJesus, 2012; Hansen, 1997; Lopez, 2013). While all of the studies about Latina administrators shared common themes about work challenges and barriers to advancement for Latinas, each contributed unique findings to add to the literature. Unfortunately, most of this literature was found in unpublished dissertations, and very few in peer-reviewed journals, causing low exposure to the challenges Latinas face as administrators in Higher Education (HE) and more specifically, in Student Affairs (SA).

Lack of awareness about issues Latina administrators face in SA may also stem from the omission of Latina administrator work experiences from the literature about all administrators. For example, recent studies on new professionals in SA fail to include Latinas. Taub and McEwen (2006) surveyed 300 students enrolled in 24 master's programs in college student personnel/higher education programs. Only 3 Latina/os responded, so even if they wanted to try to learn more about how Latinas enter SA, it would have been impractical given the small number of Latina/o respondents. Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) followed 90 new SA professionals for almost a year as they transitioned into their entry level positions to gain an understanding about what areas master's programs should focus on to prepare graduate students for the transition to full-time work in SA. While they acknowledge that the sample of participants is not representative of the diversity of all entry-level employees in SA, with only ten non-White participants and none of them identifying as Latina/o, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008), believe that gender is closer to representation with more than half identifying as female. One of the themes identified by Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) was "Navigating a Cultural Adjustment." This would have been valuable data to have for Latinas.

To shed light on studies that are available about Latina administrators in HE, I offer an overview of selected literature on Latina administrator experiences in chronological order,

highlighting top themes that emerged from each study that is directly relevant to this study.

Duran (1982) conducted the first study focused solely on Chicana administrators in public school administration in Colorado and New Mexico and similar to Esquibel (1977), sought to determine the factors contributing to the appointments of Chicanas to administrative leadership positions during a time when affirmative action was a strong hiring consideration. Duran's mixed methods study focusing on Chicana (Latina) leadership in administration in elementary and secondary school administration in Colorado and New Mexico and not in higher education.

As early as 1982, Duran mentioned the idea of "double jeopardy" due to being Latina and female. Although the focus was not on HE administrators, many of the issues were similar in that the author noted how the participants felt discriminated against and tracked into lower non-decision making positions that were assistant to someone who was in the position to make decisions (Duran, 1982). In this study, skin tone seemed to be a factor for position level, with lighter-skinned Latinas advancing to higher level positions faster than those who were darker skinned. Surveys were sent to 90 Latina administrators who were identified in this population, and 72 returned the survey for a 60% return rate. Mostly female relatives or teachers encouraged them to pursue their education, but at work, it was a male administrator who encouraged career advancement. The most significant results of this study were that Chicanas had been exposed to positive and supportive female role models at home and in their primary and secondary education settings, were hired in school districts that were well-represented by Chicano populations. The negative issues the Chicana administrators encountered were lack of support at home and at work and observance of discriminatory hiring and promotion practices (Duran, 1982).

A little over a decade later, Garza (1996) conducted a qualitative study following the lives of 16 Latina administrators employed at four different institutions averaging three years of full-time experience, ranging from one year of work experience to ten years. Some notable characteristics were that 14 of the 16 participants were employed in diversity or minority student support related positions, most held master's degrees, and two had doctorates. Top themes that emerged from the interviews included: mentoring, professional development, isolation, support, tokenism, ghettoizing or pigeonholing into diversity roles, challenges with campus climate, and low employment benefits. The top three major themes identified by the author were: mentoring, professional development, and work environment issues, specifically tokenism and isolation (Garza, 1996). With regard to mentorship, Garza noted how White mentors were helpful in teaching Latinas how to navigate the politics and work responsibilities in HE, but they lacked the cultural awareness and knowledge needed to understand the ways that Latinas connected to their environments and how the psychological and emotional burdens that Latinas endure in HE. Support from campus organized groups and professional associations for women and women of color. Participants in Garza's (1996) study valued education and pursuing advanced degrees, but found that it was not enough to help them advance. Advanced degree attainment was seen as essential if Latinas wanted to be respected in academia. One of Garza's participants said, "I need to get a Ph.D. I have learned that without that experience, many will find my voice insignificant" (p. 64).

Professional development, specifically, involvement in professional associations seemed to be the key to advancing to senior level positions (Garza, 1996). However, financial support for travel and registration at conferences was limited for some of the participants, and when it was, the financial support was only available if the professional development opportunity was directly

related to their current position (Garza, 1996). The problem with not being able to explore other types of career development further contributed to keeping Latinas in the same positions. One participant noticed inequities with how only senior White administrators were provided opportunities to participate in national leadership and management training programs (Garza, 1996). Most of the participants also had to leave their institutions to be promoted because they were not given an opportunity to be promoted where they had been currently working. They were disappointed that their work was not rewarded or recognized. Garza (1996) shared this comment regarding this issue,

The perception by many of the participants is that hard work, quality service, teamwork, substantial work experience, and loyalty and commitment all lead to opportunities for promotion. This certainly has not been the case for academic staff of color.” (Garza, 1996, p. 67)

Garza (1996) found that at the four institutions where her participants worked, there seemed to be formal recruitment and retention efforts for students and faculty of color, but no similar efforts for administrators. Interestingly, Garza found that Latina administrators at three of the four institutions had formed informal groups focusing on the recruitment, retention, and promotion of Latinas. Suggestions from Garza’s participants for improving retention and promotion possibilities: hire more Latinas, more professional training, serve on committees with policy making power and high visibility, have clearly defined career goals (different than the happenstance of entering SA).

Garza (1996) discussed being pigeonholed into “minority work” and how the work was valued and not valued was dependent on the needs of each institution and made a difference in how Latina administrators perceived their campus climates. Related to being boxed into diversity roles was the pressure to be the experts on minority issues, even if it was not in the job description and having that work “dumped” on them without additional compensation or

reduction in workload (Garza, 1996). Most participants shared how they believed they were hired because of their ethnicities, despite feeling like they should be selected because of their excellent credentials and were frustrated that colleagues seemed surprised they had advanced degrees.

While Garza outlined areas of stress and frustration for the Latina administrators, she also highlighted areas in which Latinas could improve their skills and offered strategies for success. One of the key skills Garza pointed out as critical was learning how to navigate politics. “Most of the participants learned how to survive university politics by understanding whom to trust and, perhaps more importantly, whom not to trust” (Garza, 1996, p. 96). Garza (1996) suggested developing “grow-your-own” administrator programs to nurture and groom Latinas to create pathways to advancement and to diversify senior levels. Garza also suggested that Latinas gain access to a wider range of career opportunities beyond diversity-related work because she viewed diversity and minority related positions as a “dead end” with little access to advancement from those positions (p. 106).

In an exploratory ethnographic research study of Latinas working in counseling and entry level faculty positions, Hernandez and Morales (1999) found that Latino culture and gender were two important variables that influenced career development. Studying counselors and faculty in the same study was an odd combination of subjects considering their roles on campus being so different, one more student affairs oriented – outside the classroom, and the other mostly academic in focus – in the classroom. The authors acknowledged that all nine study participants had been counselors in student affairs, but some had moved to faculty roles. The most significant finding by Hernandez and Morales (1999) was that participants “described being ‘boxed,’



packaged, and prejudged by the majority culture on the basis of their cultural heritage and gender” (p. 51) and that,

...because of their gender and ethnicity, these women feel labeled upon entry to the higher educational system, an action ‘boxing’ them into certain kinds of work within the organization enabling them to achieve within certain well-defined parameters, but not allowing them to succeed beyond. (Hernandez & Morales, 1999, p. 51)

The problem faced by these women was that “these Latinas were not only compromised by the social norms they were expected to live but became active in compromising their own career aspirations” (Hernandez & Morales, 1999, p. 54). They also found the higher education environment unsympathetic and discouraging to Latinas (Hernandez & Morales, 1999). Despite such negative experiences, the Latinas in this study used language that indicated that their positions in higher education provided them with career fulfillment. For example, participants described their careers as “organic and changing” and described their careers as a “way of life” (Hernandez & Morales, 1999). This seems to be a contradiction in the higher education environment that on the one hand provides a positive and affirming environment for Latinas, while at the same time causing a frustrating environment that causes them to feel discouraged as they navigate their faculty careers. It is already challenging for faculty to balance their teaching, research, and service in order to prepare for tenure and promotion, so additional stressors just add to the stressful process.

Hernandez-Gravelle (1999) interviewed five Latina administrators in the northeast and found that while they were expected to get involved in diversity initiatives on campus regardless of their official roles, they experienced those initiatives as being framed in Black and White identity terms, leaving out the Latina/o experience and making them feel a lack of support. While the Latina administrators expressed being fully committed to their roles on campus, they did share ways that they felt marginalized on their campuses, including feeling isolated as one of the

only Latinas, expectations to get involved in diversity work despite a lack of institutional support for diversity efforts and lack of inclusion of Latina/o perspectives. Despite the marginalization, the most significant finding in this study was how much the Latina administrators handled challenges with positivity and professionalism. The other significant takeaway was captured beautifully by Hernandez-Gravelle (1999) when she stated, “there seems to be much that can be built on from a more reciprocal relationship between the academic institutions and the Latina administrators” (p. 217). Latina administrators worked hard for the institution even though the institution did not seem to work hard for to support them.

Blackhurst (2000a) acknowledged that studies about women in SA have not explored the subtle forms of gender inequity including “inequities in job assignments, work expectations, and informal support.” She conducted a study that explored the intersections of identity that added race, age, relationship status, parenting status, position title and reasons for choosing SA as a career and the perception of sex discrimination in the workplace. In this study, Hispanic women were found by Blackhurst (2000a) to be significantly less satisfied with SA than White and Asian women. Regarding sex discrimination, Hispanic women, along with Asian American women experienced significantly more sex discrimination than White women. Women in mid-level positions were significantly less satisfied with and less committed to SA than senior-level women. Overall, Hispanic American women and Asian American women reported the lowest career satisfaction in the study by Blackhurst (2000a).

Mateo (2010) utilized an action research format to explore the experiences of Latina students, faculty and administrators by setting up a mentorship program called the “Latina-Hispanic Network” at one public four-year institution. The main finding that is consistent with almost every other study about Latinas in higher education was that regardless of role on

campus, Latinas experience life on campus as outsiders, but were very proud of their gender, racial, and ethnic identities as Latinas. The other findings were shared support systems that all of the Latinas attributed to their successes, including family support, self-efficacy, community support, having education be a priority and strong value, and having positive role models that encouraged them throughout their education and professional journeys. Finally, the other major theme shared among all the Latinas in Mateo's study was the love for higher education and appreciation for the opportunities juxtaposed with a desire for higher education to create a more affirming, welcoming, and supportive environment for the professional and academic development of Latinas. It seemed that regardless of position or level, Latinas had to rely on their own social support networks, self-efficacy, and perseverance to navigate academia successfully.

One of the studies closest in focus, and with a similar participant profile as this study was conducted by Gonzalez-De Jesus (2012), who interviewed 20 Latina community college midlevel administrators with titles ranging from Coordinator to Associate Dean. The five major themes that emerged were: feeling supported, separation, persistence, spirituality, and identity. The barriers identified included discrimination in the workplace based on gender and skin tone and experiencing a perceived unsafe work environment that caused some of the participants to hide their sexual orientation. The most significant finding from this study that is relevant is that the 20 Latina midlevel administrators entered their careers feeling positive and then encountered challenges along their career paths that caused hostile work environments and diminished hopes for advancement. Gonzalez-De Jesus (2012) offered several recommendations for the Latina administrators, including finding mentors and participating in the leadership development programs. However, those strategies can only work if leaders in higher education follow the

recommendations that Gonzalez-De Jesus (2012) offers regarding institutions focusing on better recruitment and retention strategies.

As suggested by Gonzalez-De Jesus (2012) there are Latina administrators who have participated in and benefitted from nationally recognized leadership development programs. Muñoz (2010) found this to be true of the Latina community college presidents who participated in her study, most of whom had taken part in some kind of national fellowship or leadership program connected to a professional association. Crespo (2013) conducted a study of participants from two of these leadership programs, the ACE Fellows Program coordinated by American Council on Education and one for women only, the HERS Leadership Institute coordinated by the Higher Education Resource Services organization. The sample of participants consisted of 16 Latina senior level administrators holding positions, such as faculty, department chairs, deans, vice presidents and presidents. Crespo (2013) found that these programs helped to build the confidence of the Latinas, reinforcing the experiences and skills they already had, but providing them with networking opportunities, formally connected mentors and role models in positions to which they were aspiring. That is the kind of exposure to leadership that women, especially Latinas, do not often have. Therefore, the most significant finding by Crespo (2013) is how instrumental participation in formal leadership development programs proved to be in helping Latinas in their career advancement and opportunities in higher education.

Gomez de Torres (2013) studied six Latinas in midlevel positions at community colleges and found that the Latina administrators encountered challenges along their career paths, but were able to overcome them due to: support systems, education, networking, and professional development. Also, a key to their leadership and ability to navigate two worlds as Latinas included: finding their voice, applying a coping mechanism, and embracing the bicultural

identity ingratiation (BII) as an approach to be able to perform cultural frame switching effectively. Although six was a small sample for this study, the findings were notable in that they support findings in so many other studies about Latinas in administration with regard to their needs to navigate the challenging world of academia. Specifically, Gomez de Torres (2013) described Latina administrators having to navigate two worlds that often clash. He added that they were able to figure out how to use their support systems to become successful and adjust to higher education, but they fully acknowledged that they will continue to need support since they did not believe they would ever fit in as Latinas.

In a similar study to the one conducted by Gomez de Torres (2013), Lopez (2013) used the term *Latinidad*, or tendency to view everyone in their surroundings as extended family, to describe the collectivist leadership styles of the Latina administrators that influenced their work experiences and views on being a successful administrator. Lopez (2013) interviewed 12 Mexican American women working in student affairs at public and private four-year institutions in Texas, holding positions ranging from director to vice presidents. Factors Latina administrators shared as having a positive impact on their success included: family and personal influences, education, university environment, and external influences, including mentors, intersections of gender and ethnicity. The most significant finding in the study by Lopez (2013) and in all of the studies about Latina administrators is that although the Latina administrators felt personally connected to their professional roles, the campuses where they worked, and the students they served, they still felt like outsiders who had to straddle two different worlds and learn how to integrate them in order to succeed. Consequently, Latinas find themselves constantly trying to make sense of their worlds and make adjustments to their leadership styles and strategies accordingly.

As demonstrated in the limited literature about Latinas in higher education, Latinas navigate academia having to consider the impact of their identities on their experiences constantly. Latinas' early experiences in higher education journey begin with expectations of obtaining degrees that will provide a successful future. Some stay in academia and take on a variety of staff positions such as faculty, administrators, and service employees. In each of these types of positions, Latinas can be found in all ranks, but often they remain bottlenecked in midlevel. While Latinas/os in higher education may need to contend with racial and ethnic prejudices depending on their unique situations, the challenges faced by Latinas are compounded by prejudices arising from gender stereotypes. As a result, Latinas can have a markedly different experience in higher education than Latino males.

In addition to dealing with perceptions from others, Latinas must also grapple with their own self-concept and evolving identity. To date, however, identity development specific to Latinas has surfaced in literature mostly related to undergraduate student experiences. Therefore, an opportunity exists to explore gender identity and Latina experience in higher education in greater depth. Ferdman and Gallegos (2001) explain that gender, ethnicity, and racial identity identify for Latinas is complex. Often, Latinas have a difficult time distinguishing which of these parts of their identity are being targeted in a negative experience. For example, they also found that "within the family structure and in society at large, Latinas are seen as representing both women and Latinos rather than one or the other" (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001, p. 36). The confusion and uncertainty create doubt in Latinas in a variety of situations and can make them sensitive to the perceptions and expectations of others (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001).

## **Latinas in Senior Level Leadership**

Despite the discrimination issues, specifically sexism and racism, there are Latinas who have advanced in HE and have made it to the highest posts, including being appointed Vice Presidents, Provosts, Chancellors and Presidents of colleges and universities, demonstrating that Latinas have been able to acquire the necessary credentials and skills to get there (de los Santos & Vega, 2008; Hansen, 1997; Kravitz, 2006; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Lopez, 2013; Maes, 2012; Montas-Hunter, 2010; Muñoz, 2010; Ramos, 2008; Savala, 2014). As a marginalized population, advancement does not always come easily for Latinas, and there is a significant gap between the need for Latina senior level representation in HE administration and the number of Latinas actually occupying those positions, which is that very few Latinas reach executive leadership positions (de los Santos & Vega, 2008). As of 2012, 1.6% of all chancellors and presidents in the United States were Latina, which was a total of 52, most of them working at community colleges (ACE, 2012). Unfortunately, the challenges that Latinas must endure to secure such progression is often perceived by Latinas as being greater than other ethnic groups (Maes, 2012; Muñoz, 2010; Ramos, 2008).

Recent studies, almost all of them doctoral dissertations, have explored the journeys of Latinas presidents, each making a point to state the rarity of Latinas being appointed as presidents of institutions of higher education in the United States. The studies on Latina executive leaders in higher education focused on challenges and barriers along their career paths as well, but the main focus of the studies were on pathways to advancement and positive attributes that contributed to the success of these Latinas. The stories of “how they made it” provides strategies for coping with the hostile and chilly HE environments Latinas have experienced and continue to experience. In the following section, I describe some of the positive

attributes that Latina executives shared as keys to their success, followed by the barriers they encountered along their career paths and how they persevered and overcame those barriers to reach executive level positions.

### **Keys to success**

In a 20-year-old study by Hansen (1997) focusing on the bicultural identity of 11 Latina vice presidents and six presidents in California factors of persistence and success as well as obstacles were described in the findings. The persistence and success factors included: (1) supportive family, (2) focused objectives and goals, (3) confidence, (4) working harder, and (5) personal values. In a qualitative study of 23 Latina/o administrators in California, Kravitz (2006) investigated the factors that might be impeding their careers, along with factors of success. The study participants consisted of 22 Latina/o senior level administrators ranging in senior level positions from directors to vice presidents, to presidents, working in the California State University system. From the eight presidents/chancellors participating, only two Latinas were serving as presidents or chancellors, and they were actually only interim in those roles. Nine of the participants (36%) were women and the other 15 participants (64%) were men. The women administrators described their career paths as not really expected, or happening by chance, describing how they were sought after for opportunities and happened to be in the "right place at the right time" when promotions were made possible (Kravitz, 2005, p. 178).

The stories in the study by Kravitz (2006) exposed subtle institutional forms of racism. Kravitz used Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) as theoretical frameworks to analyze the experiences of the participants in her study as she examined their marginality in the context of institutional culture, which was a different approach than other studies because it moved beyond looking only at the identity of Latinas/os, putting



some of the onus of administrator experiences into structural perspective. Factors for success that emerged as themes in the study by Kravitz (2006) included the following: parental support, spousal support, a strong desire to excel and succeed, effective job performance, a strong personal desire to make a difference, a commitment to social justice, having a Ph.D., the influence of the Chicano Movement, formal management training programs, being in the right place at the right time, experiencing strong leadership from the top, and working in Academic Affairs.

Lourido-Habib (2011) interviewed 4 Latina community college presidents who shared personal and professional factors they believed led them to their advancement to the presidency. The personal factors that emerged from the interviews included: having strong ethics, being humble, having a passion for their institutions and the students, being good listeners, and dedicating significant time and flexibility. The professional factors that emerged from the interviews included: having a terminal degree, which all four presidents possessed, and having strong mentors along their career paths. These attributes were consistent with all literature about Latina leadership and career advancement, especially the need to have advanced degrees and strong mentorship.

Finally, Using Bandura's theory of self-efficacy, Montas-Hunter (2012) explored the experiences of eight Latinas in senior leadership by collecting information in an online open-ended questionnaire with questions about identity, leadership, and self-efficacy and found that all participants had a strong sense of self and cited family support as a factor in their successful careers. There were four themes that emerged as factors that contributed to the positive navigation of their career trajectories: (1) a strong sense of values, (2) support networks, (3) self-awareness, and (4) professional experiences (Montas-Hunter, 2012). While the Latina senior

level administrators enjoyed positive influences, they also had challenges but were able to demonstrate how they worked harder to overcome those challenges, which in the end positively contributed to their advancement (Montas-Hunter, 2012). Although eight is a small sample, the findings in this study were consistent with literature about Latinas at all levels who seem to use adversity to build them up and provide them motivation to persevere in challenging environments (Montas-Hunter, 2012).

### **Overcoming obstacles**

In addition to factors emerging from the literature that contributed to Latinas successfully advancing in their careers to positions in senior level leadership, including presidencies, there were also obstacles and barriers that they overcame to get there. Hansen (1997) named two obstacles Latina senior leaders described: (1) career related, including sexism, racism, and tension resulting from differences from campus culture and (2) family related, difficulties balancing work and outside interests, such as family. The Latina vice presidents and presidents in Hansen's study were challenged by these obstacles and had not completely overcome them, but were able to develop strategies to move forward in their careers and not allow them to hold them back. This was a similar sentiment that emerged as a major theme in the mixed-methods study conducted by Muñoz (2010) of Latina community college presidents who discussed the challenges in their career paths and their demonstration of a strong determination that did not allow the discrimination they experienced to define them as leaders.

Factors impeding careers found in the study by Kravitz (2006) consisted of the following: balancing institutional requirements with family needs, the lack of a doctorate or advanced degree, White administrators maintaining the status quo, lack of effective and supportive leadership, institutional racism, encountering racist attitudes among individuals, and working in

Student Affairs. However, the finding that is the most significant and relevant to this study was that Kravitz (2006) noted gender differences among the participants with regard to career goals and paths, leadership perspectives, the formal organized leadership and mentor program in which they participated and the kinds of barriers they felt they needed to overcome to be successful. Kravitz noticed a generational difference regarding career expectations, with women over 50 not having much expectation beyond getting married and with the women under 50 having high career expectations. The barriers for the women over 50 came from having lower expectations from their families and themselves. The women were expected to get married and start families, and their careers seemed more like an alternate life plan if the family life goal did not work out. They also experience a “concrete ceiling” as they considered advancement in their careers. The men in the study by Kravitz, in contrast to the women, seemed to have always had the drive to succeed and were always expected to succeed by their families. The men also spoke about setting short and long term goals for themselves, always taking actions that would put them in positions to be successful in the future despite any challenges they experienced along the way.

Ramos (2008) used the term “*Adobe Ceiling*” in her study of Latina presidents who “broke through” to these top positions, because she found that the low numbers of Latina presidents at 4 year institutions (8 at that time) demonstrated that Latinas were not moving up because unlike the metaphorical “Glass Ceiling,” these women couldn’t see the higher levels they could reach, so their aspirations may be diminished by their own fear of what moving up looks like. Ramos (2008) found that “for Latinas the ceiling is adobe; they cannot see through it, to what is above this ceiling, and it is a thick barrier that does not shatter like glass” (p. 31). That metaphor of adobe shows how aspirations for advancement can be shattered when Latinas lose hope when they do not see themselves represented in positions of senior leadership. Ramos

(2008) found that a majority of her participants labeled themselves, “warriors” when describing how they had to navigate their career trajectory because they had to fight so many obstacles along the way.

The seven senior level Latina administrators who participated in the qualitative research study by Gallegos (2012) were able to take the negative perceptions and experiences of discrimination and positively spin them to highlight their own perseverance, as demonstrated by a comment by one of her participants, who said “this sounds awful to say, but I think we can take more crap for a longer time because that’s what we do” (p. 166). Latinas were accustomed to fighting battles throughout their careers and continue to do so in their roles as presidents at their institutions of higher education.

### **Assimilation, Acculturation or Segregation**

While most of the studies about Latina presidents focused on their career paths and ways they arrived at their senior level posts, there were two scholars who explored the idea of how Latinas blended into the campus cultures. When looking at how the Latina vice presidents and presidents experienced either assimilation, integration or segregation, Hansen (1997) found that the majority of the Latina Vice Presidents and Presidents, or 15 of the 17 experienced integration, which Hansen defined as maintaining the Latinas’ primary culture and that of the college culture, while only two experienced assimilations, which Hansen defined as mainstreaming into culture of the college. Segregation was defined by Hansen as maintaining own culture and not mainstreaming into the culture of the college, which none of the participants in her study experienced (Hansen, 1997).

Maes (2012) conducted an in-depth qualitative study of three Latina community college presidents who all noted racist and sexist experiences that they had to overcome along their

career paths. The most notable finding Maes (2012) highlighted about the Latina presidents was how they were able to maintain their own cultures and remain true to their personal values, which they attribute as key to their successful careers. Maes (2012) noted how none of the presidents had “completely assimilated into the mainstream American culture, which is reflected in their constant expression and pride of their cultural and ethnic identities” (p. 194). The institutions where they work all had significant Latina/o student populations and those students benefit from leaders who reflect their cultural backgrounds and values (Maes, 2012). Latinas who advanced to senior level leadership positions admit that their career advancement, while full of opportunity, included instances of sexism, racism, and cultural discrimination, often experienced through microaggressions, both subtle and overt in nature (Gallegos, 2012; Huber, 2010; Lourido-Habib, 2011; Maes, 2012; Muñoz, 2010).

### **Analytical Framework**

Almost all studies attempting to document, analyze and explain the experiences of Latina administrators in higher education seem to be trying to make sense of why individuals who have earned the necessary credentials, have worked hard, and who have advanced despite difficulties, are still working on the margins of Higher Education (HE), and specifically in Student Affairs (SA). Over 40 years of research is demonstrating that Latinas are still not feeling accepted as full members of academia. This study is yet another one shedding light on Latina administrators in SA, so the only way to frame the analysis of their experiences when focusing on gender, race, and ethnicity is to create a setup and analytical framework and list of assumptions based on three well-known theoretical perspectives.

In order to properly frame and analyze the experiences of the participants in this study, it was necessary to look to theoretical frameworks that have been found to be useful when

examining the experiences of Latinas navigating academia, spaces that are mostly White. The next section provides a description and discussion of the three theoretical perspectives from which elements are selected to form the analytical framework for this study: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) and intersectionality. All three theories account for how gender, race, and ethnicity comprise the different aspects of the Latina identity and the concept of intersectionality pulls together the relevant elements from these three theoretical frameworks to form an understanding of Latina identity as they consider how their gender, race, and ethnicity intertwine to form how they are perceived and the ways they navigate the higher education environment, often predominantly White and male dominated spaces. The following is a brief overview of each theory and how each informs the way the data in this study was analyzed and how the findings were presented.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) traces its origin to legal studies when scholars introduced the idea that the legal system contained inherent biases that prejudiced nonwhite participants (Solorzano, Villalpando & Oseguera, 2005). Bell (1995) was an early scholar who wanted race and the acknowledgment of inequities due to the dominance of Whiteness, to be openly discussed in academic discourse. Solorzano and Yosso (2002) define CRT in education as, “a framework or set of basic insights, perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (p. 25). What CRT does is to help to explain how people of color navigate “White spaces” where race is not always overtly discussed, yet the impact is clearly felt (Hiraldo, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Scholars began to use CRT to frame the experiences of marginalized groups in education as a recognition that power dynamics existed and impacted people of color negatively (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Ladson-Billings (1998) described the use of CRT in education as a way to emphasize the importance of narratives, testimonies, and storytelling to challenge the norms of academia and to establish how race matters. Specifically, Ladson-Billings states how CRT allows analysts to create a compelling counter-narrative that captures the experiences of non-White individuals. Ladson-Billings stated that:

It is because of the meaning and value imputed to whiteness that CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power. (p. 9)

Solorzano and Yosso (2002) identified five themes that form the basic tenets of CRT framing issues of race and other marginalized identities in education:

1. *The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination.* This theme underscores that while race is at the center of oppression, there is intersectionality with other identities also subject to marginalization and discrimination, such as “gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent, and sexuality” (p. 25, Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).
2. *The challenge to dominant ideology.* This theme rejects “the traditional claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, colorblindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity” (p. 26, Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).
3. *The commitment to social justice.* This theme looks to eliminate racism and other forms of oppression while at the same time providing empowerment to marginalized groups (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

4. *The centrality of experiential knowledge.* This theme gives voice to people of color by legitimizing their experiences as valid information and allows this knowledge to be shared in a variety of nontraditional methods, such as “storytelling, family histories, and other fees, scenarios, parables, *cuENTOS*, *testimonios*, chronicles, and narratives (p. 26, Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).
5. *The transdisciplinary perspective.* This theme helps to provide context for the experiences of marginalized people by placing those experiences within time frames, both historical and contemporary and allows for knowledge and methodologies from a variety of disciplines to help guide research that deals with racism, sexism, and classism (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).

In challenging the current theories that guide SA work, Patton, McEwen, Rendón and Howard-Hamilton (2007) suggest applying CRT to SA research as a way to acknowledge the past exclusion of race as a factor and to recognize the power structure that is reinforced when the socio-political realities of marginalized groups are ignored.

One example for the application of CRT as a theoretical framework can be found in a Latina faculty member’s study about her own life story and journey to and through academia (Salazar, 2011). Salazar (2011) used CRT to tell her own life story, which became primary data for her self-ethnographic study. Her story was a counter narrative that told a story of resilience in what she described as focusing on a success model and combat the usual deficit model (Salazar, 2011). Her life story was one of being constantly stereotyped and underestimated and she could only attribute these kinds of prejudices she experienced by people who did not know her, could only be explained using the themes found in CRT that all highlight how systemic racism and oppression could be in education (Salazar, 2011).



## **Latino Critical Race Theory**

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) has been used to distinguish the experience of Latinas/os in education further, adding to the foundation set by CRT (Bernal, 2002; Davila & deBradley, 2010; Hernandez-Truyol, 2002; Hiraldo, 2010). Due to the complexity of their identity, Latina/os struggle to clearly identify themselves racially since they do not fit into the Black/White dichotomy, so they mostly identify ethnically and nationally based on their country of origin (Espino, 2010; Huber, 2006). The nuances of the Latino identity necessitate the inclusion of Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) in the analytical framework for this study. According to Solorzano and Yosso (2001), LatCrit examines “the way in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly impact on the educational structures, processes and discourses that affect People of Color generally and Latina/os specifically” (p. 479). LatCrit has been used in concert with CRT by other scholars in education.

LatCrit brings additional considerations of how language and culture shape experiences and environments. Huber (2010) utilized LatCrit to study the experiences of undocumented students and discusses Proposition 187 in California, which allowed and encouraged law enforcement officials to stop individuals whom they believed appeared to be Mexican, to ask them to produce documents to prove their United States residency or citizenship. The proposition and actions by law enforcement to confront only certain Mexicans who appeared to be Mexican, while those who were light-skinned and appeared White were “passable” enough not to be confronted, was a clear racialization of Mexicans in the Southwest who were granted citizenship as per the Treat of Guadalupe Hidalgo. Appearances and other Latina/o traits, such as language and culture are the reasons why LatCrit has been added to the framework for the analysis of the experiences of Latina/os.

## Critical Race Feminism and Intersectionality

Another theory that was developed to combine the complexity of race and gender is Critical Race Feminism (CRF), also originated from the field of law and was developed by a group of women legal scholars who felt excluded from the discourse of race by their gender (Few, 2007). Crenshaw (1991) was an early scholar who presented the idea of intersectionality within the framework of CRF as a way to underscore how women of color experience both sexism as women and racism as a person of color, but have an added dimension of marginalization within each identity because each of those *isms* are usually discussed separately. Crenshaw (1991) used the idea of intersectionality to point out how “the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately” (p. 1244).

The use of CRF acknowledges that gender deserves stronger consideration as another marginalized identity along with race. In CRF, the intersection of race and gender and how it affects how women of color navigate White and male spaces is put into context in places where White males are the dominant culture while women of color are marginalized in these spaces (Cobb-Roberts, 2011; Few, 2007; Sule, 2011). CRF also provides additional context for women of color to “name their location and position in social and political structures” (Cobb-Roberts, 2011). Voices of women of color are validated by CRF in that it legitimizes the challenging experiences that the intersections of race and gender bring to women of color.

The concept of intersectionality in CRF brings together the three theoretical perspectives discussed in the previous sections and acknowledges the multiple aspects about Latinas that inform their perspectives and experiences at PWIs. Crenshaw (1991) used the term *intersectionality* to highlight the nuances that the combination of gender and race brought to the

experiences of women of color in the context of sexual violence, but the concept has expanded to include identity-related challenges in other realms. Women of color experience sexism and racism as they navigate academia and being female creates a marginalization with gender as women are subjected to sexism and being a person of color mean they are marginalized with regard to race, and are subject to racism.

Crenshaw (1991) believed that there was a “need to account for multiple grounds of identity when considering how the social world is constructed” (p. 1245). For Latinas, such challenges are compounded by the interplay between gender, race, and ethnic identity, further complicating the way their experiences are framed and interpreted. Depending on how Latinas are socialized, the regions where they live, or how they choose to self-identify, any one of these identity factors can become more relevant to salient than others at any given time and occasion.

### **Analysis of Latina Administrator Experiences in Student Affairs**

The previous section provided an overview of the analytical framework used in this study, which was guided by components of theoretical perspectives of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) and intersectionality. Collectively, these three theories logically converge to form a clear framework for exploring the unique challenges Latina SA administrators face as they negotiate their work environment. These theories frame the experiences of individuals who have been marginalized in predominantly White environments, including those of Latinas in administrative positions in SA. Moreover, each theory emphasizes the value of narratives, storytelling, or, in LatCrit, *testimonios* (testimonies) as a way of portraying and challenging dominant culture and its effects. These theories were also selected because they provide a voice to marginalized individuals in social systems in which they can experience microaggressions due to their marginalized identities,

where they may be targeted as minorities in any given setting (Sue, Capodilupo, Torino, Bucceri, Aisha, Nadal, & Esquilin, 2007). Although the concentration of women in entry and mid level positions is a common occurrence in a variety of occupations where men monopolize the top positions, this pattern appears especially pronounced in SA with most SSAO positions dominated by White men (Stimpson, 2009).

What these theoretical perspectives helped to do was to set up a list of assumptions by which to analyze the narratives shared by the Latina participants. Based on these theories, Whiteness prevails as the primary identity and standard for comparison for Latinas. Therefore, I developed the following list of assumptions to guide the analysis of the narratives shared by the Latina administrators in this study:

1. Latinas experience racism despite them being referred to as “Brown” or the “in between race” space (Marger, 2011). Depending on appearance, being black or white doesn’t matter because Whiteness is not the property of Latinos. Full categorization of White was changed in the 1970s when Hispanic was added to the U.S. Census in order to more accurately categorize Latinas/os for affirmative action and other special government programs and services (Farron, 2010).
2. Latinas experience sexism, but they are not grouped in with White women during feminist movements, so the issues may not look the same and are exacerbated by racial and ethnic prejudices.
3. Latinas deal with additional prejudices that African-Americans may not have to deal with as they add language and immigration status to their assumed identities. Even as compared to Asian Americans who have similar considerations, it would not be the same

since Asians are often labeled as “the model minorities,” a label not given to Latina/os, who are stereotyped as being less capable.

4. Latinas are “outsiders” in higher education and have always been, but they seek out and find camaraderie among other women of color. They bond and provide support for each other as they commiserate about their negative experiences and share strategies for survival and success.
5. Despite all of the prejudices, Latinas can use their cultural capital as an advantage as they enter SA. Some typical Latina traits cited in the literature that may come in handy in SA include being nurturing, caring, the ability to empathize and see the perspectives of others because of the way Latinas have to straddle multiple worlds and languages in their everyday lives (Anzaldua, 1987).

### **Summary**

The previous section described studies about Latina administrators in SA and their identity-related challenges in the form of sexism and racism as they described discrimination, microaggressions, and feelings of isolation and otherness at their institutions, mostly at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs). While higher education has provided many opportunities for Latinas to earn degrees that increase their employability to provide upward mobility, it has also provided a viable career opportunity in the ranks of faculty, administrators, and staff at a variety of institutions across the United States. However, the same structure that has increased the diversity of students, faculty, and administrators has also created barriers for Latinas who are bottlenecked in midlevel administrator positions and rarely advance to senior level leadership in higher education. Although any administrator may experience identity-related challenges that affect their work lives, Latina SA administrators, embody a complex identity that

influences work experiences, career advancement and ultimately, their career aspirations (Garza, 1996; Maes, 2012; Mateo, 2010).

Very little research has been conducted on how the intersections of Latinas' gender, racial, and ethnic background affects how they navigate their career. Especially lacking are studies focusing on Latinas from Caribbean areas, including Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans. Chicana and Mexican-American women have been the primary participants of the currently available studies on Latina administrators in academia. This could possibly be a result of the areas where the studies have been conducted, mostly in the Southwest and Midwest. This is especially true of earlier studies, some of which focused on elementary and secondary education administrators and not on HE administrators (Acevedo, 1979; Duran, 1982; Esquibel, 1977; Lopez, 1978). While researchers have examined a variety of aspects of the work lives of SA administrators and their career progressions, Latina SA administrators in midlevel management positions have been largely ignored or grouped in with the experiences of all other administrators (Taub & McEwen, 2006; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Therefore, to gain better insight and possible solutions, this study explored how Latina administrators in midlevel SA positions have navigated their careers and how race, ethnicity, and gender identity influences career trajectories and aspirations in this environment.

Latinas face many obstacles along their career trajectories, some of which begin very early as Latinas begin their undergraduate experiences and continue as they pursue graduate degrees and, later, employment in academia as faculty or administrators (Aldaco, 2010; Beck-Lethlean, 2008; Espino, 2010; Garza, 1996; Gonzalez, 2002; Mateo 2010; Montas-Hunter, 2012). Nevertheless, Latinas have been able to overcome these challenges and advanced in HE, advancing to the executive level positions, including being appointed Vice Presidents, Provosts,

Chancellors and Presidents of colleges and universities, clearly demonstrating that Latinas possess the skills, education, and competencies to be successful throughout their careers (de los Santos and Vega, 2008; Lopez, 2013; Maes, 2012; Muñoz, 2010). While there is literature that highlights the mixed relationship Latinas have with academia, there are still very few studies available, and most of them are unpublished dissertations and not in widely distributed peer-reviewed scholarly publications where there may be wider exposure to the issues Latina administrators face in academia (Beck-Lethlean, 2008; Crespo, 2013; Gallegos, 2012; Gomez de Torres, 2013; Hernandez & Moralez, 1999; Lopez, 2013; Mateo, 2010). The next chapter describes the methodology and research design for this study.

## Chapter III

### Methodology

#### Introduction

The methodology and research design will be introduced in this chapter. Specifically, the sampling and selection of study participants will be described. Next, the methods for data collection and data analysis will be discussed, followed by issues related to confidentiality and trustworthiness, researcher's role and reflexivity, including a narrative of my story, validity, and limitations of the study. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Latina midlevel student affairs administrators describe their institutional experiences as they negotiated their career paths?
2. What is the impact of gender, race, and ethnicity on the career paths and opportunities for advancement of Latina professionals in student affairs?
3. How are the career aspirations of Latina midlevel student affairs administrators influenced by their institutional experiences?

#### Epistemology

Informed by past research, this study explored how intersections of race, ethnicity, and gender influence the work experiences, career advancement, and aspirations of Latina student affairs administrators in higher education. This study is epistemologically grounded on the assumptions that gender, race, and ethnicity influence the work experiences of Latinas and that social identity has an impact on their career trajectories. In essence, this assumption is rooted in Berger and Luckmann's (1966) work on *epistemology*, in which they explained how knowledge about reality is socially constructed in subjective and individual experiences. Hofer (2001) further described epistemology as "the nature and justification of human knowledge" (p. 355),



and explains that there are several common elements to epistemological research, including “beliefs about the definition of knowledge, how knowledge is constructed, how knowledge is evaluated, where knowledge resides, and how knowing occurs” (Hofer, p. 355). Thus, epistemology is knowledge rooted in the individual experience within the context of the social condition. This approach holds true for the Latina midlevel SA administrator informants because they perceived their own realities based on their experiences navigating their educational processes and careers in HE. While each Latina in this study brought her own life and career experience to the interviews, these individual narratives have been woven together to construct shared Latina administrator perspectives as a representation of a collective experience.

### **Research Design**

Interview-based qualitative research provides participants a voice on important social issues. To best facilitate the process of storytelling, *narrative inquiry* was selected for this study (Chase, 2003). Creswell (2009) explained the process of qualitative research as “emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars to general themes, and the researcher making interpretations of the meaning of the data” (p. 4). Narrative inquiry is particularly useful when trying to keep a balance between sharing the stories of participants and understanding their collective experience as a product of social context. In narrative analysis, stories are supported by social characteristics and context. As a result, it is important to collect rich background demographic information at the start of each interview because this can enhance the relevance and coherence of the researcher’s analysis of the data and the interpretation of the results (Chase, 2003). Chase (2003) describes the two major principles of “narrative analysis” as follows:

(1) narration is a major way in which people make sense of experience, construct the self, and create and communicate meaning, and (2) personal narratives, no matter how unique and individual, are inevitably social in character (p. 79).

For this study, Latinas were provided the opportunity to tell their unique stories in open-ended, semi-structured interviews guided by a list of questions designed to gather information that would best answer the research questions. Each participant was regarded as the expert and primary informant of her own experience as a Latina SA administrator in a midlevel position (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, several theoretical perspectives, including Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) informed the analysis of the information shared during the interviews. All of these theoretical frameworks are rooted in the assumptions that race, ethnicity, and gender are all attributes that may impact the experiences of individuals who participate in American higher education, and institution that was originally intended to serve white, male and elite audiences, not women or people of color. Even with these theoretical frameworks in mind, the interviews were conducted in a way that were as open ended as possible and gave the participants opportunities to share anything on the topic they felt was relevant to their lived experiences.

### **Participants**

Criterion sampling was used for the selection of participants for this study. This method was appropriate because the participants needed to meet a specific set of criteria in order to participate (Patton, 1990). Patton (1990) describes criterion sampling as a type of “purposeful sampling” for “information-rich cases for study in depth” (p. 169). Using criterion sampling, the self-identification of the Latina identity was the key criteria for participation. In addition to self-identification as Latina, participants were required to be an active student affairs professional. According to the recruitment website for the 2014 NASPA Region I Midlevel Institute, midlevel

administrators must have had “a minimum of five years as a full-time student affairs professional and responsibility for the direction, control, or supervision of one or more Student Affairs functions, or one or more professional staff members” (NASPA, 2014). Therefore, the selection criteria for this study were: (1) self-identify as Latina or Hispanic, (2) currently hold a midlevel administrative student affairs position in higher education (e.g., assistant director or associate dean titles), and (3) have a minimum of five post-baccalaureate full-time years of experience working in higher education.

Participants were recruited primarily from my professional network. This network has developed over 20 years of working in SA. Many of these networks were accessible through online identity-based groups, of which I am an active member. Recruitment commenced with a letter of invitation sent via email to midlevel administrators who were part of my professional network (see Appendix B). Although it was not known as to whether they would self-identify as Latina at the time of the invitation, I believed this to be a strong likelihood based on my past interactions with them. I also posted a flyer in several online SA groups to ask colleagues to assist with recruitment (see Appendix C).

Initial recruitment efforts generated a list of 32 possible participants. After applying the selection criteria, 26 self-identified Latinas currently holding midlevel administrator positions with five or more years of full-time administrative experience in student affairs at various higher education institutions in the United States participated in the study. The participants’ self-identification as Latina was critical to fully reflect this study’s theoretical framework (CRT, LatCrit, and CRF), which were used to examine the intersection of race, ethnicity, and gender in Latina identity as it relates to higher education settings (Maxwell, 1998).

Prior to participants being selected for interviews, they were provided with a Research Participant Consent Form (see Appendix C). This document reiterated the demographic characteristics that were required to participate in this study to confirm that participants met the established criteria (Patton, 1990). The Consent Form also described the interview protocol and informed the potential participants that, upon receiving permission, all interviews would be digitally recorded and then transcribed verbatim for data analysis. Once participant eligibility to participate in the study was confirmed, they were asked to return the signed forms via U.S. mail.

### **Data Collection**

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used to collect data for this study. After the receipt of signed consent forms, semi-structured, open-ended interview was scheduled and conducted with 26 study participants, both in person and over the telephone. All 26 interviews took place in the spring of 2014. Eight of the 26 interviews were conducted in person, and due to distance and travel limitations, the remaining 18 interviews were conducted over the telephone. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Marshall and Rossman (1995) identified that narrative inquiry aligned well with developing feminist and critical theory, which are closely related to the theoretical concepts framing this study. The data collection instrument was a semi-structured interview guide. The guide was comprised of, first, demographic questions about the participants' personal and professional backgrounds. Secondly, the guide included interview questions aimed to answer the research questions and they were open-ended allowing participants to share their narratives freely if they wanted to elaborate further on any particular points (see Appendix D). The background questions asked about race, ethnicity, cultural background, languages spoken, work titles, institutions, years in current professional role, and institutional affiliation. For consistency,

each interview followed a protocol with a list of questions about work experiences, career advancement, and aspirations as they related to the participants' Latina identity, and how these factors impacted the participants' work experiences. However, participants were allowed to elaborate and share any additional information they deemed pertinent to this study. In addition, in order to obtain rich data and clarify the meaning of participant responses, probing questions were used to prompt elaboration of responses to the main questions asked of each interviewee.

### **Confidentiality**

Prior to commencement, ethical approval for conducting this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board. Consent for participation and the audio-recording of interviews was obtained in writing from each participant. To ensure participant confidentiality, real names were not used in the transcripts and the reporting of results. Instead, a pseudonym was assigned to each participant. The name of a respective institution of each participant was also redacted from the transcripts. In its place, each institution was labeled with its Carnegie classification. All interviews were recorded with a digital recorder. Digital audio files were stored on a password-protected USB memory drive and is stored in a locked drawer in the researcher's home office. All digital audio files, demographic questionnaires, transcripts, and researcher interview notes will be destroyed once the files are no longer needed for further analysis. However, all data collected will be retained for at least three years, in compliance with IRB guidelines.

### **Data Analysis**

As recommended by Creswell (2009), I took notes during the interviews as a safeguard for equipment failure. This practice also helped me identify emergent themes that appeared relevant to the research questions. After interviews were conducted, the recordings were transcribed and the narratives were analyzed and coded. Interviews were coded by reading

through the transcripts to identify and highlight themes that emerged and were common among the study participants.

After coding, I reviewed the transcripts to identify major themes that could constitute answers to the research questions. Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest several techniques for identifying and grouping themes when reading through the transcripts. These techniques include: (a) finding repetitions, (b) identifying unique terms, (c) interpreting analogies and metaphors, (d) noting natural shifts in topics (such as pauses), (e) comparing similarities and differences, (f) considering missing information, and (g) noticing linguistic connectors, such as “because,” “since,” “if,” or “then” (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I coded data that pertained to how race, ethnicity, and gender may have influenced the work experiences, career advancement, and aspirations of the study participants.

Data was analyzed to identify patterns across the experiences of the different study participants. To do so, the analysis had to focus on the meanings that participants ascribed to their experiences (Trahar, 2009). Finally, despite examining the data deductively through the theoretical framework established at the outset of this study, narratives were identified utilizing an inductive approach. That is, although some of the themes were contained in the interview questions, not all themes could be anticipated (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). However, the analytical framework informed by three theoretical perspectives of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF) aided in developing the assumptions about Latina administrator experiences in SA, as described in chapter two, which also produced a number of possible themes.

I read through all transcripts once and on the second and third read, I began highlighting groupings of terms and phrases that stood out and matched the themes from the research

questions about the Latina work experiences in student affairs. There were 41 initial codes identified, many of them found in several of the transcripts. Some of these codes seemed to be similar or could be combined with other codes, so it was an iterative process that led narrowing down to main themes and subthemes. For the findings chapter, I identified 3 major themes that emerged, along with 18 subthemes, all derived from the 41 initial codes.

### **Trustworthiness**

Leech and Ongwuegbuzie (2007) support the use of more than one type of analytical method to achieve triangulation of the results and to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative data findings. For this study, I used constant comparison, also referred to as coding, to identify the top themes to answer the research questions. After codes were generated, I used classical content analysis to determine the dominant overarching themes in the narratives (Leech & Ongwuegbuzie, 2007). The trustworthiness of the findings of this study was also enhanced by transcribing all interviews from the recordings verbatim, cross-referencing the data with notes taken by me during the interview process, and member checking.

Member checking, or respondent validation, gives the researcher a way to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meanings of what the participants were trying to say in their interviews, and can highlight any biases and misunderstanding as conclusions are drawn (Maxwell, 2005). Therefore, I sent the transcript of each interview to all 26 participants as a document attachment via email (See Appendix E), with a deadline by which to reply to me with any edits, questions, or comments. This gave participants a window of opportunity to check the accuracy of their responses by asking them for further clarification. I received replies from 21 of the 26 participants, confirming that what I sent to them was accurate. One participant sent back an edited copy. This participant realized that there was a segment of the interview during which

she discussed a specific attribute about her appearance that she thought might be easily identifiable and therefore, asked me to delete that section so that it would not be included in the analysis. I complied with the request. I did not hear back from the other seven participants by the deadline that I had provided, so I sent one last reminder but still did not receive a response. As I stated in my communication to the participants when I sent the attachment with the interview transcript if I had not heard from them by the deadline I took that to mean that the information I sent was accurate. Respondent validation (Bryman, 1988) is an effective method widely known in qualitative research, and can be used as a form of triangulation (Leech & Ongwuegbuzie, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The data collected during the interviews was as accurate as possible, with due diligence taken to try to reflect participants' perspectives and honest opinions when they answered my interview questions.

### **Researcher's Role and Reflexivity**

Due to the highly interpretive nature of qualitative research, it is important for researchers to transparently position themselves within their work (Coffey, 2002). In fact, Maxwell (2005) believes that "separating your research from other aspects of your life cuts you off from a major source of insight, hypotheses, and validity checks" (p. 36). To reveal my own relationship to this study, I shared my story as a Latina working in SA to further explain my topic selection and the choice of methodology. This exercise, according to Skeggs (2002), is "a call for accountability and responsibility in research, not for self-formation and self-promotion" (p. 369). Maxwell (2005) suggests that researchers include an "identity memo" describing their background, goals, and relevance to the research questions. Therefore, in the following narrative, I humbly share my own story as it relates to my identity research, and what led me to become interested in this topic.



As a Latina SA midlevel administrator with more than five years of professional experience, I meet all of the criteria for being a member of the population of this study. I have over 20 years of experience working in the SA field in a variety of capacities and roles, and I have become increasingly aware of how my Latina identity has impacted my career advancement and aspirations. Born in the Dominican Republic, I was brought to the United States before the age of one by parents who were seeking a better life for themselves and their family. I grew up in the Bronx and became aware at an early age that my heritage and appearance were different from those around me. Most of the children in my elementary school were either Black or Puerto Rican. I consider myself an Afro-Latina because I may appear Black or mixed race to those who do not know me. As such, I realized that there was confusion about my ethnic background and race early in my life. As far as I was aware, my siblings and I were the only Dominican children in our neighborhood and in our schools, so we were picked on and teased by Black and Puerto Rican children, including getting into physical altercations as I tried to defend myself and my siblings. This changed over the years as more Dominican families moved into my neighborhood and the teasing diminished. However, the feeling of being an outsider in my neighborhood and in the elementary school I attended is a part of a painful childhood memory that has stayed with me as an adult and has sometimes permeated my professional life. Feeling marginalized early in my life showed me that, although ethnicities and nationalities descending from Spanish-speaking countries are grouped under the category of Hispanic or Latino, there were distinct differences among them and how they viewed each other culturally.

Futhermore, due to my mother's limited ability to speak English, my first three years in elementary school were spent in a bilingual, mostly Spanish-speaking class because the school administration thought I did not speak or read English. However, I had attended pre-school and

kindergarten in English and had already learned how to read and write English. Therefore, it was confusing for me as a small child to now have mostly Spanish instruction in school. I quickly adjusted, but I remember a second-grade teacher seeming angry when I would write in English instead of Spanish. It was not until the middle of third grade that my teacher realized that I was reading and writing equally well in Spanish and English and made the recommendation to switch me to an English-only class, where I also remember seeing a big difference in the rigor and amount of assigned academic work. This increase in workload was another major adjustment. In general, these early experiences with discrimination and displacement were the driving forces that motivated me to succeed academically, never wanting to be perceived as less than capable. Notably, I strongly related to a theme in Gallegos's study (2012) on Latina identity, which found that several Latina participants experienced and overcame discrimination in their childhoods, and that this obstacle motivated them to achieve beyond the expectations of their early educators, instilling in them a drive for excellence.

My early exposure to true diversity came when I attended a very diverse all-girls Catholic high school in Manhattan. Because of its proximity to the United Nations, I was fortunate to be exposed to a wide variety of cultures, so I did not feel that I stood out in any way. Meeting girls from a variety of countries, who spoke 2 to 3 languages made me feel like I fit right in. This wonderful experience allowed me to seek out diverse settings as I considered my choices of undergraduate institutions. I chose a small public liberal arts college about 90 miles from where I lived because it was close enough to where my family lived, but far enough that it was a different experience geographically. It was at this college that I began my career in SA.

Like many other SA administrators and most of my study participants, my introduction to SA as a career began during my undergraduate years when I served as a resident assistant. I

had several conversations about SA with my residence director (RD), who happened to be an African-American woman. Furthermore, I was also aware that the dean of students at my undergraduate institution was also an African-American woman who I really admired—and still do. She is now a vice president of SA at a large public state university in New Jersey. In retrospect, I am unsure if it was because they were women of color, but I was motivated to emulate them and follow in their paths. As a result, it seemed logical to me that becoming a RD would be an ideal next step. Meanwhile, I was intrigued with working in HE, a career I knew little about until I went away to college and lived on campus. My RD advised me to try being an RD part-time first so that I could also be a graduate assistant and get my master's degree while gaining residence life experience. That is exactly what I did, and I ended up attending, living and working at a Catholic institution in New Jersey that was diverse enough and welcoming, so I felt right at home at this new place where I felt that could easily thrive and succeed.

After graduating with a master's degree in educational administration and supervision, I accepted a full-time RD position at a small public college in New Jersey. I enjoyed my RD job. However, two years later, my previous supervisor called me when an assistant director in residence life position opened up at the same institution where I also wanted to pursue a doctoral degree. I transitioned to other assistant director positions and have also held positions such as associate dean for campus life and assistant dean for multicultural affairs. Presently, I am the dean of students and assistant vice president for student affairs at a mid-size, private university in the northeast.

In hindsight, I was very lucky to have the guidance of several mentors from a variety of ethnic backgrounds who gave me good advice and shared the challenges of advancing in HE. One message I kept hearing from many sources was that getting a terminal degree was a

necessity if I ever wanted to become an SSAO. This advice is consistent with the literature on pathways to SSAO positions (Biddix, 2013; Blackhurst 2000a; Stimpson, 2009). However, I received mixed messages about the types of positions I should take as a Latina. I was specifically told by several women of color that I should stay away from positions that were related to diversity or multicultural affairs because I might be pigeonholed into these types of positions for the rest of my career. Interestingly, my role in multicultural affairs helped with my self-efficacy and boosted my self-confidence and competence levels because as a Latina I experienced discrimination first-hand and was able to understand concepts of marginalization and ways I could help others develop strategies for coping and overcoming bias-related encounters. I attribute this formative time to the unique understanding I was able to bring to the position based on my experience in HE and my identity.

Unfortunately, the literature is clear that positions that are historically ethnic, racial, and gender-diverse are not only less valued, but are least likely to lead to SSAO positions (Blackhurst, 2000a). Therefore, when I applied for and was offered the position as assistant vice president and dean of students at a medium-sized predominantly White institution, I felt like I had defied gravity and achieved something amazing, yet unusual. I had not finished my doctorate yet and had just collected data for my dissertation. I felt fortunate to be hired by a culturally competent and progressive White male Vice President who shared my passion for social justice, especially my commitment to teaching tolerance, acceptance, and awareness on many topics including race, ethnicity and LGBTQ plus identities. He was to be my new supervisor, and I believed that he regarded me as competent, appreciated my 20 years of experience in SA and had enough confidence in me to take on this intensive position knowing that I would still be looking to complete the dissertation and doctoral degree during my transition into this new position.

More Latinas would apply and advance to senior level positions if there were more SSAOs like this who were willing to look beyond stereotypes and give Latinas and other women of color an opportunity. African American actress Viola Davis said it best during her Emmys acceptance speech in 2015: “The only thing that separates women of color from anyone else is opportunity.”

Nevertheless, I felt this career advancement was well earned, as I had worked hard and prepared myself throughout my 20 plus year career by taking full advantage of all opportunities to gain as much experience as possible in every position I held. Another advantage to having a supervisor who believes in you as a professional and supports you are the variety of experiences that vote of confidence provides for introducing increasing responsibilities. As I consider my own career advancement, I credit excellent supervisors and mentors who supported my professional development, not just by providing days off without using vacation days, but also by providing departmental funding and ideas for how to save money by room sharing and taking advantage of free meals at conferences. I often invested in my own professional development by paying for travel expenses and registration to conferences when the institutions I was working for could not fund my travel. I also networked and asked for funding for conferences through departments like diversity offices, making sure I promised to work on additional committee projects in return. These strategies worked well for me and helped me gain additional experience, further adding to my overall professional development.

By getting involved both on and off campus, I was able to network with professionals at other institutions, build on my work experience and gain stronger administrative skills and abilities, which afforded me the confidence to pursue promotions, taking on advanced positions with increasingly responsible duties. Professional association involvement also provided me with several career-changing opportunities such as exposure to Latina senior leaders, connections to

other Latinas for peer mentorship, and opportunities to provide service to the organizations, making me eligible to receive several awards and recognitions. All of these experiences put me in advantageous positions when I sought out promotions or applied for senior level positions.

It is possible that my career experiences have informed how I have conducted this study and contributed to my desire to encourage the same professional development for other Latinas who are entering SA and helping them learn how to navigate their own career paths and continuously strive for self-improvement and advancement when possible. Due to my experience and personal perspectives on HE and the field of SA, an unavoidable bias exists for how I may gather, analyze, and synthesize the data for this study. This bias is common in qualitative research due to its interpretative nature. In contrast to quantitative approaches, bias in qualitative research can be a strength as formative experiences, as outlined above, can provide unique insights into a phenomenon that would go unnoticed otherwise. In light of this, according to Saldaña (2009), I met the seven important personal attributes that are necessary for successful coding, which were: (1) being organized, (2) having perseverance, (3) having the ability to deal with ambiguity, (4) flexibility, (5) creativity, (6) being rigorously ethical, and (7) utilizing an extensive vocabulary (p. 28-29). My biases certainly played a role in how the data is interpreted and how the meaning of the experiences was co-constructed.

However, through sharing my own personal experiences with the topic, I am setting my personal biases on the research record so that reviewers can further understand the nature of my analyses and interpretations. Still, measures to reduce bias were taken because it can affect the reliability and validity of the findings. It was important, for example, that I did not simply seek confirmation of my own personal experience in the data gathered from the 26 participants. As such, qualitative researchers need to take certain measures to limit the effects of bias. To do so, I

ensured that all participants were interviewed with the same set of interview questions and protocol, which were recorded and transcribed for external review if needed. Also, I made sure to member check by sending all participants an electronic text file with their own interview transcript and asked each of them to verify their own transcript and check for accuracy (Saldaña, 2009).

Ultimately, my being a Latina mid-level administrator was beneficial to this study because I have a deep understanding of the subject matter. This intimate knowledge of the topic creates the opportunity for richer interpretations of the data and the ability to recognize important themes in the data. This experiential knowledge of the subject can also add to the validity of the results (Maxwell, 2005). According to Maxwell (2005), ignoring what the researcher knows “can seriously damage the proposal’s credibility” (p. 38). Moreover, this study was enhanced by the familiarity that resulted from participants relating to me as a fellow Latina, which provided me access and helped develop a quick rapport that encouraged candid sharing by the participants. Reynolds (2002) shared a similar experience about her qualitative research as a Black female researcher whose participants fall in the same racial and gender profile. While there seemed to be some apprehension due to a difference in socio-economic status or educational background, Reynolds was still able to gain access as a Black female that might not have come so easily for researchers of other racial or ethnic backgrounds (Reynolds, 2002).

### **Limitations of the Study**

There are several limitations to this study. First, this study only looks at Latinas in midlevel administrative positions and not entry-level administrators or SSAOs. Therefore, this study is limited to one segment of SA administrators. It is difficult to draw inferences about whether, and to what extent, the career aspirations and work experiences of Latina SA midlevel

administrators are similar to all Latinas in different career stages within SA. Rather, this study was an in-depth inquiry into a specific group of Latinas holding midlevel administrative positions in SA who had worked in HE for five or more years.

Second, the findings of this study are context-bound; the institutional types and unique environments in which these Latina administrators worked influenced their work experiences and cannot be generalized to all institution types. Another possible issue is that there are limitations to the use of a pan-ethnic category such as the term *Latina*, which, depending on the experiences of each identifying as such, may include race, ethnicity, and gender. Because there are so many variations on how each Latina in this study self-identified, one aspect of Latina identity may emerge as more salient than others and may limit the way that the overall findings can be generalized to all Latinas. I was especially cognizant of how the subtle and nuanced experiences of Latina women varies based on their countries of origin, upbringing, and cultural self-identification with regard to race and ethnicity.

Finally, there may be a limitation with using my own professional and personal networks to recruit participants. As a Latina, I am in similar roles as the participants in my study, who like me, are involved in professional development organizations aimed at career advancement. Their involvement and heightened awareness of the issues involved may cause this group to have particular insights that are unique to this segment of the Latina administrator population in student affairs and would then also make them more willing to share and discuss these issues openly.

## **Summary**

As described in this chapter, I utilized the narrative inquiry tradition in qualitative research, using an interview protocol and review of documents provided by the participants,



including their current resumes, which they generously shared after their interviews. Great care was taken in preparing for the data collection by setting up interviews, recording them, transcribing the recordings, coding and analyzing the data, utilizing specialized qualitative analytical software, as well as reading through all interviews in order to analyze the narratives collected. Although all participants shared individual experiences, I looked for common themes that best represented the fuller picture of what Latinas in midlevel SA administration have experienced as they have (or haven't) advanced in their respective career paths. In the next chapter, the research participants will be described, followed by chapter 5 which summarizes the findings from the data and the final chapter, chapter 6, which provides conclusions, implications, and recommendations.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Research Participants**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the work experiences and career aspirations of Latina midlevel SA administrators and how their identities, specifically how gender, race, and ethnicity may have impacted their work experiences, career trajectories and aspirations for advancement. Hargrove (2014) provided an excellent example of creating a chapter of research participants separating out a biographic sketch of all of the study participants as a way of further giving them a voice in their own narratives.

The following chapter consists of a description of the 26 study participants, including their demographic characteristics, followed by a biographic profile of each participant. I conducted interviews with these 26 Latina midlevel administrators to gain insight about how their individual narratives contributed to a shared understanding of how Latinas navigate careers in SA. At the beginning of each interview, I asked each participant to share information about their personal characteristics, including race, ethnicity, family affiliations, and academic and professional accomplishments, including degrees earned years of professional experience, and position details. These backgrounds were so rich and provided much insight into gender, race, and ethnicity that it warranted a separate chapter that provides an overview of what a group of Latinas in midlevel from across the United States might look like and what kinds of personal and professional backgrounds they have.

This chapter begins with a summary overview and demographic analysis of the common background and demographic information of the participants. Tables are provided to visually illustrate the diversity and commonalities among this group of Latina SA administrators. The

four tables are followed by participant profile summaries with a brief description of each of the 26 participants. This chapter concludes with a summary of the major similarities and differences among the participants.

### **Demographic Analysis of Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of 26 Latina mid-level administrators currently working in a variety of higher education institutions in full-time professional positions working in 11 different states from the east to west coast of the United States. Participants shared a diversity of personal characteristics, demographic information, and professional background information. The following section is an overview of common characteristics, supported by quantitative information, derived from responses to questions in the semi-structured interviews.

Each participant of this study was female and, by description in the criteria, all participants identified themselves as Latina. With regard to individual ethnicity and nationality, 18 of the participants shared that they had one ethnicity, while eight shared that they had multiple ethnicities. The cultures represented included: 13 Puerto Rican (50%), six Dominican (23%), three Cuban (12%), three Mexican/Mexican-American (12%), two Colombian (8%), two Irish (8%), one German (4%), one Guatemalan (4%), one Italian (4%), one Peruvian (4%), and one Venezuelan (4%). For nationality, 22 participants shared that they were American (85%) which included four who answered Puerto Rican for this question. For the other four (15%), two were Dominican (8%), one Colombian (4%) and one Venezuelan (4%). The majority of the participants shared nationalities that are often categorized as Caribbean, with the majority sharing that they were Puerto Rican.

Racial identification seemed to be difficult for many of the participants. All 26 of the participants deliberated more for this than any other question in their interview. One participant,

Evelyn, did not answer, stating “I do not answer that question.” This was the only question in all of the interviews where a participant did not provide an answer. Other participants said “I do not really know what to say” and “that is a complicated question” before providing their answer. Answers were distributed as follows: 11 said Latina or Hispanic (42%), five answered Black (19%), five answered White (19%), two answered biracial or multiracial (8%), one answered American (4%), and one did not answer (4%). It was interesting to see how almost half of the participants shared that their race was Latina or Hispanic, considering that these two categories are not listed in the 2010 U.S. Census as being a race. An equal number of 5 answered Black, and 5 answered White for the question of race. The remainder were biracial or multiracial, except for one who stated that her race was American, which is also not a category available under the question of race on the 2010 U.S. Census.

The average age of these participants was 35 which ranged between 28 and 47. Regarding relationship status, 16 of the participants (62%) shared that they were married or partnered, nine were single (35%), and one was divorced. With regard to children, 15 of the participants (58%) had no children, and 11 had children (42%). Of these 11, two had three children, five had two children, and four had one child. From the group of participants who had no children, about half of them shared that having children was definitely something they had considered, but had deliberately delayed in order to focus on their careers. The idea of age and family considerations figured prominently in the way the Latina administrators described their career paths, decisions they made about moving from one position to another, especially if the move may have involved a possible geographic relocation that would impact their families. The consideration of motherhood, in the present and in the future also impacted their aspirations and thoughts about advancement, with several Latinas sharing how they might not want to advance if

it meant sacrificing motherhood or leaving their families behind. This topic is covered in more detail in chapter five in one of the themes that emerged in the findings.

The participants also shared information about their work experiences. The average number of full-time years of work experience was 11. Position titles including Resident Director, Consultant, Coordinator, Counselor, Manager, Director, Assistant Dean, and Associate Dean. Most of the participants held director-level positions and collectively earned an average salary of \$63,000, ranging from the lowest at \$40,000 to the highest at \$105,000. The average number of full-time direct reports each participant supervised was two. However, this number may be somewhat skewed since one of the participants in this study had ten direct reports. Of the rest of the participants, 12 had no direct reports, two had six direct reports, three had four direct reports, two had three direct reports, and one had one direct report.

There were a variety of areas within higher education: six participants worked in Residence Life, six in Student Activities, five in Multicultural Affairs, four in Academic Affairs, two in Student Support Services, two in Career Services, and one general SA. Moreover, the participants worked on several types of institutions all over the United States: 15 participants worked at private institutions, and 11 worked at public institutions. Geographically, the participants were currently living and working across 11 different states in the following locations: 16 located in the Northeast, four in the southwest, two in the southeast, two in the mid-Atlantic area, and two in the Midwest. Although SA often requires living on campus, twenty of the participants in this study lived off campus while six used to live on campus in apartments provided by the institutions where they worked. Another distinction with regard to institution types was regarding student demographics: 19 participants worked at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI), four worked at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), two worked at various

institutions, and one worked at a Historically Black College and University. Educational background was the most consistent among participants. All 26 participants earned a bachelor's degree, all but one participant earned a master's degree, and two had already earned a doctorate. Nine of the participants shared that they were in the process of completing a doctorate.

At the end of this section, four tables are included. Table one includes summaries of the personal characteristics of the participants, including ethnicity, race, age, geographic location, marital status and how many children they had if any. Table two includes summaries of the academic and professional characteristics of the participants, including highest degree earned, the current functional area of work, institution type, current title, years of full-time work experience, and salary range. Table three provides details about the personal characteristics of each of the participants, including ethnicity/nationality, race, age, relationship status, the number of children, and state of residence. Table four provides details about the professional characteristics of the participants, including highest degree earned, institution type, department or functional area of work, years of work experience, and salary.

The section following the four tables provides a brief profile of each Latina administrator in the order in which they were interviewed. Each participant was given a pseudonym from A to Z and are referred to by those pseudonyms in the description of the findings in chapter five. A description of each participant provides some insight into each unique journey that led them to SA and some details about their personal and professional lives. The goal of providing this chapter was to highlight each Latina administrator and provide them a space that honors their participation and generosity for sharing their experiences and perspectives by participating in this study.

Table 1

*Summaries of Participant Personal Background Information (n=26)*

Features	Frequency	Percent of Participants (%)
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Puerto Rican	13	50%
Dominican	6	23%
Cuban	3	12%
Chicana or Mexican-American	3	12%
Colombian	2	8%
Irish	2	8%
German or Italian	2	8%
Guatemalan	1	4%
Peruvian	1	4%
Venezuelan	1	4%
<b>Race</b>		
Latina or Hispanic	11	42%
Black	5	19%
White	5	19%
Biracial/Multiracial	2	8%
American	1	4%
No answer	1	4%
<b>Age</b>		
25 – 29	2	8%
30 – 39	19	73%
40 - 49	5	19%
<b>Geographic Location</b>		
Northeast	16	62%
Southwest	4	15%
Mid-Atlantic	2	8%
Midwest	2	8%
Southeast	2	8%
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married/Partnered	16	62%
Single	10	38%
<b>Child(ren)</b>		
None	15	58%
1	4	15%
2	5	19%
3	2	8%

Table 2

*Summaries of Participant Academic and Professional Background Information (n=26)*

Features	Frequency	Percent of Participants (%)
<b>Highest Degree Earned</b>		
Bachelor's Degree	1	4%
Master's Degree	23	88%
Doctorate	2	8%
<b>Current Functional Area</b>		
Residence Life	6	23%
Student Activities	6	23%
Multicultural Affairs	5	19%
Academic Affairs	4	15%
Student Support Services	2	8%
Career Services	2	8%
General Student Affairs	1	4%
<b>Institution Type</b>		
Predominantly White Institution	19	73%
Hispanic Serving Institution	4	15%
Diverse Institution	2	8%
Historically Black College or University	2	8%
<b>Current Title</b>		
Assistant or Associate Dean	6	23%
Director	6	23%
Assistant or Associate Director	9	35%
Manager or Program Consultant	2	8%
Residence Director or Coordinator	2	8%
Counselor	1	4%
<b>Years of Full Time Professional Experience</b>		
5 – 10	10	38%
11 – 15	14	54%
16 – 20	1	4%
21 - 25	1	4%
<b>Salary Range</b>		
\$40,000 - \$49,000	5	19%
\$50,000 - \$59,000	7	27%
\$60,000 - \$69,000	4	15%
\$70,000 - \$79,000	6	23%
\$80,000 - \$89,000	1	4%
\$90,000 - \$105,000	3	12%



Table 3

*Participants by Ethnicity/Nationality, Race, Age, Relationship Status, Number of Children and Current State of Residence (n=26)*

Participant Pseudonym	Ethnicity/ Nationality	Race	Age	Relationship Status	Child (ren)	State
Ana	Puerto Rican	Black	32	Partnered	0	NJ
Beatriz	Chicana	Mexican-American	33	Married	0	CA
Carla	Dominican	Hispanic	35	Married	3	NY
Dinora	Puerto Rican	Latina	35	Partnered	0	CA
Evelyn	Dominican	No Answer	38	Single	0	NC
Fela	Dominican & Venezuelan	Mestizo	30	Partnered	0	VA
Gabriela	Mexican	Latina	31	Single	0	IL
Hilda	Puerto Rican	White	33	Single	0	NJ
Ines	Puerto Rican	Multiracial	39	Married	2	MA
Julia	Puerto Rican, Cuban & Peruvian	Latina	40	Single	0	NY
Karina	Cuban, German & Italian	Latina	32	Married	1	NJ
Lucia	Colombian	Latina	34	Married	2	NY
Minerva	Puerto Rican & Guatemalan	Latina	29	Single	0	NY
Nancy	Puerto Rican	Latina	47	Single	1	NJ
Olga	Dominican & Cuban	American	30	Single	0	NY
Pilar	Puerto Rican & Italian	Black	34	Married	0	NJ
Quiana	Puerto Rican	Black	30	Married	1	FL
Rosa	Mexican-American & Irish	White	35	Married	0	TX
Selena	Colombian	White	37	Married	3	NY
Teresa	Cuban	White	28	Single	0	MD
Ursula	Dominican	Black	42	Married	1	NY
Veronica	Puerto Rican	Hispanic	40	Single	0	NJ
Wendy	Puerto Rican	Latina	37	Married	2	NY
Xiomara	Puerto Rican	Multiracial	41	Single	0	IN
Yolanda	Dominican	Black	37	Married	2	FL
Zunilda	Puerto Rican	White	38	Married	2	MA

Table 4

*Participants by Highest Degree, Institution Type, Department or Functional Area, Years of Full Time Experience and Current Salary (n=26)*

Participant Pseudonym	Highest Degree	Institution Type	Department or Functional Area	Full Time Experience	Current Salary
Ana	Master's	PWI	Multicultural Affairs	6	\$58,000
Beatriz	Master's	PWI	Residence Life	10	\$41,000
Carla	Master's	PWI	Residence Life	15	\$73,000
Dinora	Master's	PWI	Student Activities	15	\$60,000
Evelyn	Master's	PWI	Student Activities	15	\$60,000
Fela	Master's	PWI	Academic Affairs	5	\$50,000
Gabriela	Master's	PWI	Multicultural Affairs	10	\$95,000
Hilda	Master's	PWI	Student Activities	8	\$54,000
Ines	Master's	PWI	Multicultural Affairs	11	\$65,000
Julia	Master's	PWI	Student Activities	14	\$40,000
Karina	Master's	HSI	Academic Affairs	11	\$77,000
Lucia	Master's	PWI	Student Support Services	12	\$54,000
Minerva	Ph.D.	PWI	Residence Life	6	\$41,000
Nancy	Master's	PWI	Residence Life	23	\$105,000
Olga	Master's	PWI	Multicultural Affairs	8	\$50,000
Pilar	Ph.D.	PWI	Career Services	9	\$72,000
Quiana	Master's	HBCU	Academic Affairs	6	\$56,000
Rosa	Master's	HSI	Academic Affairs	13	\$43,000
Selena	Bachelor's	PWI	Residence Life	13	\$57,000
Teresa	Master's	PWI	Multicultural Affairs	5	\$43,000
Ursula	Master's	HSI	Student Affairs	14	\$73,000
Veronica	Master's	PWI	Residence Life	17	\$96,000
Wendy	Master's	PWI	Student Support Services	12	\$87,000
Xiomara	Master's	HSI	Student Activities	15	\$70,000
Yolanda	Master's	PWI	Career Services	13	\$60,000
Zunilda	Master's	PWI	Multicultural Affairs	15	\$70,000

## **Participant Profiles**

The Latina administrators who participated in this study were generous with sharing their time and details about their personal and professional lives, which added to the richness of the data and provided a greater understanding of how their identities impacted their work experiences, career paths and the choices they made along the way. The following is a description of each participant, including how they described themselves in terms of ethnicity and race; entry into SA; and a brief summary of their career trajectories and career aspirations. The participant profiles also included personal and professional information the Latina administrators shared during their interviews.

### **Participant profile 1: Ana**

Ana is a 32-year-old self-identified Puerto Rican who described her race as Black. She has six years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree in Counselor Education, and is currently in the process of completing a doctorate in Counselor Education. Ana works in student activities, leadership development, and diversity programs at a mid-size public higher education institution in the northeast. Ana started her career in an entry-level position as a resident director in residence life before advancing to a counselor position. She currently holds the title of assistant director. She also teaches an undergraduate course as part of her doctoral program and enjoys being part of research projects with her faculty. Ana discovered SA during her time as an undergraduate student where she was one of very few Latinas in her cohort. During this time, she was asked to assist with recruitment and mentorship of other students of color. For the future, Ana aspires to be in a position of senior leadership as a dean of students in SA, but has also considered moving to a faculty position. Ana is partnered and has no children.

**Participant profile 2: Beatriz**

Beatriz is a 33-year-old self-identified Chicana who described her race as Mexican-American. She has ten years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree in Postsecondary Administration and SA, and was planning to enroll in a doctoral program in the next few months. Beatriz works in residence life at a large private research institution in the southwest and started her career in an entry-level position as a resident director. She subsequently advanced to a midlevel learning community manager supervising five full-time resident directors. She began her career in SA when she became a resident advisor during her undergraduate time and, around the same time, she mentored other first generation and low social-economic status students in an upward bound program. Beatriz aspires to be a director for residence life. Beatriz is married and has no children.

**Participant profile 3: Carla**

Carla is a 35-year-old self-identified Dominican who described her race as Hispanic and Afro-Caribbean. She has 15 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree in Social-Organizational Psychology, and is currently in the process of completing a doctorate in Adult Learning and Leadership. Carla works in residence life at a large private, urban research university in the northeast, having started with an entry level position in student activities and advanced to a program coordinator position and then to assistant director position. She is currently an associate director in residence life. She discovered SA through her undergraduate involvement where she found mentors who took an interest in her leadership abilities. Carla is proud to have served as the senior class president at her undergraduate institution where she started her full-time administrative career in SA. She has been part of significant reorganizations at her current institution and is proud of the mentorship she has been

able to provide for her staff. Carla aspires to be in a senior leadership position where she can use her education and experience to improve the field of higher education. Carla is married and has three children.

#### **Participant profile 4: Dinora**

Dinora is a 35-year-old self-identified Puerto Rican who described her race as Latina. She has 15 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a master of science in Higher Education and Administration, and is currently in the process of completing a doctorate in Organizational Leadership. Dinora works in student recruitment and retention at a large public research university in the Southwest, where she initially started in an entry level position in student activities and has since advanced to civic engagement coordination. She was very involved in campus activities as an undergraduate assistant and served in a leadership role as a Resident Assistant, but at that time did not consider SA as a career. However, after starting a career in public relations, which was her undergraduate field of study, Dinora returned to SA because she did not have a good work experience. She recalled her leadership experience in SA and the satisfaction she garnered from it. Dinora aspires to be a director in an office that directly supports underrepresented student populations and then, ultimately, would like to become a Vice Chancellor or Vice President at a college or university where she can have a bigger impact on all students. Dinora is partnered and has no children.

#### **Participant profile 5: Evelyn**

Evelyn is a 38-year-old year self-identified Dominican who preferred not to reveal her race. She has 15 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a master of education in Higher Education Administration, and was in the process of completing her doctorate when she participated in this study. She has since completed her doctorate in

**Organizational Leadership.** Evelyn works in fraternity and sorority life at a mid-size private university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. She started her career with an entry-level position in residence life and then advanced from multicultural affairs and Hispanic/Latino studies to assistant dean and director level positions. She discovered SA as a career opportunity when she got frustrated attending a career fair where she was told that there were no jobs for sociology majors. One of her mentors at her undergraduate institution was a director in fraternity and sorority life who valued her leadership abilities and suggested that she follow his career path in SA. She followed his advice and is proud of the work she has done in the field. Evelyn aspires to be a vice president or dean of students in the near future but has also considered moving to alumni affairs or development as possible career transition out of SA. Evelyn is single and has no children.

#### **Participant profile 6: Fela**

Fela is a 30-year-old self-identified Dominican and Venezuelan who described her race as white and mestizo. She has five years of professional experience, a bachelor's degree, and a Master of Science degree in Higher Education Administration. Fela works in an academic support position within residence life at a medium-sized public research university in the Southwest. Her entry level position was as a residence director, and she subsequently advanced to the assistant director level to the position she currently holds. She discovered SA through her undergraduate involvement as a Resident Assistant and her interest in SA grew from her leadership in residence hall student government. Fela was about to graduate a semester early and was trying to figure out what to do next when her direct supervisor and her Residence Director suggested that SA could be a good a career option for her. This is how she found her career in SA. Although Fela is having a positive experience in her current position that blends residence

life and academic support, she has considered leaving SA and transitioning completely to Academic Affairs. Fela aspires to move up the ranks to ultimately become an assistant dean or dean of a college. Fela is partnered and has no children.

### **Participant profile 7: Gabriela**

Gabriela is a 31-year-old self-identified Mexican who described her race as Latina. She has ten years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, and a master of science in Communication. Gabriela works in multicultural SA at a large private research institution in the Midwest. She had an unusual start to her career. Originally, she was given special acknowledgment by a mentor who noticed her advanced leadership skills during her undergraduate years. Subsequently, Gabriela was appointed to a director level position in Hispanic/Latino SA right after graduating with her bachelor's degree and worked full-time in that capacity while completing her master's degree. Her career path began with an associate director position, but for the most part, her responsibilities continued to expand and, ultimately, she was appointed to a deputy dean and director position. Despite Gabriela's fast tracked career advancement, she intends to get a law degree and aspires to have an impact on education on the elementary and secondary levels and would like to work on policies for higher education access. Gabriela's passion is mentorship of underrepresented student populations and ensuring proper preparation and access to higher education for all students. Gabriela is single and has no children.

### **Participant profile 8: Hilda**

Hilda is a 33-year-old self-identified Puerto Rican who described her race as white. She has eight years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree in international relations and diplomacy, earned a master's degree in Counseling Services and is currently in the process

of completing a doctorate in Higher Education Leadership, Management, and Policy. Hilda works in student activities and holds an assistant dean title at a medium sized private institution in the northeast, having started an entry level position as a Residence Director in Residence Life when she found out that SA seemed like a more suitable career option than international relations and diplomacy. As an undergraduate student, Hilda was very involved and served in various leadership positions, including as a Resident Assistant. She enjoyed that experience so much that she decided to follow the path of her own Residence Director, someone she looked up to and admired. Although Hilda describes her career path as one that has not been exactly calculated and planned, she does aspire to be a Dean of Students in the future and feels she is currently getting good mentorship and support from her current supervisor, the Dean of Students at her current institution. Hilda is single and has no children.

**Participant profile 9: Ines**

Ines is a 39-year-old self-identified Puerto Rican who described her race as multiracial. She has 11 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree in Teaching. Ines works in diversity services at a small, private liberal arts institution in the northeast. She began with an entry-level position in student union administration, continued in student activities, and ultimately advanced to her current director position. Before this, Ines spent a few years in the television industry, which was the major for her undergraduate degree, but she did not find the work fulfilling except for the part of her job when she was working closely with college students. Her desire to continue to work with college students led Ines to return to SA full-time. Ines recalled how highly involved in campus activities she was during her undergraduate years and knew that this experience would benefit her work with students. In fact, during this time, she made an important connection with one of her sorority sisters who was also



working in SA. She suggested to Ines that SA could be an ideal career path to follow. Currently, Ines aspires to be a dean of students and would like to pursue a doctorate in higher education administration eventually. Ines is married and has two children.

### **Participant profile 10: Julia**

Julia is 40 years old and identified with three nationalities - Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Peruvian. She described her race as Latina. She has 12 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree in College SA, and is currently enrolled in a doctoral program in Higher Education Administration. Julia works in student activities at a large private doctoral degree granting institution in the northeast, having started her entry level position as a program coordinator and then moving her way up to student activities and student union management before securing her current position as assistant director of student life. Julia discovered a career in SA via her undergraduate campus involvement whereby she served as student government president, attended student leadership conferences, and networked with many SA staff members. Julia noticed that few people in upper administration looked like her, except for one Latina dean who eventually mentored her and suggested that she pursue a career in SA. Julia credits this Latina administrator with helping her finish her undergraduate degree by mentoring and encouraging her when she faced challenges. Since then, Julia has been driven to do the same for other students. This is what helps Julie persevere through challenges associated with being the only Latina in many of the work spaces she navigates. Julia aspires to be a dean of students or vice president of SA in the future. Julia is divorced and has no children.

### **Participant profile 11: Karina**

Karina is 32-years-old who self-identified as Cuban, German and Italian, and described her race as Latina. She has 11 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a

master's degree in Labor and Employer Relations, and is currently pursuing a doctorate in Educational Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education. Karina works as an assistant to a dean of an academic college at a public doctoral level institution in the northeast, having started her entry level position in financial aid and then moving to several student service positions including those that focused on advisement and mentorship. Although Karina's professional roles have extended beyond SA, she has worked on similar undergraduate student support initiatives throughout her career. Karina has strong female mentors who have helped guide her in her current role, and she has become involved in national and regional organizations that encourage leadership and advancement for women in higher education. Due to her concerns about balancing family and work, Karina aspires to be an associate dean or associate vice president for Academic Affairs but does not see herself going further than these supporting roles. Karina is married and has one child.

### **Participant profile 12: Lucia**

Lucia is a 34-year-old self-identified Colombian, who described her race as Latina. She has 12 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a Master of Social Work, and is intending to enroll in a doctoral program in Educational Leadership, Administration, and Policy. Lucia works in substance abuse prevention at a large private, urban university in the northeast, having started her entry level position in Residence Life as a Residence Director and moved her way up to an assistant- and then to an associate-to-the-director position, respectively. Lucia discovered that SA could be a viable career during her undergraduate years when she was Resident Assistant. She found that she enjoyed supporting her fellow students through interpersonal conflicts and helping with their college transitions and has since dedicated her professional life to continuing to support students with their challenges. Lucia is considering

leaving SA and using her MSW degree for more clinical practices with families. Being one of few Latinas in leadership roles at the higher education institutions, she has had many challenges. Lucia is married and has two children.

### **Participant profile 13: Minerva**

Minerva is a 29-year-old self-identified Puerto Rican and Guatemalan, who described her race as Latina. She has six years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree in Organizational Leadership with a concentration in Higher Education, and a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Administration. Minerva works in residence life at a large private, urban university in the northeast. She began her SA career via several undergraduate leadership positions, including in hall government and as a Resident Assistant. Minerva is a Residence Director and has been for a number of years, but has been searching for positions within SA really and looking to advance out of this position which is often regarded as entry level. Although Minerva aspires to be a dean of students in the future, she has expressed challenges with advancement but believes that earning a doctorate was a move in the right direction because it makes her more competitive in the job marketplace. Minerva is single and has no children.

### **Participant profile 14: Nancy**

Nancy is a 47-year-old self-identified Puerto Rican, who described her race as Latina. She has 23 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a master's degree in Counseling, and is considering enrolling in a Master in Business Administration degree program in the near future. Nancy is a director of residence life at a medium sized public liberal arts institution in the northeast, having started her career in SA as a residence director. She entered SA when she became a Resident Assistant while in graduate school and was encouraged by a

supervisor to pursue a career in the field. Nancy has considered taking a similar position at another institution that is closer to where her daughter lives in the southeast. However, she has grown disillusioned about employment in higher education and SA. During her time at her current institution, Nancy has observed decreased levels of diversity in director level positions and feels the climate has evolved to become a “culture of white males” over her 18 years of employment. Lately, Nancy is focused on retiring from her position and finding a position outside of academia. Nancy is single and has one child, but also takes care of her ailing mother who lives with her.

#### **Participant profile 15: Olga**

Olga is 30-years-old and self-identified as Dominican and Cuban. She described her race as American. She has eight years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor’s degree and a Master of Social Work. Olga works in Multicultural Affairs at a large private doctoral degree granting institution in the northeast. She started her career in SA as a Residence Director. Olga’s inspiration for pursuing a career in SA comes from mentoring others and her fond memories of the mentors that she had in college. Olga’s primary responsibilities currently include planning campus-wide cultural programming and coordinating retention initiatives, especially for underrepresented student populations. Olga has experienced many challenges as one of very few Latinas at her institution and has considered leaving SA. She aspires to pursue a doctoral degree in a discipline in which she can become a faculty member. Olga is single and has no children.

#### **Participant profile 16: Pilar**

Pilar is 34-years-old who self-identified as Puerto Rican and Italian. She described her race as biracial (White and Black), but most strongly identifies with her Black racial identity. She has nine years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor’s degree, a master’s degree in

Counseling, and recently completed a doctorate in Counselor Education. Pilar is an Assistant Director in career development at a public liberal arts college in the northeast. She started her career in SA in an entry level position as an academic advisor for a higher education access program for diverse economically and educationally disadvantaged students. Pilar was a first-generation student who was highly involved as an undergraduate student. Having completed a doctorate recently, Pilar aspires to be a faculty member and is currently searching for academic appointments in her field. Pilar is married and hopes to have children in the near future as she begins her career.

#### **Participant profile 17: Quiana**

Quiana is a 30-year-old self-identified Puerto Rican, who described her race as Black. She has six years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree in Educational Curriculum and Instruction. Quiana works as a Director in a teacher preparation department at a historically Black public university in the southeast. She started her professional career in SA at another institution, working in Multicultural Affairs as an Assistant Director. Quiana was drawn to SA because she was a strongly involved student as an undergraduate, especially in Greek Life, an area where she envisions herself working. Although Quiana's current position is in Academic Affairs, the student support aspects are very similar to the work that she performed with multicultural student populations at her previous institution. Quiana aspires to be a dean of students and is married and has one child.

#### **Participant profile 18: Rosa**

Rosa is a 35-year-old who self-identified as Mexican-American and Irish. She is biracial (Hispanic and White). She has 13 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree in Adult Education. Rosa works in student retention services at a medium

size private liberal arts college in the southwest where she provides guidance and advisement to at-risk student populations. Rosa began her career in higher education in an entry level position advising students as they navigated the college application process as a representative of a small college. Here, she worked to increase opportunities for underrepresented student populations and eventually advanced to other positions with similar advising functions for college students before moving on to career development. Although all of her professional roles have technically been housed in Academic Affairs, Rosa's responsibilities have closely mirrored many of the functions of SA including advising students and providing them with tools for academic and social success. Rosa is happy in her current role and does not aspire to move up to a senior leadership position in the near future. Rosa is married and has no children.

**Participant profile 19: Selena**

Selena is a 37-year-old who self-identified as Colombian and described her race as White. She has 13 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, and has completed some classes towards earning a master's degree, which she hopes to complete in the near future. Selena has navigated her career in higher education by working in different areas of SA. Selena began with an entry-level position as a Residence Director in Residence Life, then worked in admissions, returned to Residence Life, and then eventually worked in Student Activities before settling in her current position in Residence Life operations and budget management at a private graduate research institution in the northeast. Selena shared that she aspires to be a Dean of Students in the future and made it a point to say that it would be a family decision, as Selena is married and has three children. Ultimately, she believes this type of position would have a major impact on her work-life balance.

**Participant profile 20: Teresa**

Teresa is a 28-year-old who self-identified as Cuban, and described her race as White. She has five years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree in College Counseling. Teresa currently works in Multicultural Affairs at a private medium sized liberal arts institution in the mid-Atlantic region, having started her entry level position as a Residence Director in Residence Life. Her last two positions have been in diversity work at PWIs, but earlier in her career, she worked in paraprofessional roles serving underrepresented student populations. Teresa enjoys her diversity work but aspires to work as a Director for a program that primarily focuses on providing higher education opportunities to underrepresented student populations, including students of color, first-generation students, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Teresa is single and has no children, but has considered how her career advancement choices will impact her desire to start a family in the near future. Therefore, she does not see herself in positions of senior level leadership.

**Participant profile 21: Ursula**

Ursula is a 42-year-old who self-identified as Dominican, and described her race as Black. She has 14 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a Master of Arts in History, and is currently in the process of completing a doctoral degree in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Ursula works in the Vice President of Student Affairs office on strategic planning and student transition initiatives, including orientation and commencement, at a public medium-sized master's degree granting institution. Ursula had been involved in a sorority as an undergraduate student, but did not have SA on her list as a potential career. She came to SA having been recruited for a Residence Director position and has been in SA ever since. Ursula's past work history includes Residence Life and generalist positions at various

types of colleges. She aspires to be a VP of SA in the near future and has considered the region and type of institution where she sees herself working. Ursula is married and has one child.

**Participant profile 22: Veronica**

Veronica is a 40-year-old who self-identified as Puerto Rican, and described her race as Hispanic. She has 17 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, and a master's degree in Education, Policy, Research, and Administration. Veronica is currently an Associate Dean and Director of Residence Life at a public doctoral degree-granting institution in the northeast, having started her entry level position as a Residence Director and advancing from Assistant to Associate Director at her current university. She discovered SA through her undergraduate involvement as a Resident Assistant. Although Veronica shared that she enjoys her current position and can see herself in that same role forever, she would be open to a senior level position in the future at the same institution if an opportunity presented itself. Veronica is single and has no children.

**Participant profile 23: Wendy**

Wendy is a 37-year-old who self-identified as Puerto Rican, and described her race as Latina. She has 12 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, a Master of Science in Social Work, and is currently in the process of completing a second master's degree in Liberal Studies. Wendy works as a personal and academic counselor at a community college in the northeast, having started her entry level position in Student Activities as an Advisor, a position she said, "fell in her lap" as she was finishing up her undergraduate degree. Before her current position, Wendy navigated a career in a variety of roles from Student Activities to Residence Life, Academic Advising, and Admissions. Wendy shared that if she was asked about her career aspirations a year ago, she would have said she would like to become a Dean of



Students eventually, but has since considered the impact this would have on her family and work life balance and now believes that remaining a counselor would best. Wendy is married and has two children.

**Participant profile 24: Xiomara**

Xiomara is a 41-year-old who self-identified as Puerto Rican, and described her race as multi-racial, but then said she would rather not identify with any race. She has 15 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, and a Master of Science in Education with a concentration in Higher Education and SA. Xiomara is an Assistant Dean at a small private liberal arts college in the Midwest. She started her work career as a K-12 Spanish teacher immediately after completing her undergraduate degree. She had been a highly involved student as an undergraduate, serving as a Resident Assistant and Orientation Leader and, after several years teaching, Xiomara eventually found her way back to SA when she pursued a master's degree and then held two Residence Director positions at two different institutions before arriving at her current position. Xiomara aspires to be a Dean of Students. Wendy is single and has no children.

**Participant profile 25: Yolanda**

Yolanda is a 37-year-old who self-identified as Dominican, and described her race as Black. She has 13 years of full-time professional experience, a bachelor's degree, and a Master of Science in Urban Policy Analysis and Management. Yolanda is an Associate Director of Career Services at a large public research institution in the southeast, having advanced from her entry-level role as coordinator and then Assistant Director to her current position. Yolanda aspires to be a Director of Career Services and believes that pursuing her doctorate in the near future will give her an advantage over other candidates. Yolanda is married and has two children.

**Participant profile 26: Zunilda**

Zunilda is a 38-year-old who self-identified as Puerto Rican, and described her race as White. She has over 15 years of full-time professional experience and has a bachelor's degree and a Master of Social Work. Zunilda is Director of a Latino cultural center at a large private research institution in the northeast. She started her career in the not-for-profit sector working with underrepresented youth. She found her way to SA when she returned to higher education in Admissions. She began as a counselor for a graduate school of social work in the northeast before advancing to director of admissions before taking on her current role. Zunilda has considered leaving SA and starting her own life coaching business, but the students keep her excited and motivated enough to stay. Zunilda is married and has two children.

**Summary of Participant Profiles**

The previous section provided a summary of personal and professional background information for the 26 participants. Although these Latina administrators had unique characteristics as individuals, they also shared many things in common. Overall, the Latina administrators in this study represented a diverse, well-educated, and experienced group for whom SA seemed like a good fit. While the Latina administrators shared many common characteristics in background and work experiences, each participant was unique in her own way based on geographical location, family dynamics, levels of education and identification with race and ethnicity. Participants also shared a common desire to continue their education by pursuing a masters or doctoral degree. In light of the context provided by these 26 profiles, the next chapter focuses on the findings from the interviews conducted with each participant.

## Chapter V

### Research Findings

#### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how Latina professionals in midlevel Student Affairs (SA) administration have negotiated career opportunities and aspirations for career advancement. Specifically, I sought to understand how the intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity influenced the way in which participants perceived their roles within their institutions and what type of advancement they aspired to in their careers. The 26 participants were midlevel Latina administrators with at least five years of work experience in SA. They were at critical crossroads in their professions; they may have been contemplating what kind of opportunities they would like to explore as they decided whether to stay in midlevel management or if they aspired to advance to senior level administration. In the previous chapter, I summarized the demographic profiles of the participants, including personal and professional characteristics.

In this chapter, I provided answers to the research questions by describing three major themes and related sub-themes that emerged from the data. The interpretations are supported by direct quotes capturing the essence of what the participants shared. The following sections represent the collective narratives, or *testimonios*, that these Latina administrators shared during their interviews. I asked them questions about their career experiences, starting with how they found SA as a career, how they navigated their work experiences into their current midlevel positions and what kind of career aspirations they had. Specifically, I asked them about their challenges, if they saw themselves advancing in SA, and how they believed their identities as Latinas may have influenced their views on advancement. The following research questions guided my study:

1. How do Latina midlevel student affairs administrators describe their institutional experiences as they negotiated their career paths?
2. What is the impact of gender, race, and ethnicity on the career paths and opportunities for advancement of Latina professionals in student affairs?
3. How are the career aspirations of Latina midlevel student affairs administrators influenced by their institutional experiences?

Based on the analysis of the interview data, three major themes emerged with subthemes that corresponded with the research questions and sub-questions:

- (1) Latinas Find a Natural Fit in Student Affairs,
- (2) Latinas Move from Natural Fit to Misfit, and
- (3) Latinas Have High Aspirations Diminished by Barriers to Advancement.

The first major theme described the Latina administrators' entry into SA, initially finding a natural fit as they entered SA. The second major theme identified negative experiences along their careers paths when Latinas moved from a feeling of natural fit to misfit as they experienced their institutional environments as tokens and outsiders. In this theme, the analytical framework informed by three theoretical perspectives, CRT, LatCrit and CRF, became instrumental in positioning the intersections of gender, race and ethnicity as possible causes for isolation, discrimination, and a heightened sense of self-awareness that compelled them to make adjustments to their mannerisms and appearances to try to fit in. The third major theme addressed high aspirations diminished over time, by personal and professional barriers to career advancement, influenced by the disillusionment that came as a result of negative work experiences. These major themes and subthemes are illustrated in Table 5, with representative quotes and frequencies by participants in numbers and percentages as shared.

Table 5

*Percent and Number of Participants by Subthemes (N=26)*

<b>Major Theme One: Latinas Find a Natural Fit in Student Affairs</b>	
<i>Research Question 1: Institutional Experiences</i>	Frequency (%)
Finding Student Affairs: “Bit by the bug.”	26 (100%)
Natural Fit: “Felt good with my spirit and soul.”	23 (89%)
Connected: “Feels like a family.”	22 (85%)
<b>Major Theme Two: Latinas Move from Natural Fit to Misfit</b>	
<i>Research Question 2: Impact of Gender, Race, and Ethnicity</i>	
Misfit: “I have felt like an outsider for most of my career.”	24 (92%)
Burden of Proof: “I always have to bring my A-game.”	20 (77%)
The Chosen Token: “It’s the elephant in the room, being the token.”	17 (65%)
<b>Major Theme Three: Latinas Have High Aspirations Diminished by Barriers</b>	
<i>Research Question 3: Career Aspirations</i>	
High Aspirations: “I can see myself as a Dean.”	17 (65%)
Professional Barriers	
Career Development: “Not just mentorship, monetarily too.”	18 (69%)
Scarce Role Models: “I’ve never come across a senior level Latina”	13 (50%)
Stuck in Midlevel: “I need to move out to move up.”	13 (50%)
Personal Barriers	
Adobe Ceiling and Fear: “Higher up is a very dangerous place to be”	22 (85%)
Family Considerations: “My ovaries are going to dry up.”	19 (73%)
Advanced Degree Attainment: “You need a doctorate to move up.”	17 (65%)

## **Major Theme One: Latinas Find a Natural Fit in Student Affairs**

In response to the first research question: How do Latina midlevel student affairs administrators describe their institutional experiences as they negotiated their career paths, Latina administrators described their entry into Student Affairs (SA) and shared how they found a natural fit, enjoyed working with students, appreciated the variety of the work and felt connected to their colleagues, especially other women of color they found who supported them as they began their careers. Overall, Latinas were drawn to and fell into SA in ways that made them feel like they were giving back to a community that provided them guidance and an introduction to a career in SA when they struggled as undergraduate students. They found camaraderie with their co-workers and were guided by women of color – specifically, Black and Latina women who served as peer mentors as they began their careers in SA. In the following section, I described the way in which the Latina administrators entered SA, how they experienced SA as a natural fit at their institutions and how connected they felt to the work, the students and their co-workers at the beginning of their SA careers.

### **Finding student affairs: “Bit by the bug”**

The Latina administrators described how they began careers in SA by finding this path during their time as undergraduate students. They discussed being involved on their campuses as student leaders, fully engaging in their college experiences. When they struggled at first, they found support from supervisors and mentors who helped them overcome their challenges.

**Falling in: “it kind of just happened.”** All the participants described entering the field of SA by happenstance, most of them described being introduced to the career opportunity by a supervisor or mentor encouraging them to apply for positions and enroll in a graduate program. Wendy spoke of the lack of conscious intention behind her career choice as follows: “It kind of

just happened, to be honest with you,” she said, “It was an opportunity, that I guess fell on my lap. I started meeting certain people and they just directed me along the way.” All participants’ initial interest resulted from similar chance encounters with supervisors and advisors who saw their potential and tapped them to become involved on campus.

Minerva is an example of a Latina administrator who used a common metaphor for entering SA. She described how she was “bit by the bug” on her first day of college. She shared, “I had a mandatory floor meeting as a first-year student, and I remember just being wowed, just by the essence of RAs in front of the room and the Hall Director.” Minerva stayed after the meeting to ask how she can get such a position and that was when she was recruited by her Residence Hall Director to get involved and take on leadership positions on campus. Minerva did go on to become a Resident Assistant and then a Residence Hall Director, a typical pathway into student affairs.

Wendy and Minerva’s stories are typical examples of how almost all of the Latina administrators described the way they fell into SA as a career beginning with their undergraduate experiences. For some of the participants, it was finding support when they struggled during their college years; they were first introduced to SA administrators as a source of survival. The following section describes how these participants explained undergraduate struggle and support received that led them to fall into careers in SA.

**Finding support as a struggling undergrad: “Someone who believes in you.”** When describing how they discovered the field of SA, all 26 participants identified a particular interpersonal relationship that played a key role in how they first discovered, and then navigated their careers in SA. Higher education was a new world for many of the participants, as they described being first generation, the first in their families to attend college, so it is no surprise

that getting adjusted to college was a struggle for most of them. Even before considering a career in SA, Pilar, for example, said that attending college had not been in her original plan after finishing high school. She said,

When I first attended college I had absolutely no idea what I wanted to do. I was the first in my family to attend college, really the first in my primary household to graduate from high school. So I had no plans to attend college, not because I wasn't smart, but because I had no knowledge of it until my high school counselor basically kept stalking me in my homeroom every day saying, "you have to apply to college." So I decided to do it.

Pilar not only attended college but got her master's degree and doctorate and was now trying to figure out what she wanted to do next. Her same hesitation to attend college trickled into her indecisiveness with what kind of career path she was going to have, but she shared that she had supervisors and advisors that helped her get through college by giving her advice and encouraging her to continue her education to go on to graduate school. All of the participants described that they entered SA with an eagerness to offer support for students similar to how they had received care from SA professionals as undergraduate students when they were struggling to find their place at their institutions.

This positive interaction with SA prompted participants to consider SA as a way to give back, which then led to a viable career path. For example, Gabriela's account of her first encounter with SA reflects a common scenario across participants when they faced challenges or struggled with their undergraduate experiences. She said:

I sort of fell into it. I got really actively involved in the multicultural community as a junior in college. And there was a bias incident that happened and that's when I really became sort of a leader on campus and the person who was leaving as the Director of Hispanic Latino Student Affairs told me that I should apply for the job. I did and it's kind of how it happened.



Ana also shared a poignant story of her struggle as an undergraduate student when she described going away to college to a rural area that was much different than the urban setting she grew up in and was more comfortable navigating,

I went up there by myself and I struggled. My entire time as an undergrad I struggled because I didn't have the support that I needed and I didn't see anyone that looked like me on campus. And now that I look back, I don't think there were any other Latinas on campus.

Ana became an active student leader working with the admission department, giving tours and connecting other students of color to campus resources, something she was still doing in her full-time professional role. When she was about to graduate, Ana was still trying to find her way and did not know what to do until an advisor of one of her student organizations encouraged her to stay and get her master's degree. Ana admitted that she did not see herself as a graduate student and that she thought, "I don't even look like what a master's student is supposed to look like," another common experience shared by a majority of the Latina administrators, who just needed that encouragement and someone to believe in them. The struggle as an undergraduate student not only provided motivation for getting involved and giving Ana control over her experience but also gave Ana the knowledge and deeper understanding she needed to be successful in her current position.

Ines, like many other participants, described having an appreciation for supportive administrators who helped her navigate her undergraduate experience, describing how she thought it was "refreshing and good to have someone who believes in you." The Latina administrators shared many stories about how they overcame their challenges during their undergraduate years with the help of administrators who not only believed in them but reached out to actively support them when they were about to give up. Julia shared a touching story about how she found a Latina dean who prevented her from dropping out of college, an outstanding

example of the power of having leaders to whom students can directly relate. Julia had a negative interaction with a senior level administrator who left her in tears and prompted her to start packing up her room and saying, “I was done.” That Latina Dean heard the story, sought her out and urged Julia not to give up since she was so close to finishing. This thoughtful administrator reminded Julia about her strong leadership abilities and suggested that she continue to get her master’s degree and possibly seek out a career in SA. Julia’s interaction with the Latina dean made a strong impact on how Julia felt about the importance of representation of Latina administrators in higher education, which motivated her to start her career in SA after she graduated:

As I progressed through my undergraduate education, I started noticing that there weren’t too many people that look like me in higher level administrator positions at universities and considering that this is a metropolitan area - that was just eye-opening. I wanted to be that face. I had one amazing dean that was Latina and she was my rock. If it wasn’t for her, honestly I don’t know if I would’ve finished my undergrad degree.

While many reasons led the Latina administrators to pursue careers in SA, the commonality among them was how they fell into the career and were recruited by other SA administrators who were helpful to them as they struggled during their time as undergraduate students and shared SA as a possible career path. Their entry into early leadership roles was precipitated by their own struggles in college and, upon discussing their tribulations with an advisor or supervisor, were recommended to use the SA resources available to them. More than half of the participants described how, as undergraduate students, they started out in leadership positions to follow the path to careers in SA. Therefore, “bit by the bug” does seem to be a fitting metaphor that demonstrates how Latinas found SA and established viable careers they enjoyed and meshed well with them. In essence, these Latinas felt like they were “chosen” for this work in SA and “falling in” was easy when the principles of SA matched so closely to their own values, making

SA a natural fit for them. In the next section, I elaborate on this feeling of natural fit that Latinas experienced in SA as they entered their careers in student affairs.

**Natural fit: “Felt good with my spirit and soul”**

Although these Latina administrators found the field of student affairs as their career paths by chance, the nature of their early experiences was usually the result of a personal need for SA services and interacting with SA staff at critical points during their undergraduate student lives, especially when they were struggling academically and socially. The personal benefit received in such early encounters appeared to attract participants to the field, making SA feel like a natural fit. For instance, Evelyn, who was actively engaged in leadership positions, including several student clubs on campus, just like other participants described, told the story of how she found SA during her senior year in college. She was overwhelmed trying to think about what she was going to do once she graduated, worried about making sure she could make her immigrant mother proud. A club advisor in one of the many clubs in which Evelyn was involved, stepped in to encourage her to get her master’s degree and become a graduate assistant, working part time at a university while completing her degree. She shared her immediate emotional response to this advice: “that very day, that very moment, I knew that is what I would do – that I would go into higher education. I don’t know what it was, but it just felt good with my spirit and soul.” This strong connection to working in higher education was shared among almost all of the participants who described finding careers in SA as a positive turning point in their lives.

Veronica was another example of a participant who, like several other participants, had first considered another career path as a lawyer, but was lured to SA by her undergraduate supervisor when she was a Resident Assistant. Her striking comment fell in line with the

common theme other participants shared about how natural it felt to gravitate towards student affairs:

This woman at my undergraduate institution, she said, “You know, you’ve been such a great RA and with orientation, with all of your experience, you’d be really good” and that is when it was suggested that I pursue this. I didn’t really know that it was something that I can do. So then when I applied to grad school, I got in and got an assistantship and the pieces just all started to fall together. But looking back it seems like it was a natural path since I was always involved somehow in housing at a young age.

The encouragement of a supervisor was all Evelyn and Veronica needed to shift their original career plans and see themselves in career choices that helped them flourish as professionals. Both recall those early moments fondly and still feel that they made the right choice when they decided to pursue careers in SA. Overall, it was a common theme among the Latinas to find the support they needed during their undergraduate years and recognizing how being able to turn around and be that support for others would be an ideal opportunity to both find a career and give back at the same time. In the next section, I explain how the idea of giving back was a clear draw for Latinas to pursue careers in SA, especially knowing that they would be ideal resource people for all students, but especially for students of color who might also be struggling like they did. In addition, the Latinas felt connected because of how positively they felt about their colleagues, how much they enjoyed the variety of their work and how some of them were able to use their ability to speak Spanish to provide a good bridge between the Latina administrators and other Latina/o employees at their institutions who were often heavily concentrated in custodial and facilities positions. All of these points are explained further in the following sections.

**Giving back to SA “It’s a gift.”** An important part of the natural fit experienced by the participants entering the field of SA included enjoying interactions with students and seeing it as a way to give back in gratitude for what they had received from SA administrators who help

them. The Latina administrators overwhelmingly expressed their passion for working with students, even admitting how they may be choosing to pause advancement for fear of losing touch with students. The majority of participants shared how much they cared for the students and felt that it was a gift for them to be able to influence students during their formative years in college as illustrated in Gabriela's response, "That's a huge formative time in a student's life and being able to be part of that to me is just... it's a gift." Working with students was clearly a positive and fulfilling aspect of working in SA and the Latina administrators enjoyed being part of students' foundational years in college and making a difference in students' lives.

Teresa, like most participants, also made this point about making a difference, as many other participants did. She said,

I had some mentors in college that really made a difference. I thought that I was going to be a high school English teacher and use the life lessons that you find in literature to help our students learn life lessons. And then I quickly realized to the various leadership positions that I was holding as an undergraduate student, that what I really wanted to do was help students identify those obstacles and overcome them and that I could do that at the college level more than I could do that at the high school level.

Again, being able to support students and help them get through challenging times was a significant benefit Latina administrators found with working in SA.

Ursula shared that working with students was the reason she "came into this business in the first place," a sentiment also shared by other participants including Olga, "my own passion for helping others and the mentors that I had in college, pretty much inspired me to want to be a mentor to future generations." Many Latina administrators shared how being able to mentor students was partly why they pursued careers in SA, again feeling a calling to give back. Zunilda believed that "in some way I am helping them get through this season of their life." Yolanda captured this same sentiment best when she said:

I like Student Affairs the most because at the end of the day we really do get to get to know the students and enjoy them and help them in their process. I like working with students because when you get that freshman student in that first-year experience class and you see them and they don't know what to do and how to do it and they're so confused and by the time they get to graduate and you see how they've matured and how they've really got it together and are able to move forward and make life decisions, and I really like to see that.

Several of the participants pointed out how their ability to connect with students was a professional asset for them individually, and a benefit to their departments. Karina saw her connection with students as a strength, "I have a really great relationship with the students. I think that one of my strengths is that I can connect with students and students feel safe and can confide in me." Carla described her relationship with students as an asset, "my ability to really disconnect from my needs at the moment and connect to and tap into what the students need at that time, my ability to meet them where they are, and my ability to not form judgment are all important." Carla also felt appreciated by the students, "quite often I have been recognized by students for my great work. They have written stories in the paper about their connections with me."

Julia captured this sentiment shared by many of the participants, when she shared her thoughts about what she enjoyed most about her work in SA:

The interaction with the students is what gets me every time. Just being able to be part of their lives and watching them grow and transition from the quiet freshmen and the unsure students to see how everything changes throughout their four years – hearing their stories. I do enjoy that.

The vast majority of the participants shared stories about how they assisted students during critical moments in their undergraduate years and served as mentors to guide them during their college years, similar to what they had experienced as they struggled during their own undergraduate time. The focus on students is the central mission of SA, which is what the Latina administrators enjoyed most about their work and while they were able to serve all students, they

were also able to serve as a resource for students of color, a point that I elaborate on further in the next section.

**Bringing diversity: “A resource for students of color.”** Latinas were aware of the diversity they brought to their institutions and embraced that ability to bring unique skills that enhanced the campus environment and put them in positions to be able to serve as role models for students, especially students of color who may not have the opportunity to see Latinas in leadership roles on campus. Not seeing Latinas in leadership positions as undergraduates was an issue brought up by almost all of the participants, so they understood how significant their Latina representation was for students, especially younger Latinas.

Xiomara, for example, considered this responsibility carefully as she transitioned into her current role. She was approached by students of color who took her “to task for not getting involved with students of color in really direct ways.” Xiomara understood that as a Latina she would be expected to serve as a support for students of color, but it took some time for her to come to terms with her designated student of color mentor role. Xiomara shared a sentiment that many of the participants shared,

I’m aware that my being on campus matters to students of color, that I have a responsibility to spend some time with them and interact with them, whether or not my job requires that of me and so I’m grateful for that and I think it creates a student expectation. I think that for me I felt that kind of push and pull of wanting to be a resource for students of color and knowing that that’s my role whether that’s formally a function of my role or not but that piece always exists.

Similar to being able to serve students of color, a few of the Latina administrators also noted how they were able to give back to their campus communities by connecting with Latina/o employees at their institutions, utilizing their bilingual skills. Although only four participants discussed how their Spanish speaking impacted their work, it was worth mentioning as a unique skill that Latinas were able to bring to SA. A few Latina participants shared how speaking Spanish came

in handy at work, to the mutual benefit for the Latinas and their institutions. It served as a bridge between Latinas in administrative positions and the Latina/o co-workers employed in non-administrative roles like facilities operations, custodial services and dining services, allowing them to give back to their institutional and cultural communities. For example, Veronica, who believed that her Spanish speaking skills helped her get promoted said,

In my current position, I'm the only Latina and I'm the only who speaks Spanish. When I first got here my supervisor was a white male and he was overseeing the maintenance and the operations. The custodians were all Spanish; the mechanics were all Spanish so he needed me to be able to help manage conversations with them. And so I think that was how I was able to get my foot in the door with facilities. That's a big "aha moment" I just had right now, because he couldn't manage those responsibilities, those conversations. And so when he needed to sit down and discipline them he just put me into the meeting.

Veronica was able to demonstrate leadership skills among a broad group of employees due to her ability to navigate multiple languages and cultures, ultimately resulting in senior level administrators taking notice of her and promoting her.

Teresa used her Spanish language skills in another area, like Veronica, expanding the scope of her work and providing her an opportunity to utilize a unique skill that few others at her institution had the ability to do. Selena also shared how she used her Spanish speaking abilities as an advantage to connect to custodial and facilities staff members in Spanish if they felt more comfortable and how she felt it was positive, "being able to navigate that world in regards to communicating better." While being bilingual enhanced the work environment for some of the Latinas, it was also a way of giving back and serving as a role model for others. Having these Latinas in leadership positions where they were able to use their Spanish language fluency to facilitate organizational communications among various types of workers provided them with opportunities to demonstrate communicative skills as well and created a collaborative and productive workplace setting. Therefore, Latina administrators felt appreciated and valued for a



beneficial cultural attribute they could share with their campus community, definitely contributing to their positive outlook on their work and feeling of natural fit.

**Enjoy the variety: “I love that my day is never the same.”** The variety of the work was another reason Latinas had positive experiences in their early days in SA. Minerva, along with the majority of the participants described how working in SA fit nicely with her natural work style with no two days being the same and the variety of the work contributing to her satisfaction and motivation to succeed. Minerva described her appreciation for the variety of her work days when she shared:

I love that I have to multitask. I cannot do the same job all day long. It’s just not how I would operate. I would get bored very easily. I like that I can be having a student conduct meeting and then an hour later I can be attending a program and then an hour later I can be speaking to a parent and then 20 minutes later I can start working on the budget and then I have a meeting with facilities and we’re talking about lounge renovations. Those are the things that really make me tick and really going.

It was apparent in Minerva’s positive outlook that she appreciated the autonomy that SA provided, giving her and other participants a great deal of decision making power over the way their work days were structured. This provided a sense of self-efficacy that helped to boost their confidence in their work.

Ines shared a similar sentiment about her work, saying, “I love that my day is never the same and that the dynamic is always changing.” It was clear that the variety and dynamic environment in SA fit well with the Latina administrators work styles. Culturally, they were already accustomed to navigating different worlds and switching perspectives when necessary, so being able to multitask and have a work day with a variety of activities was a valued aspect of SA for the Latina administrators.

Along with their enjoyment of working with students and appreciating the dynamic work environment and variety of the work, Latinas felt connected to their colleagues as well. This

theme that emerged as Latinas described how much they appreciated their co-workers is the focus of the next section.

**Connected: “Feels like a family”**

The majority of participants expressed that they had positive experiences where they worked, citing a variety of instances when they felt good about their work and strong connections with their co-workers, particularly in the early stages of their careers. Veronica described her work environment as extremely close with regard to personal and professional relationships, stating, “It feels like a family. We work here for so long, everybody knows everything about each other. All about each other’s families and so it’s a very close knit culture.” Xiomara described her work environment similarly. She also used the word “family” when she described the small institution where she was working, stating how “there is some familiarity with how people work together and our work styles.” Rosa describes this closeness she shared with her co-workers across her campus:

Everything is great where I work. My office staff is just myself, my supervisor and the student interns and peer mentors, but within the division I have a very supportive, friendly, collaborative relationship throughout the campus – friends in all divisions. It’s very easy for me to pick up the phone and get help with something or get the answers to a question. So, I would say that it’s a very productive, respectful and friendly relationship with all of my coworkers.

All participants identified positive aspects of their work environments, especially the closeness they felt with their co-workers and how connected they felt to those around them, prompting them to use the word “family” when describing their work environments.

It was encouraging to see how the Latina administrators shared examples of someone along their career paths who provided support to them not only as undergraduate students, but as administrators. The most significant group of supporters that the Latinas identified were other

women of color who gave them advice and assisted them with navigating their institutions. The following section describes how these relationships with women of color also helped Latinas feel better connected to their institutions, especially at the beginning of their careers.

**Support (not mentorship) from women of color: “Do things differently.”** Latinas described how they received support from women of color as they began their careers, but the word mentor did not seem to be connected to describing that support. It might have been a matter of semantics, but it seems that the mentors they were looking for might have been from senior leadership who looked more like them, perhaps other women of color, which, of course was a rare find. Interestingly, support came more often from other women of color who were the Latinas’ peers, holding similar level positions. Since the examples of support that was shared about people who mentored the Latina administrators seemed to be in equivalent position to the ones the participants currently held, this was more of a peer mentorship. They served as someone who was helpful to the Latinas by providing career advice. Several participants spoke about examples of the kind of career advice women of color provided to them.

Although participants who received mentorship conveyed its importance toward dealing with issues they faced as women of color, some of the participants mentioned having people who were there for them when they needed some ideas or advice, but did not consider them official mentors. Ines shared:

I don’t think I have an official mentor. I never asked anyone to be my mentor. Certainly, there are people in this field that I look up to and I take leadership ideas from and I bounce things off of them. There’s really none in an official capacity. I’m not sure that I have a mentor like other folks have, which is sad.

Similarly, Quiana shared the value of having a mentor, but shared how she did not have a formal one, yet described her relationship with a previous supervisor in a way that could be labeled as a type of mentorship:

She lets me really work through those problems and I think she's definitely helped me become a better professional than what I was when I first started in the field. But she's not like a designated mentor, I think if you spoke to her, she would be surprised that I look at her in that manner.

A few participants said they found support from Black women who took an interest in them and helped them navigate their workplaces. One Black woman told Evelyn, for example, that she had to "do things differently" because of the way they had to navigate politics and find their own voices among men and White women. Gabriela said, "it's really important to me to share how much sisterhood I have found and support with Black women more so than with Latina women." Gabriela described how integral this support was to her being able to navigate her workplace. Ana, like several others, described forming a strong relationship with a Black woman at her institution who had been there for many more years than her and provided her with the kind of support she needed to feel like her feelings were validated:

This woman will keep it real and tell me, "Yes, this is what's happening to you." And then she'll help me try to figure out how I navigate on campus as a woman of color. Sometimes I'm able to go to her and vent. And then sometimes I'm able to go to her and just say, "I'm thinking about this strategy, what do you think? Will that be politically smart on my end?" So she helps me navigate the campus and I think without her I would be angry all the time or confused or sad or looking for a new job by this point. So she kind of grounds me.

Ana did not use the word mentor, which was an interesting commonality that became apparent as most of the Latina administrators shared how they encountered women along their career path who were instrumental in helping them learn how to navigate challenging workplaces. For most of the Latina administrators, I think the word mentor is reserved to someone they regard as being in a higher level position and who is formally assigned as an ongoing professional relationship. Latina administrators described these women of color who provided career advice and support, but hinted at a lack of formal mentorship related to a professional barrier which I discussed under the third major theme, lack of professional development, found later in this chapter.

**Latina peer mentorship: “there’s an ease with mentorship.”** There was something noteworthy about the comfort level Latinas felt when confiding in someone with whom they felt instant connections, knowing that their ethnicities as Latinas provided them with a perceived familiar common ground due to their similar backgrounds. Rosa explained this best, as many other Latina participants described their Latina peer mentors when she said, “there’s an ease with mentorship that I see more among Latinas than I see among non-Latinas.” Ursula echoed this sentiment, using the word “co-mentor,” which she described as “peer mentorship,” stating:

I have what I call co-mentors, people who are in my same level as me. I consider other Latinas in similar positions co-mentors even though we don’t see each other all the time. I’m on a Facebook page and there’s a lot of peer mentorship that goes on there, I have someone at another institution. I have a lot of women who are in the same general role in Higher Ed with either middle manager or trying to become middle manager or vice presidents and we co-mentor each other.

Pilar also emphasized the importance of finding good mentors in SA, starting from the beginning of her career, but was specific about how important it was that her mentors share similar backgrounds and can inspire her to move up and get her doctorate. She said,

It started off for me at the undergrad level, meeting another Latina who held a higher position in Student Affairs and who connects with students, that was pretty significant for me. I think again, meeting mentors who help me realize that I can even go on graduate school and then I can go on for a doctoral degree. I think mentors have played a huge role in that. It’s been really important for me to meet others who have come from similar backgrounds, not just ethnicity wise but from inner cities, from underserved communities. I think for me I needed to see that if they can do it, I can do it too.

Karina also described one of her Latina colleagues a little older than her, who she said was “very instrumental and motivational” in her career. The Latina administrators appreciated having other women of color who were there to support them and provide advice to them when they needed it but pointed out how these women were rarely in senior level positions. When a few of the participants did see women in positions of power, they were inspired by them and were able to see themselves as being able to reach higher in their aspirations.

**Inspiring women leaders: “She’s a powerhouse and a leader.”** Another way that Latinas felt connected to SA was by realizing when women were in leadership roles at their institutions and feeling motivated and inspired to advance their own careers. Latinas who had women as supervisors described their workplaces positively. For example, Minerva was one participant who described her relationship with her female supervisor with optimism:

It’s phenomenal. I honestly can’t imagine a relationship that can be better or stronger. She’s just really invested in me as a person-- not just professionally but personally as well. You can tell that she cares about me as a person. She wants me to succeed. She believes in my work. She trusts me, which is really important.

Karina was another participant who echoed this sentiment about her female supervisor, someone for whom she had great admiration:

I think she’s a powerhouse and a leader. Also what I admire most about my second boss is that she has a family and she is able to balance her professional and her personal life. So I think having motivation and then also having mentors to help guide and coach you along the way have been helpful.

Comments like these were shared by a majority of the participants who had a female supervisor.

Participants, like Pilar, described her female supervisor as “supportive” while Yolanda describing her female supervisor as, “a very nurturing leader.” Evelyn, like several other participants, captured the significance of female leaders when she described how much more valued she felt as an employee when she switched from a male supervisor to a female supervisor shortly after she arrived at her institution, “She’s amazing as far as relationships. She cares about me and I know it. She calls and checks in on me. She wants to see what’s going on.” It was clear that seeing women in positions of leadership played an important role in how some of the participants felt about their opportunities for advancement and hope for the future. They felt much more connected to their institutions when they witnessed women in positions of power

who served as role models and represented examples of how women can lead in ways that were effective and affirming.

### **Summary of Major Theme One**

The Latina administrators in this study described finding careers in SA by happenstance, falling and enjoying the work and students so much that it felt like a natural fit, with the work reflecting who they were as individuals. Latinas entered college as undergraduate students with the goal of personal betterment and hopes for a brighter future. However, academia proved to be a difficult environment to navigate for these Latinas, so many of them struggled at the institutions they attended as undergraduates and found support from mentors and supervisors who helped them through the journey to graduation and introduced them to careers in SA. This career discovery was typically facilitated by supportive supervisors and advisors who tapped them and made them feel “chosen” as they were invited to enter the field of SA.

The strong connection to SA and to the students they were serving proved to fall right in line with the Latinas’ personal values, which provided close association to the work that prompted their professional commitment that helped them navigate their entry level years as professionals into their time as mid-level administrators. They shared how they found enjoyment in the meaningfulness and variety of the work, the positive relationships with students, and the encouraging workplace dynamic with their co-workers, all contributing to that natural fit Latinas found in Student Affairs.

### **Major Theme Two: Latinas Move from Natural Fit to Misfit**

In response to the second research question: What is the impact of gender, race, and ethnicity on the career paths and opportunities for advancement of Latina higher education professionals, the intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity influenced the career paths and

opportunities for advancement for the 26 Latina administrators, for the most part, in negative ways that created challenges along their career paths that moved them away from that initial natural fit they felt in SA to feeling misfit.

In the first major theme of Latinas finding a natural fit in SA, the Latinas described how they fell into SA and were tapped by supervisors and advisors who suggested they pursue SA as a possible career path. They took this advice and were chosen for entry level positions, often being “the only Latina administrator” at their institutions, adding to the desired diversity, but in essence making them the “token” Latina, except at Hispanic Service Institutions (HSIs). The intersections of the Latina identity caused the Latina administrators to experience covert and overt racial and gender discrimination along their career paths that demonstrated to them that they were outsiders and were not as embraced in the field of SA as they thought they were when they started.

The second major theme emerged as the Latina administrators explained how gender, race and ethnicity impacted their career trajectory by exposing to them the harsh realities that the Latina administrators faced in their work experiences as women of color trying to fit into a predominantly White and male institutional culture. At first SA seemed to fall in line with their own cultures, but then it became clear how it was countercultural to their identities as Latinas when they experienced moments of isolation and discrimination. As they progressed in their careers, they experienced SA as not such a welcoming and promising career path to follow if they were looking to advance to senior level positions. The majority of the Latina administrators shared how the Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) they saw were mostly White and male, so they did not see themselves in positions of power at their institutions.



In the following sections I described the subthemes that represent how Latina administrators in SA experienced negative experiences along their career paths due to gender, race and ethnicity. The first subtheme reflects the Latina administrators' experiences with microaggressions and stereotypes that made them feel misfit at their institutions. These microaggressions exposed them to the negative stereotypes about who they were as Latinas, as women finding SA to be an "old boys club" and as women of color finding themselves in White spaces where issues of power and privilege affected workplace relations and where misperceptions about gender and race negatively impacted their work experiences, making the racialized Latinas feel invisible.

The second subtheme describes the Latinas' burden of proof, with the constant need to prove their competence by feeling the need to work hard and attempting to guard against Latina stereotypes by adjusting their mannerisms and physical appearances to fit in. The third subtheme depicts Latinas as the *Chosen Tokens* when they realized the diversity and positive qualities they brought as Latinas made them feel like tokens when they were boxed into specific roles they perceived as limiting their advancement. It proved to be difficult for Latinas to be seen as being able to transcend these boxes and move away from midlevel to senior level leadership positions.

**Misfit: "I have felt like an outsider my entire career"**

Most the participants reported that they often felt like outsiders due to their ethnicities as Latinas. As mentioned previously, these feelings began as early as their college years for Latina administrators, many of whom had a rough entry into higher education as undergraduate students. However, with the help of SA administrators who supported and encouraged them to pursue higher degrees, they entered careers in SA, which started out very positively. The idea of

feeling misfit was about Latinas not fitting into their predominantly White institutions where many these Latina administrators were employed.

Fitting in was a major concern for Latinas, especially as they began their careers in SA. For example, Fela, like most of the other participants, described how she knew that she would have to consider the challenge of fit and how that informed the career choices she made. She believed she had to find a place where her thoughts were “going to be embraced” and that she was “not going to be labelled as someone who’s just trying to advocate for one group or highlight a group.” Fela further shared, “I’m always worried if am I going to fit in an environment knowing that I am very assertive, I’m vocal, and most of the time I won’t really look like the people that work there.”

Similarly, Carla shared how being the only Latina at work made her feel like an outsider. She noted, “my experience with my team is like an outsider that people need when it’s convenient. I’m the first person they will remember when they need something and the first one to forget when it needs to be recognized.” Unfortunately, Carla was speaking about her current midlevel position, but also said, “I have felt like an outsider for most of my career,” a very sad realization, making Carla and other participants feel hopeless about their prospects for advancement. Teresa was told by a classmate as she was applying for jobs and was interested in working at a place that was not very diverse, “I don’t know if you’re going to fit in because you look so different even if you do qualify to have the job. You look so different that I think it’s going to deter them from taking you.” The feeling of misfit or outsider was the isolation they felt at their institutions, often being the only Latina, a concept I will describe further in the following section.

**Isolated: “The oddball in the room.”** A negative work experience that the Latinas faced at some point in their careers was a feeling of isolation, often being the only Latina at their institutions. Julia used the term “oddball” when describing her isolation as one of the only Latinas at her institution, a feeling shared by the majority of the participants:

I feel like the oddball in the room being the only brown person at a presidential function or one of those higher-level type of events, where I’ll be uncomfortable to begin with because I don’t share a lot of the same experiences that these people have.

Over time, the experiences of being the only Latina had a negative impact and contributed to a feeling of being an outsider. For example, Gabriela told a story about attending events where feeling isolated as one of the only women of color in attendance caused her to go back to her office and cry. Gabriela told the following story:

There was a welcome reception for the new chief finance person in our division, a White man. I went to the reception, and I get there and besides one of the admin, I was the only person of color, male or female. Everybody looked at me when I walked in and the only person that talked to me was the admin. I had to insert myself into people’s conversations. I was so blown away by that and by the time I left, I was in tears. I couldn’t believe that this is the leadership of my division.

Gabriela shared the sentiment of the majority of Latina administrators, who were sad that they were constantly feeling left out when they were the only Latina in many of the settings they were in. Similarly, Fela also felt alone when she moved from an urban city to a rural town where she did not find any other Latinos with whom she could connect, so she decided, “Okay, I’m here by myself” since she did not feel connected to anyone on campus or in her town. Fela ended up leaving that position and moved to a new job at an institution located in a city that had a large Latino population, a challenging situation that many Latinas have struggled with, first as college students, then for graduate school and as they navigate their careers in higher education.

While at first many of the Latinas expressed how special they felt to be “very aware” that she was “the Latina in the room,” as Ana described. The problem was that after a while the

feeling was more isolating for them and made them stand out in negative ways when they were the ones bringing up issues of race and ethnicity. They found themselves being the only ones who actively voiced the inequities they observed at their institutions or spoke out about creating better campus climates for marginalized people, especially students of color on their campuses. In the next section I describe how that idea of standing out, coupled with negative treatment from co-workers and discriminatory language used around them minimized their value of diversity. These Latinas felt that their presence on campuses was no longer as welcomed or appreciated as they were when they first entered SA and progressed through their careers.

**Diversity devalued: “A sense that diversity is not important.”** Contributing to the Latina administrators’ feelings of isolation and alienation were indicators that diversity was not valued on their campuses. A lack of campus diversity or devaluing diversity on campus led to negative experiences for the participants. That is, half of the participants shared frustration with the way diversity was regarded and discussed. For example, Ana shared this sentiment when she said, “There is this sense that diversity is not important. And so I feel very invisible sometimes. I feel like I’m talking to an empty room.” Ana explained further with an example about her strained relationships with co-workers at her past employer and how she did not feel supported by them:

And so my co-workers, I see them, I say hi and I keep it moving. They don’t support me in my role. They don’t understand my role. Actually, in a meeting, they told me that diversity wasn’t important. And so I felt like they were saying that my role is insignificant. And the students’ experiences are insignificant. And when I brought it up, I was looked at as the angry black woman. And my boss called me in and said, “I saw that you are really angry at the meeting. What’s going on?” and put everything on me versus getting to hear my side of the story.

Conversely, not all participants felt that diversity was not valued, especially if they were working at an institution with racially diverse students and staff. There were four participants who

discussed how working at a minority serving institution, including HSIs and HBCUs was a positive experience that gave them hope for future advancement. For example, Karina shared how positive her experience has been as a Latina staff member at her institution, “since it’s such a diverse campus and many students are, we want to make sure that our faculty and staff are also as diverse. So, I think it’s been an asset.” Similarly, Teresa experienced a contrast between how she saw herself compared to others when she left a less inclusive institution for a more diverse institution where she noticed a difference in representation of diverse staff, which gave her a more positive outlook regarding her future prospects for advancement:

At my previous institution, I would say being at a very small school and being one of few, you could probably count in one hand, people of color. That definitely impacted the way that I viewed Student Affairs for a while and it definitely impacted my own self-worth as well at times. I think I was self-conscious about what I was able to do in the eyes of my supervisors who were all white. Where I am now, several deans at our institution are all people of color, so finally being at a place where I can look upwards and see many people that look like me or have had similar experiences as me very much gives me hope that if I choose to go farther than an Associate Director level or Director level, that it’s an option.

Teresa felt that having a diverse representation of administrators at her institution was enough to make her feel that her identity as a Latina was valued and that she might have a chance to be promoted at that institution. There was definitely a sense of hope in Teresa’s account. Lucia also told a positive story about being at an institution where diversity was valued and how that made her feel like a professional at her previous institution:

I think in the past it’s actually been pretty helpful and only because I previously worked at an institution that was very international. You have to be very culturally sensitive and inclusive because it was the social culture. And that’s the only thing that was acceptable and I excelled there rapidly. But here, that doesn’t really bode well.

Unfortunately, the diversity that was valued at her previous institution was not something she thought was celebrated or appreciated at her current institution. Most of the Latina administrators shared similar sentiments about their diversity being devalued at their institutions and how their

White co-workers did not appreciate their contributions. They noted verbal and nonverbal indicators throughout their work days when they would hear negative comments about diversity initiatives on campus. They often noticed that there were no active efforts to diversify the institution or at least educate the campus community about diversity topics. Aside from hearing insensitive comments about diversity on their campuses, the Latina administrators also endured injurious comments about their Latina identity, including remarks about their appearance, mannerisms, clothing and jewelry choices and the way they talked, further adding to their feelings of misfit at their institutions.

**Latina identity microaggressions. “Everybody just judges you.”** All of the participants in this study shared encounters with microaggressions based on stereotypes about their Latina identities, all based on superficial characteristics, including behavior, mannerisms, and appearances. Although the participants had a variety of nationalities of origin, including Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Cuba, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, and Guatemala, these specific identities were not mentioned as the Latina administrators described their negative experiences of being subjected to microaggressions by their colleagues.

The collective identity as a Hispanic woman or Latina seemed to be most salient and the stereotypes and cultural assumptions were general and not pertaining to any one Latino culture. The stereotypes and assumptions about the Latina identity shared by study participants made a significant impact on how these Latina administrators felt about fitting in at their institutions. Again, as stated previously, microaggressions were directed at the Latina administrators based on the collective Latina identity, not with regard to any individual’s nationality. These participants pointed out how individual nationalities did not matter when being discriminated against or judged based on her Latina identity. Quiana shared:

Everybody just judges you and they don't really care about what nationality or ethnicity you are, they're just looking at you for what you look like. So I think it's all relevant, I think once they look at me on paper and they see my first name and say, "okay she may be somewhat Hispanic," they judge me because of how I look and how I act or how I talk. I don't necessarily feel like there is any difference when people are judging me based on my nationality or anything.

The Latina administrators experienced moments when they had others point out how they should behave at work. For instance, Fela was one Latina administrator who talked about an example of the kind of issues that would come up when she was told by a co-worker, "Watch your tone" or "try not to use your hands so much." These were reminders for them that they did not fit into the expected behavior.

Another common insult that a majority of the participants shared was when co-workers confused them with other Latinas who happened to work at their institutions. They talked about how they were accustomed to being called by the wrong name, usually the name of another Latina. Lucia shared this example of how she just got used to it. Lucia shared,

I caught myself responding to somebody else's name. So there's very few Latinas here and I'm often confused with another Latina and when they call her name sometimes they're actually calling for me and it happened recently. And when they called her name I actually turned around. I thought maybe they're actually calling me and my staff caught on and they were like, "wow, does that happen that often?"

Lucia and the other Latinas were frustrated about having their identities mistaken and not being regarded or remembered as a unique individual. The biggest issue with this is that they noted how they did not see the same thing happen to their White counterparts. Latinas wanted to be noticed and seen by their colleagues.

**Latinas in White spaces: "It's like I'm invisible."** This section includes the way that the participants described their experiences of how race impacted their institutional experiences, sharing how they felt invisible. Several participants felt as an outsider in SA, specifically as the field seemed to be "so White" and that whether they were light-skinned or dark-skinned, the

issue of race was pervasive in their work experiences and hopes for career advancement. Latinas realize that their skin color made a difference with how they perceived their initial fit at their institutions, especially for light-skinned Latinas, but ultimately, the skin tone did not matter with regard to how they were treated at their institutions and how they felt that they did not belong there.

Almost all of Latina administrators recounted a negative racial experience related to work, depicting their institutions as “White spaces” where diversity was undervalued, and Whites seemed to be valued more than they were in their work environments. Participants expressed concerns over how their racial identities impacted their career paths and opportunities for advancement. For example, Zunilda explained how she felt invisible because she is not white, saying:

There have been instances where I can be in a room with my Assistant Director who is a White male and myself and so people don't see me. They just see him and they're like, 'Oh hi!' and I'm like, 'No, actually I'm the Director.' And it's sort of like I wasn't what they expected.

Several participants described feelings of invisibility when they were not seen for the positions they held. Similarly, Dinora felt invisible when she was treated differently than her white male counterparts as she had to carefully consider whether or not she should speak up in a given situation. A vast majority of participants expressed their constant struggle for raising their voices. The pattern also showed that when participants attempted to speak they felt dismissed. Dinora's commentary, below, reflected this pattern and demonstrated her fear that this dynamic may be hurting her career:

I hear White men speaking all the time, but no one makes a big deal. But if I raise my voice for the one thing and I want to add to the conversation, I feel like it's hurting my career because I seem more aggressive than some of the other females. People expect you to be calm and quiet, and I am for the most part. That's the funny thing. So when I'm calm and quiet, I'm not moving up because no one notices me. I'm invisible.



Both Zunilda and Dinora's reflections revealed how invisible Latinas felt when they were trying to contribute to their workplaces, but had to be overly conscious of how they would be perceived. Being overly conscious prevents Latina administrators from performing their work responsibilities and causes them to feel like they have to work harder or overcompensate.

***Skin tone matters: "I wasn't what they expected."*** Over half of the participants shared that skin tone affected their interactions with others at their institutions, which may have impacted their career paths and opportunities for advancement. Skin tone and identification with race made a difference in how lighter skinned Latina administrators described the impact of race on their career paths and opportunities for advancement. Based on their interactions, it seemed that the lighter skinned they were, the more they felt they could blend in at first, but the darker skinned they were they would experience discrimination in more overt ways during their careers. The following sections provide more details for the ways that skin tone made a difference in the way that the Latina administrators were treated by their work colleagues, further emphasizing their lack of fit at their institutions.

**Light skinned: "I can pass for White."** Having lighter skin seemed to make a difference in how some participants experienced their workplaces. For example, Ines said, "I think I have some level of privilege because I'm lighter skinned." Meanwhile, Gabriela also recognized the role of skin tone in her experience and the privilege that comes with being perceived as White at first glance. She said:

I think because of my complexion I can pass for White. That's just the reality. Unless I speak or people hear my last name, they don't necessarily know that I'm Latina. So, I can use that as an advantage. Whereas I know, my darker skinned sisters and brothers can't... they just can't.

The challenge for Gabriela, however, was that as she tried to fit in at her institutions, she was also straddling two worlds by trying to be accepted by her colleagues of color. Gabriela admitted that her White appearance, “can open doors and at the same time, especially with other Latinos, they’re like, “Wait a minute. What is she? And is she down?” Gabriela understood that while it was beneficial for her to fit in, she also needed the support of her fellow Latinos during times when she did not fit in. Rosa, like the other participants who shared that their race was White, has experienced Gabriela’s observation first-hand. During first impressions, others perceived her as White, but she wanted to be sure that students of color could still go to her and rely on her for support, so she shared her strategy for how she navigates:

I’m White complexioned so that always makes things interesting in terms of students and how they perceive me and it’s the initial impression. I’m very intentional about sharing my story and who I am fully in order to establish a connection with students, especially students of color because they assume that I’m White and don’t realize I’m Latina.

Hilda spoke about a similar experience about her appearance and how it created a difference in how others have treated her. She said:

I don’t know that everybody sees me and knows that I’m Latina right away. So I think that in some ways, I guess the word I would use is, I “pass.” But people don’t know that I’m Latina unless I tell them or unless I start to speak Spanish. And I don’t know... I wonder sometimes how that would be different if my appearance was more obvious. I have lighter skin, straight, dark hair, so I guess I could pass for any number of ethnicities. But I don’t know that my appearance impacts somebody’s knowledge of me without them knowing more about me being Latina.

Teresa talked about an interesting story about an occasion when she thought she was providing a role model for a group of high school students of color who were doing a college visit at her PWI. She was telling them about how she was once in their shoes and wanted to make sure that they encountered people like her who was just like them. The students looked at her with confused looks on their faces. When she realized that they did not see her as one of them because she looked White, Teresa felt the need to say to them,

Let me set the record straight. I am Cubana. Born and raised in the U.S. but of Cuban descent and my first language was Spanish and I'm just like you. I grew up in an urban area. I know what I'm talking about, trust me. As a Latina, I know a little bit about where you're coming from.

Zunilda, like the other four participants whose race and appearance was White, admitted how she thought that her lighter skin tone had been advantageous to her feeling accepted at first glance and how that helped her fit in when she first started working at her current institution,

I look like a White woman so people always say to me, "Oh my gosh, you're Puerto Rican? I thought you might be Portuguese or might be Greek or Italian. I can't believe you're Puerto Rican" So, I definitely think that if you were going to hire a woman of color I would be it, I think. Because I don't look as other dark skinned women would. And I think that has been beneficial for me.

The perceptions shared show that lighter skinned Latinas struggle with appearances because they were seen as White and may fit in at first, but once it was revealed that they were Latina, they no longer fit in and were subjected to the stereotypes and microaggressions previously described by all of the Latina administrators in this study. They went from being seen as White, looking just like the majority, to being an outsider once it is revealed that they were Latina. In the next section the opposite situation is discussed, with Latinas who are darker skinned expressing the discrimination they experiences as they were perceived as Black women.

**Dark skinned: "They think I'm Black."** Most participants discussed that dark skin played a role in workplace dynamics. When the skin tone of the Latina administrators was darker, they tended to share more robust examples of discriminating behavior. For example, Carla tells this story:

There was a security guard who was doing something inappropriate that just got fired and we learned that he went to a class of self-defense in one of our lounges, this guy happens to be black and my dean sent me an email to just check to see if I knew the guy. And I cannot help to think that, "Did she think I knew the guy because I'm black?" I know that if this was one of the White colleagues that I have, she would not even remotely ask. That was not an official program, so the only way that she would even think that I might know that guy is because I happen to be a Black woman, a Black Latina woman.

Fela also shared how her darker skin led to inappropriate questions and a warning from her supervisor at an institution located in the southern United States because of her darker skin tone.

Fela shared:

My supervisor told me not to leave campus after 6 p.m. because they were still lynching migrant workers. And when I got there and she said that, I thought “This lady’s crazy.” And she was like, “No, do not leave campus past 6pm, please, you’re making me worry.” So, I didn’t.

Not only did she receive warnings like this from her supervisor, who was trying to protect her, but Fela also experienced moments when she definitely felt different and was sure that it was due to her appearance. She shared how there were several occasions when she was doing a presentation for parents and each time it was inevitable that someone would ask her about her background. Fela’s frustration was apparent as she shared:

I would spend 25 minutes giving this presentation and I would say, “Do you have any questions?” and every session someone would raise their hand and say, “Ma’am, where are you from again?” It was like they didn’t hear anything in my presentation. They were so fixated on the fact that I did not look like them and I did not speak like them that they didn’t understand what was going on. So that experience really is how I can speak about my color because for them if you’re Latina, if you’re Afro Latina, like in the South, they think you’re black. So, for them it’s easy to put you in the black box. Instead of me doing my job and teaching students about my job, I’m teaching as many people about my ethnicity and my race, which was not something that I was planning on doing.

This was one of many examples of how race interfered with the everyday work experiences of the Latina administrators. Instead of focusing on the tasks they had at hand, Latinas found themselves expending extra energy explaining their identities to their colleagues, to students and to the families of the students. They wished they could go about their regular work, but instead, found themselves explaining their identities and not being seen as just professionals, but rather, professionals of color who were different. This is when the feeling of misfits gets solidified by constantly having to react to the perceptions and assumptions that others make.

**Old boys club: “Male voices are heard louder than mine.”** Latinas begin careers in SA like most other professionals, entering entry level positions, being trained and socialized into higher education, often after having completed academic preparation through undergraduate and graduate degrees. Although they were inspired to pursue SA because of the connection as undergraduate students and enjoyed their entry into the field as professionals, participants realized how gender impacted their work experiences and opportunities. Latina administrators encountered challenges along their career paths due to issues of gender, realizing there is a “glass ceiling” for them as women in SA. A majority of them described SA as an “old boys club.” They spoke of the politics they encountered that did not feel natural to them. They also expressed a desire for much needed formal mentorship to help them navigate this environment that became hostile to Latinas as they discovered that their gender was not as welcome to the SA field as they thought in the beginning. This alienation stemmed from a series of experiences of microaggressions and covert and overt reminders that men were most often seen as leaders and women in top leadership were not as visible.

Karina found gender to be one of her biggest obstacles to her career advancement. She further noted how gender issues were problematic for her as she observed how men seemed to advance faster than women, when she said, “I see male employees getting higher positions faster than some of the females. I think gender has been an issue.” Karina continued to speak of the inequity she had experienced:

I might have worked a little bit harder to get recognized for the same things. Maybe I had to actually complete a Master’s to get a promotion whereas a male employee just has to start a Master’s program and then they can get a promotion. So I think I might have to work a little bit longer also a little bit harder but eventually I think besides all that I can catch up.

Similarly, Olga said, “I feel like I have to prove myself before I could actually bring that idea to the table. Whereas men when they say it, they’re like, ‘Oh, that must be an amazing idea.’” The Latina administrators in this study described their awareness of gender differences between men and women as they navigated their careers in SA. For example, Selena shared an interesting story about how her gender played out at her workplace:

I’m one of three managers, I’m the female and there’s two male managers and I’ve been asked to stay for meetings where both of them have not. One of them has been there for four years, one them has only been there for three months more than I have and yes, we have different manager responsibilities. We’ve now had several occasions where, “Oh, Selena can pitch in. Oh, there’s no one upfront. Okay, call Selena. She can come help cover the phone.” And yet we’ve had staff meetings where it was said, when there’s no one at the front desk or one of the secretaries is out we have to rotate who comes up. And somehow I’ve been primarily the one providing that extra support.

Ines shared the following account of how sexism was pervasive, even more so than racism because of the feeling that men’s perspectives were more validated:

There’s so much more sexism than racism sometimes, which is just crazy for me. I’m a kid from the Bronx, I know what racism is, but there are some times sexism is so blaring. All of it is there, I know I have a social justice lens in this work, right? But we need to be just equal.

Meanwhile, Minerva shared how pervasive gender identity was in her workplace when she said,

When I think about my core identity, I really think that I focus more on being a female than being a Latina. And I think that’s because just being a female in itself already hinders us from being able to progress as quickly as our male counterparts.

Latinas described how being female worked against them as most of them tried to assert themselves and find their voices in male dominated spaces, but were left feeling silenced. They noticed how men seemed to advance faster and were well represented in senior level positions. Latina administrators were challenged with navigating politics and observed glass ceilings for women in SA reinforcing how prevalent sexism was at the majority of their institutions.

**Navigating politics: “I don’t know how to play.”** The collective sentiment conveyed by participants indicated that being passionate, qualified, and good at their work was secondary to their advancement because of gender discrimination. The “old boys club” culture appeared to be intensified by the fact that the participants felt underprepared to successfully navigate politics in the workplace. The politics the Latina administrators described had to do with them feeling like they needed to compromise their integrity, true feelings on certain matters and ethics in order to not rock the boat or upset others. They wanted to appear to be team players, but there were moments when they did not feel like conforming just to appease others. Evelyn presented a clear account of these politics and the effects on how they navigated their workplaces. She said:

I don’t know how to play. We, as Latina women are taught that when you walk in a room you say hi to everyone and that you greet people that you are welcoming, that you’re excited to see people, but we’re also taught that if someone has hurt you, if you don’t feel good about a person that you don’t have to fake it, that you don’t have to sit through and feel uncomfortable. I think that that’s a challenge with navigating the politics.

The way that another participant, Fela described her thoughts on the politics was about having to compromise her identity. She explained, “I want to live with integrity and I don’t ever want to sell out on my identity, sell out on my culture, be silent against advocacy for Latino students because it’s going to make somebody uncomfortable.” The concern for having to hold in their opinions for fear of upsetting others. The intersectionality of the Latina identity makes it challenging to distinguish which form of discrimination might be hindering their career advancement, but there are clear instances shared by the Latina administrators that pertained clearly to gender, reinforcing the notion of the “old boys club” that still seems to exist in SA, especially in senior level administration.

**Limited advancement for women in SA: “It’s still a glass ceiling.”** Adding to the perception of being in an “old boys club,” several Latinas mentioned being aware of a “glass

ceiling” preventing significant advancement for women administrators in SA. For example, with regard to SA leadership, Teresa described what she believes happens with women in SA: “It tends to be more of a female heavy career but when you start looking at deans and directors and VPs they tend to be male. It’s very rare that you have enough women, never mind two or more.”

Yolanda was, like many of the participants, personally affected when she was not granted a promotion and was told the reason by her director was, “we just need more males in this office.” The problem for Yolanda was that the opportunity for promotion for any of the women in her department was unjustly given to a male administrator with less experience than the women who had already been working in that department for years. This blatant bias was remarkable, except that it seemed more of a common occurrence based on the stories the Latina administrators shared with regard to their limited advancement opportunities.

Unfortunately, what started out as ideal careers that were welcoming and felt natural for the Latina administrators now seemed to be favoring the leadership and advancement of male SA administrators. As they considered their own career advancement, they noticed that women were not the ones getting the promotions, since they entered SA feeling very positive about their work and their future career advancement prospects. The reality did not quite match the aspirations the Latinas had because what they observed was that women were not promoted as quickly as men, so it seemed less likely that they would be placed in line for promotion when opportunities presented themselves.

Therefore, at midlevel, these Latina administrators were forced to come to terms with the reality that the men around them were more likely to be regarded as more qualified and better poised to be promoted to advanced positions. Now they came to realization as to why they did not see many women in senior level leadership. The next section dives a little deeper into what



was happening in their work environments in which gender issues became problematic for the Latina administrators.

**Burden of proof: “I always have to bring my A-game”**

The negative experiences Latinas endured due to their gender, race, and ethnicities caused them to be actively conscious of their behavior in different settings on their respective campuses and to be more reflective about how they were perceived by others, compelling them to make adjustments to their mannerisms, appearance, and behavior to try to fit in. Another way the Latina administrators in this study found themselves marginalized was that they felt as if they needed to work harder than their White counterparts. Zunilda, for example, described this feeling as having to “carry an extra burden of proof” to be seen as competent. This was one of the main answers given in response to whether they believed Latinas had to navigate their careers differently than others. These women felt that they were not respected professionally, constantly being questioned by others about their titles, credentials and professional experience.

In this regard, Wendy shared, “You have to work a little bit harder to show that you are not the token Student Affairs rep, that you actually know your stuff.” Accordingly, Veronica phrased this best when she said, “I always have to bring my A-game. I can’t have an off day.” Having to navigate their workplaces with this kind of pressure was stressful for the Latina administrators and added to the disillusionment of working in SA, which once seemed like a comfortable and nurturing environment when they began, but then impacted their professional development.

Nancy, like a majority of the participants, believed the challenges she faced in her career development were different from her White peers. She said, “I think there are different challenges that non-Latinas do not have that when it comes to being in Student Affairs, there’s a

lot of proving of oneself necessary. I feel that as a Latina I had to prove myself over and over again just to get to the point of being Director.” This inequality had demonstrable effects on the Latina administrators. For example, Julia struggled with self-confidence, stating “It’s hard not to feel insecure when you look at the faces of the other administrators.” To compensate, she said “you try to be the first one in and the last one out,” something she believed her non-Latina peers did not need to focus on. Zunilda reinforced this insecurity when she said,

Because it’s like these feelings that you live in and “subconsciously they’re always there” and when you are able to actually step back from it you can see “Oh, I said this because I didn’t want them to think this about me.

Gabriela also identified this double standard, stating “The reality is that we’re second best, we’re questioned, our capacities are constantly challenged, so, I know that’ll also be part of what I have to deal with.” Meanwhile, Fela expressed a desire to be perceived as competent by others, “so they have to trust that I’m as competent as anybody else. So, I think a part of it is, if you don’t have the right people in place rooting for you, they will leave you out of the picture. They will not have you at the table. They will not ask your perspective.” Latina administrators wanted to feel respected and have their thoughts valued by their co-workers.

Connected to the idea of having a burden of proof, whereas the Latina administrators thought they needed to prove themselves at work more than their White counterparts, there seemed to be cultural expectations and assumptions made about the way they should behave at work. These expectations came from people external to the institutions where they worked, including from their families and people internal to their institutions such as supervisors and co-workers. Fela shared an example of how she felt disrespected by a fellow Latina co-worker who seemed to question her Latina identity. Fela told this story highlighting some issues she experienced:

I'm part of the Hispanic Latina Employee Association at my institution. The president is a woman from Mexico. She's native. Her skin tone is white and her hair is what people consider good hair. Her mother is white American. So, when I met her I felt that I wasn't Latina enough for her because she was from Mexico and she moved to the states just to get her degree, worked in Mexico and came back to work here. So then when I shared that I'm from New York, but I was born in Venezuela, she said, "Oh you're not really Latina. You're a New Yorker."

Beyond their behaviors and mannerisms, most the participants also discussed how much their appearance seemed to matter as they navigated their work environment. As a result, participants consciously made adjustments to the way they dressed and the way they wore their hair.

Veronica described the shocked faces she saw when she introduced herself as Associate Dean of Students:

I see the parents' faces. They're like, 'Oh my God.' A, 'How old is she?' and B, 'Really? She is?' I get that when I go into meetings and introduce myself. But when they know me and they see my work and they hear me speaking, I'm intelligent and I know what I'm talking about and I've been in this game for a minute then it all changes. But I see the initial hesitancy when I come in.

Because of these kinds of reactions, Veronica and many other Latina participants made sure to always dress professionally, often feeling like they needed to dress better than their White colleagues. For example, Gabriela shared how she made conscious decisions about how she dresses for work:

I dress differently than a lot of my colleagues. I dress better. I have to. I'll be in a suit, I'll be in a dress, when they're in khakis or in jeans. I can't do that. I need to present myself at a hundred percent at all times because if I don't, they may not be hearing me, and that's the reality. I've experienced that. When I haven't dressed the part, then people respond differently to me. So, in that regard, it's like I have to try harder to be taken more seriously.

Although only four participants mentioned it, there also seemed to be specific ideas about how hair should be worn in order to be perceived as professional. Whether it was about curly hair, big hair, or long hair, the consensus among those who mentioned it was that there seemed to be a standard to follow in order to fit in or to not be perceived in a negative light. Ana shared how

conscious she was about this every day, stating “before I go to work, I look at the mirror to make sure that I could blend in. Because if my hair’s too big I need to put extra gel to make sure that none of my curly hair is up. I want to be taken seriously.” Zunilda was another participant who shared some advice her sister shared about what she needed to do with her curly hair, “if you’re going to make it in the workforce, you’re going to have to tame that hair because people are just going to look at you differently.” Despite having had her LinkedIn profile picture taken professionally, Zunilda still received criticism about the way her curly hair looked with the first feedback she got being directed at her naturally curly hair, such as, “that’s not professional. You need to straighten your hair.”

Finally, Veronica also made decisions about how she wore her hair to try to manage the perceptions from others. She shared the following on the topic:

I wore my hair in a bun every day. I wouldn’t take my hair out. I don’t really wear it out too much because I perceived it to be too sexy. That sounds crazy but I get too much attention from that, when I have my hair out. I’ve cut it now so it’s a little bit better. But I went into a full thing where I cut my hair to my shoulders because I needed it to be professional. I need it to be perceived just so. I do n’t know if the normal white woman has to think about that or does think about that.

Clearly, the messages about having to dress better than those around them and how they wore their hair in order to be perceived as more professional came early in the Latina administrators’ lives and followed them throughout their careers in SA. These women took advice on these aspects of professional life very seriously. Latinas felt the need to work longer hours, dress better than their co-workers and consider the way they styled their hair very carefully so that they could be respected and regarded as competent. The issue here is the subconscious feelings of inadequacy that was pervasive as they navigated their careers, causing them to lose confidence and burdening their lives and work days with that constant burden of proof to be seen as competent.

**The chosen token: “It’s the elephant in the room, being the token.”**

Several participants used the word “token” as they described their experiences of being the only Latina at the institutions where they worked, but also Latinas observed how they believed that being Latina helped them secure their job because they were specially selected to help advance diversity on their campuses. According to these participants, being the token Latina meant that they were aware that they were selected partly because of their being Latina as part of an institutional effort to increase diversity and that they were expected to fulfill duties related to diversity on campus, including being on committees and working closely with students of color.

While many expressed that there was something positive in being selected, this also came with some specific expectations. While seemingly positive at first, this led to a heightened level of self-awareness that influenced their work experience and made them stand out as tokens, a phenomenon I labeled, “the Chosen Token.” Julia was one of the Latinas, like many of the participants, who seemed to be conflicted about the meaning of being a token Latina. She said:

I think in some ways it’s opened up some doors and it’s the elephant in the room, being the token. I’ve been asked to join things and they were very honest, that they wanted someone like me on their committee for diversity reasons. So that’s I guess a positive impact, I don’t know. It’s kind of tough because the pride in me is like, “Oh, that’s the only reason why.” But on the flip side you do want to have diversity on your committees for opportunities that occur.

Julia’s perspective was echoed by Zunilda, who captured this conflict as follows:

It’s sort of like this Catch 22 sometimes because the university systems talk highly about diversity and wanting to promote or hire non-Caucasian women or folks to their positions. And so sometimes you’re able to find your way in because of that.

Being the Latina token in the workplace appeared to get reinforced through a series of experiences that included being expected to perform certain roles, like mentoring students of color or doing diversity work, microaggressions and the feeling that behaviors, mannerisms, and

appearances needed to be adjusted in order to fit in. For example, Pilar described how her consciousness about her Latina identity as commenced early in her career. Pilar said,

Starting off young, I think I was still trying to figure out my place within the profession and what that meant for me as a Latina. I think for me I've had some pretty unique experiences being bi-racial as well, in terms of my own identity development. But I think for me, I didn't initially start off that way. As things started to get a little bit more clear, I think primarily for me, working at an institution where I was one of the very few, I most certainly have — at least I believe that I navigate that a little bit differently where at least internally I think I constantly feel that pressure to prove myself a little bit more, to consistently be the one to go above and beyond and I think I'm always conscious of how people will view me.

While it seemed to be a positive way in, being the Chosen Token in SA also brought with it some experiences that limited Latina administrators' reach on campus and caused them to be boxed into certain roles, made them feel isolated since they were often the only Latina. They tried to change their mannerisms and appearances in order to fit in. The problems that arise from being the Chosen Token are described in more detail in the following sections.

**Boxed in: “They want to put us all in boxes.”** As the Chosen Token, Latinas first experienced a positive outlook as they entered SA, since they were mostly aware that they were able to offer unique skills that helped the overall diversity of the institutions hiring these Latinas. However, as they tried to advance in their careers, they realized the skills they brought. Being able to translate, working with students of color, and serving as a diverse representation and perspective on committees and doing diversity work was all that the Latinas were seen as being able to contribute and not much more. They also perceived to be further boxed into very specific Latina roles. In fact, these “Latina Boxes,” as many of the Latina labeled that feeling of being boxed in, dictated that Latinas had seemingly pre-determined places at their institutions with specific roles and functions. Latinas cited how their being Latina caused their institutions to box them into diversity roles, including the diversity work box and the student of color mentor box.

The following section describes these boxes and how their Latina identities informed how they felt the only way for these Latinas to fit in was to be seen as experts on diversity, administrators who could only work with students from underrepresented student populations.

Evelyn and many other participants named the concept of being boxed into certain roles as women of color while their White colleagues are seen as being able to be more versatile with regard to their job experiences. Evelyn, for example, said,

I think it's hard for Latina women and people of color to get out of boxes. If you were hired at a school to be the dean of residential life and that's all they see. So, when you talk to them about doing disability services, they're like, 'How could you do disability services?' But then I think our White colleagues can do that all the time. They can be experts in every field, but we can't. So sometimes we have to leave institutions to show a different side of ourselves.

Ursula voiced a similar frustration about being boxed in, starting with being underestimated, but then being assumed to fulfill specific roles as a Latina. Ursula shared how she would like others to behave towards her: "Don't treat me a certain way because I'm Latina or don't underestimate my abilities because I'm Latina or don't assume that because I'm Latina, I know everything about Latinos. So don't pigeonhole me that way." The problem with Latinas being boxed into specific roles and not being seen as able to broaden their experience base is that when it comes time for promotion, they will not be given the opportunities because of a narrow view of what they can do. As generalists, Latinas may be more marketable and would be seen as someone who can perform any transferable functions. Quiana expressed her desire to be seen as a generalist when she applies for jobs. She said,

When I apply for jobs, I don't apply necessarily looking for something that would put me in a position of being the only Latina there or something that only deals with Latinos or minorities. I look for jobs that really will help me fulfill that dream of wanting to help students on either end. But I think sometimes our counterparts, who are not Latinos will look at us and say, "Well, you should probably aim to do something like Multicultural Affairs or work at a predominantly Hispanic institution" and it has been done to me by colleagues, but I don't think they meant to do it in a negative fashion. I really honestly

feel that they just thought that they were trying to help me but it actually offended me because it felt that I can't do a regular position of not dealing with minority students.

Another reason why Latinas being placed in the diversity work box is problematic is that it shows an inherent bias as White colleagues don't have the same limitations or expectations. This creates an unequal work dynamic for Latina administrators that disadvantages their career advancement because they are then expected to do more than their White counterparts and most of the time do not receive the same recognition or credit for this extra work.

**The diversity work box: "You didn't hire me to be the diversity expert."** While the Latina administrators shared how they took great pride in the diversity they brought to their institutions, they also expressed how that special feeling wore off as they realized that they were expected to be the diversity experts at their institutions regardless of what positions they held. Being the diversity expert meant that Latinas were expected to provide information or participate in diversity related efforts, whether it was in their job descriptions or not. This frustrated the majority of the participants, including Evelyn who in an interaction with her Vice President had to remind him about her functional role at the institution. Evelyn shared how her Vice President often said to her, "you know you're my expert on Latino issues," but she had to constantly remind him of her role by saying, "you didn't hire me to be the diversity expert on Latino issues. I'm your expert on Greek Life issues."

Gabriela also expressed concerns that were similar to the majority of the Latina administrators about being pegged as the diversity person even if diversity work was not part of her job. Issues like these cause Gabriela and many other Latina participants to think strategically about how they choose their work and the positions for which they applied because they were aware that whether or not diversity work was part of their positions, they would be expected to do diversity work anyway. Gabriela said "we have to constantly negotiate our identity in how we



work.” Latina administrators were aware that the kind of work that they were boxed into usually involved diversity work or working with students of color. The following section expands on Latinas mentoring students of color.

**The student of color mentor box: “That gives my White colleagues an out.”** Despite attempts to build mainstream careers that served all students, study participants shared ways that they were placed into the student of color mentor box. They had supervisors who they suspected hired them for the specific purpose of mentoring students of color. Latina administrators also ended up in those roles by their own desires to help students who looked like them and by students of color seeking them out. Half of the participants perceived the expectation to mentor students of color as a double-edged sword. Pilar reflected on this issue when she shared that “because there are so very few of us, we’re expected to be the experts in dealing with any students of color...it’s nice to serve as a role model but it’s tiring at the same time.”

Again, this box in which Latina administrators are placed, with them being expected to serve students of color disadvantages them by placing an extra burden on them as one of the few Latinas who could serve as role models for these students. In turn, this is problematic because as Evelyn said, it “gives our White colleagues an out.” Those White colleagues send students of color to Latina administrators when they don’t know how to relate to them, assuming Latinas would be able to take that burden away by stepping in. Latinas do step in because they feel a sense of responsibility to take care of students of color and provide them with advice and mentorship when they are struggling with their leadership positions while balancing their marginalized identities at PWIs. White colleagues can then step away and get back to their work while Latinas now have to stop what they are working on to attend to students of color who may or may not be their direct responsibility.

## Summary of Major Theme Two

Despite the initial acceptance and celebrated entry into SA, the Latinas in this study told a story of the painful realization of how their gender, race, and ethnicity impacted their social and professional positions on predominantly White campuses and created challenges as they navigated their careers in SA. As Latinas advanced in their careers in SA, they experienced feelings as outsiders due to reminders that their Latina identities do not fit into the predominantly White spaces in academia. Participants described that this misfit emerged as they compared themselves to others and subsequently realized how different they were. More poignantly, this sense of otherness hardened as they experienced microaggressions at their workplaces. In fact, all of the Latina administrators reported instances of microaggressions based on stereotypes about their race and/or ethnicity. For some, this sense of otherness triggered efforts to assimilate by adjusting their mannerisms and appearances, including style of dress and hair.

The Latina administrators in this study shared that their SA careers felt like a natural fit and reflected who they were as individuals. This discovery was typically facilitated by supportive supervisors. After their introduction to the field of SA, participants shared that their early experiences were positive and motivating. While navigating their careers from entry to midlevel, they described a type of informal peer mentorship from other Latinas and Black women who helped to guide them as they advanced. Despite working in the field of student affairs and feeling a natural fit, the Latinas in this study found themselves feeling as outsiders. When comparing themselves to their white colleagues, they often felt they stood out or did not quite fit in.

Further, despite often being viewed as a female dominated field, SA continues to remain primarily male-dominated in the executive leadership ranks. Participants experienced this

inequality negatively but less so if they had a lighter skin tone. If they have lighter skin tone and appear White, they are treated differently than their counterparts of color. If they have darker skin tone, they experience racism like their black counterparts, regardless of gender. The Latinas in this study were clearly cognizant of their identity as Latinas represented in their administrative roles at their institutions.

Finally, Latinas were the Chosen Tokens when they realized that they were hired to increase the diversity at their institutions, and as the only Latina administrators, or one of very few, they were expected to get involved with campus diversity efforts, whether or not it was in their job descriptions. They were also expected to mentor students of color, which took that burden away from their White colleagues who may not have the skills or cultural understanding to provide advice to these students of color. While Latinas are involved in the extra diversity and student of color mentoring, they have to also fulfill their regular responsibilities. The only way to get it all done was for Latina administrators to work harder and longer to make sure their colleagues saw them as competent.

### **Major Theme Three: High Aspirations Diminished by Barriers to Advancement**

In response to the third research question: How did the work experiences of Latina midlevel student affairs administrators influence their career aspirations, I found that Latinas had high aspirations that were diminished by perceived professional and personal barriers to their advancement. In the first two themes, the story of the Latina administrators unfolded, starting with undergraduate experiences that brought them into awareness of SA as a career possibility when they received support from supervisors and advisors who tapped them and introduced them to SA. The Latinas' entry into SA was a positive one, with the work and environment first feeling like a natural fit, but then as they gained experiences, especially negative ones that made

them feel like outsiders, they felt a misfit in SA that made them question whether or not advancement would be possible for them or if they should leave the field altogether.

Along with the negative experiences, the Latina administrators faced personal and professional barriers that were perceived as impediments to their future advancement despite having high aspirations. This section describes the third major theme, high aspirations diminished by barriers. This theme was significantly informed by the Latina administrators' institutional experiences and the ways that those experiences were influenced by the intersections of their gender, race, and ethnicity, which was described in detail in the previous section. The Latina administrators expressed desires to advance to senior level positions, but professional and personal barriers precipitated their higher aspirations. These obstacles prevented them from career advancement and opportunities and caused them to get stuck in midlevel positions.

Barriers to career advancement were those that were inherent in a higher education structure that was historically designed for White men. Although over the years educational and career opportunities have opened up to women and people of color, the higher education environment has not changed enough for them to feel like they fully belong. Professional barriers included the need for professional development, limited role models and lack of upward mobility at Latinas' institutions. Personal barriers involved fear, family considerations, and advanced degree attainment. The following section describes how the majority of participants who expressed a desire to advance to higher level positions explained how these barriers impacted their career aspirations.

**High aspirations: “I can see myself as a dean”**

The majority of the Latina midlevel administrators aspired to pursue Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) positions in the future, with most of them expressing desires to move up

to Dean of Students or Vice President of Student Affairs positions. None of the participants shared that they aspired to become a college president in the future. Evelyn, like several other participants, expressed interest in being a dean or vice president in the future. She seemed to feel personally responsible to be a visible representative for all Latinas. For example, when asked if she saw herself in positions of senior leadership in the future, Evelyn stated, “I do and I think we owe it to our people to do that. We have to be in places that people can see us too so they can see themselves.” Evidently, Latina participants understood that while their upward mobility is an individual accomplishment, they are viewed as role models for other Latinas.

Since there are such few Latinas in senior level positions, Latinas think collectively about their representation for Latina/o culture when considering career advancement. Fela shared this point of view of thinking collectively when advancing in her career when she said,

I think we navigate it with a heavier heart, honestly and a heavier part on our shoulders because we come from a collectivist culture, so we think about not just ourselves but how is this going to impact my mom my siblings and my *vecino* (*neighbor*), or somebody that paved the way for me in some way.

That collectivist attitude was also expressed by Selena who said:

So, I definitely see myself in a higher-level position. If that needs to be more women and more Latinas paving the way and I think that’s a responsibility that I am willing to take because I am a hard worker and I hope that I’m proving myself in a way that people see me for the work that I’m doing and the positive impact that I’ve made within departments and divisions and institution because I do feel like everyone at the school — when you work for a Higher Education institution as much as you are an individual, everything that you do while you’re there is in a capacity of an ambassador of the institution.

Selena’s point further emphasized the idea that while they aspire to senior level positions, Latinas are aware that they represent more than their individual desire to advance; they represent all Latinas. The majority of the Latina administrators expressed their desires to become deans or vice presidents at some point in their careers. Some of the Latinas shared how they thought they

would have advanced sooner, but described professional and personal barriers that they believed got in the way of their advancement.

### **Professional barriers**

**Career development: “Not just mentorship, monetarily too.”** With regard to career and professional development, a majority of the participants had a sense of frustration, sharing that they did not receive adequate financial support for professional development from their institutions and supervisors. Julia, like most of the Latina administrators, was irritated about the lack of funding she received from the institutions where she worked, but recognized that she would have to fund it herself. She said,

I'd like to hold a position in one of the professional associations, but we have no professional development money. So, I know at my institution realistically at this point in time, won't be funding me or sending me to anything. Now that I know this, I will have to make sure I save money so I can do it myself and go to a conference or two on my own.

Self-funding of conference attendance seemed common among many of the participants; some of them admitted that they did not always have enough money in their personal budgets to pay to go to conferences, especially if there was extensive travel involved.

Pilar made a point about how important professional development had been for her as she has moved up in her career, stating how it was “key” to her career both personally and professionally. Carla discussed how much her professional development was not valued by her supervisors in all the positions she held early on in her career. Even though they would tell her that they were interested in her improvement as an employee, they did not support her involvement in professional associations. Carla stated how “it wasn't what they said to me, it was lack of investment in me.” The financial commitment towards her professional development was just not there, which was a common experience among most of the participants.

One participant was fortunate enough to have great support for professional development from her institution. Minerva noted that professional development was embedded in her institutional culture, “they really foster and value it and provide the funding for it [professional development] to make sure that it’s happening.” It seemed to be widely known among her work colleagues how valued it was for them to be able to publish research and present at conferences, so professional development funding was automatically built into their budgets. This would be ideal for Latina administrators to expand social and professional networks, make connections and pursue advanced degrees at some point in their professional lives. Related to professional development was mentorship, which was a major issue for all of the participants. While they brought up how important it was for institutions to fund professional development, all Latinas expressed how formal mentorship would be key to career advancement. In the next section Latinas expressed their need for mentorship to help them with their careers.

**Finding mentorship: “I didn’t have anyone helping me.”** While navigating their careers from entry to midlevel, Latinas pointed to a lack of formal mentorship that they wished they had received from senior level administrators, who would be in ideal positions to provide them with career advice and strategies for advancement. Teresa, like most of the participants, illustrated how lack of mentorship may have caused her to miss out on some leadership opportunities early on in her career:

I didn’t have anyone pushing me or mentoring me, or helping me become a better leader. So when it came time to apply for a high student leadership position, I didn’t get it because I was soft spoken, I was quiet. No one really helped me work through that. So when I got to my graduate school, I didn’t get the higher ed grad assistantship. And without the higher ed grad assistantship, I took more student loans, and I just don’t think I fully believed in myself because there wasn’t that mentorship.

Mentorship was clearly a concern for the Latina administrators. However, there seemed to be a distinction made between the support from supervisors when Latinas shared how they entered

the field of SA with the support of supervisors and advisors who believed in them and tapped them to pursue graduate degrees and position in SA. They also revealed how they found women of color in similar positions as their own who provided them guidance with navigating their campus environments. The distinction here could be that they were looking for formal mentorship from senior level administrators who would dedicate formal teaching and learning time with the Latinas administrators with advice beyond how to handle their daily work. They were looking for advice on what skills and competencies they needed to advance in their careers and how to seek out promotions. For these Latina administrators, ethnic or racial background of these mentors mattered, but when it came to looking for role models, it was important to see Latinas in positions of senior leadership. In the next section, Latinas share how limited their exposure to Latinas in senior level leadership was as they navigated their careers.

**Scarce role models: “I’ve never come across a senior level Latina.”** With such few Latinas in senior leadership positions, it was difficult for the Latina administrators to see themselves as viable candidates for advancement. Dinora, like most of the participants, observed that this was the case when she said, “I have never come across a senior level Latina.” The reality of being the only one, which was already discussed in the first major theme, perpetuates the feelings of isolation experienced by Latinas. Olga, for example, discussed how hopeless she felt about her own advancement. She stated, “once you move up the ladder, I think in Student Affairs there is less and less people of color, so I think it’s just real.” The other issue with such few Latinas in senior leadership is that hiring administrators have a difficult time seeing these Latinas as qualified candidates, which leads to them to not being promoted internally.

**Stuck in midlevel: “I need to move out to move up.”** Latinas in this study expressed how they were not being promoted at their own institutions. This became another professional



barrier shared by half of the participants; they often needed to look outside of their institutions if they wanted to be promoted to higher positions. The problem is that senior leadership positions are limited and may only become available at institutions that are geographically distant from the communities where Latinas live. This is a difficult choice to make for Latinas who value their families and want to have them close by. Moving is not as easy for Latinas due to family and cultural issues that complicate relocation, so many of them end up not being able to move and stay stuck in midlevel positions. Hilda elaborated on the connection to her limitation with moving and her values as a Latina. Hilda shared,

I have certain values that are important to me like family, loyalty, and obviously those happen with other ethnicities but I feel that I get that from my ethnicity and those are things that I instill in my choices. Finding a place where I feel comfortable and then being loyal to that place.

Latinas then feel stuck at their institutions and in their positions even if they enjoy the place but would like to advance. Ines shared her challenge with this issue:

I feel kind of stuck here and I think there's a few reasons. I don't think there's a leadership pipeline at this university. And I think a lot of universities lack leadership pipelines for student affairs people and for a lot of employees, but specifically student affairs folks and that's a challenge because if you want another job and another position you have to look for another institution. But for someone like me who really likes the place I'm at, that's challenging.

For those who do choose to move to seek advancement, the decisions are made with heavy hearts and lots of deliberation due to their relationships with their families and hesitance to move to places where they might not feel as comfortable. Ines, shared her hesitation about moving to advance her career when she said,

I will not just move to anywhere for a job but there's specific places I would think about moving and that's really two-fold. One, because I have a family that I have to take with me now and two, I want to be around my people. We navigate things differently because being in the middle of nowhere where there's not another soul that looks like you, can relate to you, who can take you to dinner and enjoy the foods that you love is real is not a

good idea. And I don't know if I would want to be in that situation and I think a lot of Latinas probably feel the same way.

Latinas are not able to move just anywhere in the United States and must keep this in mind when they consider attending graduate school and job searching. Quiana shared how she did go far away for graduate school, but then returned home to find a professional position because she did not want to be far from her family. Quiana said, "I didn't want to miss out on family events and gatherings any more than I had to." There was also pressure from family to stay close to home as expressed by Fela who shared how her mother had a major influence in her decision to stay close to home because she had a tough time explaining to her what the reality of moving up was, especially as Latinas reach senior level positions. Fela expressed the concern, "explaining the process of moving up, explaining the fact that when opportunity comes, you have to make sacrifices." Thus, geographic moves for career advancement was certainly a barrier that often held Latinas back and forced them to stay at their institutions. They were not moving up to senior level positions because promotions within the same institutions were not easy to come by for the Latina administrators.

**Perceived unfair hiring practices benefitting Whites: "Everybody that gets hired is White."** The idea of white spaces and inequity crept up again when participants discussed their perceptions about hiring practices and how they also seemed to privilege whites. Gabriela described this perception of inequity in hiring practices at her institution, "in the last six months, four white women have been promoted. And there are two of us who are women of color in interim roles and the university is launching searches." Gabriela went on to say,

There's this constant phrase of "we're investing in diversity, investing in doing good work and we're committed", but you don't even see that in their hiring. And we've going through a lot of transition in the last two years as an institution. We're a revolving door. It's actually becoming part of our reputation right now which is problematic and everybody that gets hired is white.

I could sense Gabriela's frustration with the way that race seemed so dominant and being White seemed to be the biggest advantage and factor to be considered with regard to internal promotions. Nancy spoke of a similar issue at her institution where she pointed out how the number of directors of color has been diminishing and she had noticed how White men were being promoted into those positions. Nancy described this observation as "a culture of White males" who were increasingly being placed in leadership positions. Such professional barriers were frustrating for the Latina administrators who entered SA with a positive outlook, hoping to someday advance to senior level positions, but then they encounter workplaces that seem to be full of barriers to their advancement.

### **Personal barriers**

In addition to the professional barriers that Latinas faced as they navigated their careers and considered their options for advancement, this study uncovered personal barriers. These personal barriers may be contributing to reasons why Latina administrators wished to remain in their midlevel administrative positions. Latinas experience personal barriers that limit their opportunities for advancement, including fear of advancement, family considerations, and advanced degree attainment.

**Adobe ceiling and fear: "Higher up is a very dangerous place to be."** An overwhelming majority of the Latina administrators discussed their hesitance with regard to career advancement. Some of this fear seems to be stemming from feelings of self-doubt, most likely reinforced by the stereotypes and microaggressions described in the second major theme, making Latinas feel that they had more to prove and not regarded as prepared and competent as their White male and female counterparts. Another issue could be connected to one of the

professional barriers with regard to lack of representation, as Latina shared that they were fearful and did not know what it looks because of lack of Latinas in those senior leadership roles.

Contributing to this fear was a lack of knowledge about what being a Dean of Students or Vice President of Student Affairs looks like. As discussed previously, the Latina administrators were experiencing the “Adobe Ceiling” effect as described in the review of related literature, meaning, they don’t know what senior level leadership looks like, having never been exposed to it, which is different from the glass ceiling because at least with a glass ceiling, women can see what upper level positions look like, but just hit the ceiling trying to reach those positions. (Ramos, 2008).

The majority of the participants, made comments about not knowing what senior leadership looks like, not being aware of any Latinas in senior leadership positions and not having a clear understanding of what steps are needed to move up. Ana, like most participants shared how she does not know what her Dean of Students for Vice President did and said how she would like to spend time with them to learn more about what they do so that she can say to herself, “This is what you do? Okay. Maybe I’ll consider it.” Or “I don’t want to touch that at all.” Having a better understanding of these senior leadership roles would help Latina administrators decide when they might be ready for advancement or if they preferred to stay in midlevel positions with more manageable work responsibilities and schedules. Another participant, Veronica, expressed this same fear of the unknown by referring to moving up as “dangerous places” when she says:

I don’t know that I want to go that high up. Higher up is a very dangerous place to be and I like the not-so-dangerous places. I like job stability. I just want my job to be calm. I don’t want to have a lot of issues. I want to be able to enjoy my life. I want to be able to go on vacation. I don’t want my job to be my life.

Aside from the fear of being in a vulnerable place as a senior leader at an institution, many of the participants expressed how much they feared losing touch with the day to day student experience and were not interested in the politics that become more complicated as they move up to roles with heightened responsibilities, bigger budgets to manage and larger numbers of people to supervise. However, with the fear and *Adobe Ceiling*, not fully being aware of what that exactly entails may be causing skewed perceptions of what leadership looks like that may be hindering the career advancement of Latinas who shy away from even applying for these types of positions. That brings the discussion to the next section about the fear translating into self-doubt.

**Self-doubt. “I start questioning my abilities.”** Connected to fear, a sub-theme that emerged from the stories of the participants was self-doubt and lack of confidence in their capacities to take on advanced positions, with over half of the participants sharing such sentiments. Pilar shared thoughts that were echoed by many other participants when she was asked about considering career advancement. Pilar shared,

I think it brings with it a lot of self-doubt and me questioning my abilities, although deep down I know that I can do it. Again, it’s always been important for me to meet other people who have similar career paths or be in positions that I one day aspire to be in. So I think it’s been discouraging. It’s equally exciting, again, I want to be able to play a role and shift that a bit but there’s always self-doubt there.

Gabriela tried to explain this self-doubt and framed it collectively based on her conversations with fellow Latinas who may also be considering applying for senior level positions. She said, “we will hesitate to go after more senior positions sooner. We feel like we have to put in more time.” Self-doubt and fear seem to be holding Latinas back from even applying for promotions because they do not feel ready for the next move or have fear of the additional responsibilities that a senior level position might bring. Not knowing what being in a senior level leadership

position looks like, or *Adobe Ceiling* was a commonly shared notion among the Latinas, and related to the unknown was not having a sense of how career advancement might affect family life. In the next section, I discuss the ideas shared by the participants, about family considerations when they considered moving up to senior level positions.

**Family considerations: “My ovaries are going to dry up.”** Family considerations, contemplating motherhood and the pressures from their families to start a family impacted the way the Latina administrators made decisions about how they navigated their careers, often experiencing this push and pull as a barrier to their advancement. Most Latinas in this study made choices to purposely limit their career advancement and opportunities due to the prospect of motherhood. A small group of four of the participants voiced other goals that they felt were more important than pursuing senior leadership positions, like raising a family full time.

Fela, along with a few other participants, voiced her concern about what move ahead in her career would mean for her family and how her age was a major factor, even jokingly stating, “my ovaries are going to dry up” as she discussed her frustration with the prospect of having to choose between having children or moving up. Nevertheless, Fela felt confident about her abilities to advance, but commented how she still had anxieties about balancing her time, asking herself, “How am I going to be a mom, a wife and a competent and successful professional?” It’s unfortunate that she felt like she had to choose between her family and advancing in her career.

While Latina administrators considered navigating their careers, many of them put motherhood on hold in order to pursue career opportunities. Most participants did not believe that they would be able to get promotions if they had a family that needed their time and attention. Nancy shared a moving story about how being a single mother may have impacted her career opportunities and limited her advancement:

As a single mom and raising a daughter, my focus was on raising my daughter and so I feel that there could've been other things that I could've done that would have opened up opportunities for me or showcased more my abilities here at my current institution if I would have neglected my time with my family. I felt like if you stay late, they see you here, you're a hard worker. But if you're not here at that time, you're not a hard worker? What if you're good at time management and you got the job done? I want to get home to my child and I was the only one, so I had to go pick up my child from school. She then got a disease so she couldn't be in afterschool anymore and after school programs. So, I had to make sure that I take my lunch time every single day to go pick her up from school and bring her home. And those are the sacrifices I needed to make. There probably would've been other opportunities for me, but I would have had to sacrifice my time with my daughter, my family in order to do that.

Nancy further commented that her dedication to her daughter and family life may have put her at a disadvantage when it came to being considered for promotion. However, she expressed having no regrets and would choose taking care of her family if given a choice. Another participant, Karina, also made a conscious decision to focus on her family, realizing that staying in her midlevel position would be safe for her because she would not need to stay late, go to extra events and functions.

Zunilda raised a point about how SA may not be supportive for mothers, stating, "I don't think, in general, the workplace does enough to support us in that struggle and to support our career development." Focusing on family is admirable and many of the Latina participants felt like they needed to choose between family and advancement, which is unfortunate because this means they would stay in their midlevel positions and senior level roles might benefit from their experiences and expertise.

Related to the push and pull of family considerations was the idea that motherhood was a perceived requirement in Latino families, as shared by most of the participants. However, some of the participants expressed how having children was actually not part of their plan and how difficult this was to articulate to their families whose expectations was that they would have children at some point in their lives. Xiomara, for example, told her story about the family,

societal and cultural pressure of being a Latina who was still not married and had no children at the age of 40. Xiomara said,

When I turned 40 and I was working in Residence Life. I remember having a very intentional, reflective period where I thought to myself “am I making a choice to be devoted to my career and in making that choice am I specifically deciding not to have a family, specifically deciding not to have children?” I remember struggling with that about that time and trying to figure out whether it was tied to my career and my career choices and my decision and even now it’s hard for me to say definitively yes or no, but what I think I know now that I didn’t know then is that it doesn’t matter because I don’t know if it was unintentional. If it was an intentional impact, or intentional career, or intentional consequence of making the decision to be committed to my career advancement, but I am happy with the choices I’ve made.

Cultural expectations in Latino families might be a reason why several Latina administrators expressed frustration with the expectation that they become mothers. Gabriela gave an example of how several other Latinas felt about this expectation when she said,

There’s the expectation that I should be married with children by now. And for me that just pushes me to work harder at what I love to do, which is this work because that’s not the life that I feel like I have to have. What I want to have is this fruitful career in this field first. I’ll have a family at some point, but I’m just not in a hurry for that.

Whether they chose to have families or not, family considerations and making decisions about advancement and motherhood weighed heavily on most the Latina administrators. They recognized how most workplaces, including SA did not seem to be friendly for families due to the late hours and additional duties that demanded the time of administrators, especially those who were looking to advance to senior level positions.

**Advanced degree attainment: “You have to get a doctorate to move up.”** One widely held belief among the participants was that advanced degree attainment was essential for moving up to SSAO positions, especially obtaining a doctorate in order to be considered for advancement. Two of the participants already had doctorates and nine shared that they were currently enrolled in doctoral programs at the time the study was conducted. Most job listings for



senior level positions list a preference for advanced degrees, so the pressure for Latinas to obtain a doctorate was high, especially for those looking to become SSAOs in the future. Latina administrators recognized the requirement, but the fifteen Latinas who had not earned doctorates or enrolled in a doctoral program expressed hesitance when they considered pursuing a doctorate. Teresa, like many other participants, explained that the need for a doctorate could be a hindrance to her advancement,

I think one [barrier] is definitely the Ph.D. aversion that I have, me not wanting to go back and put myself through the ringer in the ways that I did in grad school. Also, my own mental block of deciding if I want a Ph.D. in Higher Ed or if I want a Ph.D. in Multicultural Counseling, that's something that definitely — I think holds me back.

Xiomara confirmed the expectation to have a doctorate in order to move up in SA,

I love our division of SA, but they're really big on the doctorate so it would be maybe ten years from now when I've completed my doctorate and put in some more time but I definitely would love to be a Vice President of Student Affairs.

There seemed to be a widely-known expectation in Xiomara's division that a doctoral degree was eventually expected. Hilda also received advice about needing a doctorate in order to advance in her career when her supervisor told her, "If you want to continue to advance within this path you're going to need to have an advanced degree," which led her to start a Ph.D. program. Fela knew the importance of this credential as well, expressing interest in pursuing a doctoral degree. She stated how she was "incredibly anxious about that experience and that journey."

Even when trying to obtain a doctorate there is disappointment. Olga was frustrated about her attempt to pursue a Ph.D.

I just tried applying for Ph.D. programs and so far I've been denied from two programs. And I'm in shock because most of the letters are saying like, 'You are highly qualified but unfortunately we just don't have enough room.' So that's going to delay me especially in SA you need a Ph.D. to move your way up. But I think that's pretty much the only thing that I could say that's really holding back right now from moving up.

Although Olga did not know the factors contributing to why she was not accepted into the doctoral programs she applied to, what I acknowledged in this situation is that she is at least trying and has realized how important an advanced degree will be as she considers applying for senior level positions in the future. Being denied this opportunity to pursue a doctorate and all other barriers identified by these Latina participants further diminishes aspirations for career advancement for Olga and other participants. Having a doctorate was widely accepted by almost all participants as a requirement for any SA administrator who would be pursuing senior level leadership positions.

### **Summary of Major Theme Three**

Most the Latinas in this study expressed desires to advance to senior level leadership in their careers, with several sharing their disappointment with not getting there sooner due to a variety of challenges. Some Latinas chose not to advance and were content in their midlevel positions. Still others were considering leaving the field of student affairs for a variety of reasons, whether it was to pursue faculty positions or leave higher education altogether. Most Latina administrators expressed desire to advance to senior level positions in SA and discussed professional and personal barriers they believed were limiting their career advancement opportunities.

The professional barriers included low levels of support for career development, lack of funding for professional development, scarce Latina role models in senior level positions and feeling stuck in their midlevel positions due to limited promotion opportunities at their institutions, necessitating that Latinas relocated if they wanted to advance. The personal barriers included fear of advancement due to not being exposed to senior level leadership, considering

motherhood and other family concerns and apprehension about advanced degree attainment.

Some Latinas felt the need to choose between career advancement and motherhood.

Advancement for Latina administrators in student affairs will not be possible if these barriers are not adequately addressed.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, the Latina administrators experienced identity related discrimination due to their gender, race and ethnicity as they navigated their careers in SA, negatively impacting their work experiences, career advancement and aspirations for advancement. The stories these Latinas shared painted a vivid picture of how they started out in their careers very positively, but then began to feel like outsiders due to microaggressions they experienced at their institutions because of their identities as women, women of color and as Latinas. Though the aspirations for future career advancement for most of the Latinas were high, they seemed to be diminished by negative work experiences and professional and personal barriers they perceived were limiting their opportunities. These Latinas rose to the occasion and knew they could fulfill diversity on their campuses. They were chosen, but they also recognized that they were tokens. They were the *Chosen Tokens*.

The next chapter will provide an overview of the study, theoretical framework, methodology and a brief description of the participants. The chapter will also provide a summary of the major research findings, discussion of the major themes and discussion of implications for practice for institutions of higher education and for Latina administrators. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research on Latina administrators in student affairs and final thoughts and dedication.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations**

#### **Introduction**

In the previous chapter the findings were presented in response to the three research questions with interpretation of findings, description of three major themes, and supporting quotes from participants' narratives. This chapter begins with an overview of the study, synopsis of the methodology, and brief description of the participants. Then it offers a summary and discussion of major findings, the contribution of the study to the literature, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with final thoughts and comments.

#### **Overview of the Study**

This study explored how Latina professionals in midlevel Student Affairs (SA) administration have negotiated career opportunities and how their gender, race and ethnicity influenced their work experiences, career aspirations and advancement. The individual narratives of the 26 Latina midlevel SA administrators contributed to a shared understanding about how they navigate careers in the field of student affairs within higher education, and how their complex identities were related to their work experiences as administrators, as well as career aspirations and advancement. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do Latina midlevel student affairs administrators describe their institutional experiences as they negotiated their career paths?
2. What is the impact of gender, race and ethnicity on the career paths and opportunities for advancement of Latina professionals in student affairs?

3. How are the career aspirations of Latina midlevel student affairs administrators influenced by their institutional experiences?

The findings in this study provided insight into the work experiences and career advancement barriers obstructing the advancement of Latinas in SA. Latinas entered higher education as undergraduate students with high aspirations and hopes for a brighter future. They struggled as they adjusted to college and found their way to SA like most other SA administrators, supported by advisors and supervisors who encouraged them to pursue master's degrees and seek out careers in SA.

Latinas began careers in SA with optimism and the idealistic thought that if they worked hard, they would advance from entry level positions, to midlevel and then to senior level position. However, Latinas experienced sexism, racism, and discrimination along their career trajectories that negatively impacted their work experiences. Although many Latinas aspired to move up to Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO) positions, they encountered professional and personal barriers that impeded their career advancement and diminished their career aspirations.

The literature on Latinas in higher education largely described negative experiences they faced as undergraduate and graduate students, as faculty, and as administrators, but also highlighted the resilience of Latinas and drive to persevere and succeed (Aldaco, 2010; Beck-Lethlean, 2008; Espino, 2010; Garza, 1996; Gonzalez, 2002; Mateo 2010; Montas-Hunter, 2012). Past findings in literature demonstrated that gender, racial, and ethnic-related prejudices Latinas faced in academia created barriers to career advancement (Crespo, 2013; Garza, 1997; Gonzalez-DeJesus, 2012; Hansen, 1997; Kravitz, 2006; Lopez, 2013; Massé, Miller, Kerr, & Ortiz, 2007).

Even Latinas who advanced to senior level positions and college presidencies faced challenges along their career paths, but found ways to overcome those challenges to take on top leadership positions where they were able to effect institutional policy change and serve as role models for Latinas at all levels of academia (de los Santos and Vega, 2008; Lopez, 2013; Maes, 2012; Montas-Hunter, 2012; Muñoz, 2010). These Latina presidents represent a new face of leadership that proves that Latinas are capable of possessing the knowledge and skills to be successful and effective leaders. Generally, the findings in this study were closely aligned with the literature on Latina administrators' work experiences in higher education.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study employed the methodology of narrative inquiry, an appropriate method for gaining an understanding of important social issues (Chase, 2003). Narrative inquiry is useful when trying to strike a balance between sharing the stories of participants, understanding their collective experiences, and placing them into social context. Therefore, it was important to collect rich background demographic information at the start of each interview in order to enhance the relevance and coherency of the analysis of the data and the interpretation of the results (Chase, 2003). Once approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board, I recruited 26 participants primarily from my professional network. By employing purposeful sampling strategies (Patton, 1990), the Latina midlevel administrators with five or more years of full time experience were selected. I conducted semi-structured interviews in person and by phone. The interviews took place over a three month period during spring of 2014.

Although I utilized an interview guide to collect demographic and professional background information and career experiences, participants were allowed and encouraged to share their narratives freely and elaborate further on their answers. All interviews were recorded

and transcribed. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants and institution names were changed to Carnegie classification labels in the final versions of the transcripts to ensure participant confidentiality. Traditional coding methods of constant comparison and classical content analysis were used to analyze the data to identify overarching themes and patterns across the experiences of the study participants (Leech & Ongwuegbuzie, 2007). The individual narratives shared by the Latina administrators were woven together to construct shared perspectives as a representation of a collective experience.

The analytical framework was guided by components of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and Critical Race Feminism (CRF), all contributing to placing marginalized identities in context of higher education. Rooted in the assumptions that race, ethnicity, and gender are all attributes that may shape the experiences of individuals who participate in American higher education, these theoretical perspectives helped to provide context for the experiences of people of color at Predominantly White Institutions. The data analysis was focused on the meanings that participants ascribed to their understandings of their work lives and career aspirations and I interpreted those meanings that represented the shared experiences of Latina administrators (Trahar, 2009).

### **Research Participants**

The participants of this study consisted of 26 Latina mid-level administrators with a diversity of personal attributes, demographic characteristics, and professional background information. The ethnicities represented by the Latinas included: 13 Puerto Rican, six Dominican, three Cuban, three Mexican/Mexican-American, two Colombian, two Irish, one German, one Guatemalan, one Italian, one Peruvian, and one Venezuelan. With regard to race, 11 said Latina or Hispanic, five answered Black, five answered White, two answered biracial or

multiracial, one answered American and one refused to answer. The average age of these participants was 35 which ranged between 28 and 47. In terms of relationship status, 16 of the participants were married or partnered, nine were single, and one was divorced. With regard to children, 15 of the participants had no children and 11 had children.

The participants also shared information about their years of work experience and compensation. The average number of full-time years of work experience was 11. Position titles included: Resident Director, Consultant, Coordinator, Counselor, Manager, Director, Assistant Dean, and Associate Dean. There were a variety of areas and departments in SA represented by the participants: Residence Life, Student Activities, Multicultural Affairs, Academic Affairs, Student Support Services, and Career Services. Most of the participants held director-level positions and earned an average salary of \$63,000, ranging from the lowest at \$40,000 to the highest at \$105,000.

Geographically, the Latina administrators were currently living and working across 11 different states in the following locations: 16 located in the northeast, four in the southwest, two in the southeast, two in the mid-Atlantic area, and two in the Midwest. Participants worked at different institution types with regard to student demographics: 19 participants worked at Predominantly White Institutions (PWI), four worked at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), two worked at minority serving institutions, and one worked at a Historically Black College and University. Educational background was the most consistent among participants. With regard to educational background, all 26 participants earned a bachelor's degree, all but one participant earned a master's degree and two had already earned a doctorate. Nine of the participants were in the process of completing a doctorate at the time of this study.



Latina administrators represented a variety of backgrounds, locations, position titles, departments, institution types and locations. The majority of the Latinas were Caribbean (Puerto Rican, Dominican and Cuban) and from the Northeast, a unique demographic of Latinas not well represented in the literature. This study brought to light the stories of Caribbean Latinas, Afro-Latinas and mixed-race Latinas working in midlevel positions in student affairs.

### **Summary of Findings and Discussion**

#### **Major Finding One: Latinas Find a Natural Fit in Student Affairs**

The first set of questions invited Latina administrators in midlevel student affairs administrators to describe their institutional experiences as they negotiated their career paths. Latina administrators described their entry into Student Affairs (SA) and shared how they found a natural fit, enjoyed working with students, appreciated the variety of the work and felt connected to their colleagues, especially other women of color they found who supported them as they began their careers. Listening to the stories from the Latina administrators about how they found SA was like hearing from almost every SA administrator who shared how they entered the SA profession. Latinas found SA by happenstance during their undergraduate years when they served in leadership positions or worked on campus and discovered the profession through an advisor or supervisor who introduced them to SA as a potential career (Biddix, 2011; Carpenter & Stimpson, 2007; Long, 2012; Stimpson, 2009; Taub & McEwen, 2006).

Despite the abysmal number of Latina/o respondents in Taub and McEwen's (2006) study on graduate students' decision to enter the SA profession, the results were consistent with what Latinas shared about their decisions to pursue careers in SA: they found out about SA from advisors and supervisors who told them about SA while they were in leadership positions as undergraduate students; they were encouraged to enter the SA profession by someone who

sought them out and tapped them for SA; they were attracted to the SA profession by the prospect of giving back and being part of a support system for students. Taub and McEwen's description of the respondents may not accurately represent the current profiles of student affairs professionals; the respondents in their study "fit the profile of the traditional student affairs professional" (p. 212). That is the kind of language that normalizes the reinforcement that there is a "*typical*" SA professional and that caused a dean of students to leave her position when she used similar language in response to a Latina student who wrote to her via email to share a blog post she wrote about her marginalized experience at Claremont McKenna College (CMC). The dean wrote what she believed was a supportive reply to that Latina student inviting her to meet with the dean and her staff to continue the discussion. Unfortunately, the email ended with the line, "We are working on how we can better serve students, especially those who don't fit the CMC mold" (Brown, 2015). It was evident that there was a perception that there was a typical "mold" for CMC students that did not include Latinas.

The Latina administrators discussed being involved on their campuses as student leaders, fully engaging in their college experiences. When they struggled at first, they found support from supervisors and mentors who helped them overcome their challenges. The struggles they described were consistent with the way Latinas described their undergraduate experiences in the literature. Higher education was a new world for many of the participants, as they were first generation, the first in their families to attend college, and thus it was no surprise that adjusting to college was a struggle for most of them. The key to survival for Latinas as undergraduate students was to find administrators and faculty members who seemed to genuinely care about their wellbeing. Student affairs administrators play a key role in helping students navigate their

college experiences while balancing their identity development, academic transitions and overall adjustment to college life (Magolda, 2003).

Being in a student organization and getting something positive from that experience was consistent with the literature, with advisors making a great impact on the Latinas when they were involved in student organizations as undergraduates (Delgado-Romero & Hernandez, 2002; Delgado-Romero, Hernandez & Montero, 2004). Although Latina administrators described how they struggled during their undergraduate years, they did not discuss that the SA professional was not intended for them as they began their careers in SA. On the contrary, they received encouragement and invitations to apply for graduate programs in HE and entry level positions in student affairs.

In essence, these Latinas were “chosen” for this work in SA and “falling in” was easy when the principles of SA matched so closely to their own values, making SA a natural fit for them. They were giving back to a community that provided them guidance and an introduction to a career in SA when they struggled as undergraduate students. The way Latinas in this study entered SA as student leaders was consistent with the way that female SSAOs described their entry in a study by Marquez (2014). The Latinas in the literature described their entry and desire to give back to their communities was consistent with the Latinas in this study (Aldaco, 2010; Beck-Lethlean, 2008; Crespo, 2013; Garza, 1996; Gonzalez, 2002; Mateo 2010; Montas-Hunter, 2012).

It was not until they progressed in their careers and entered midlevel when the message about them not fitting in became abundantly clear. As they began to feel moments of disconnect, they connected with women of color, specifically, Black and Latina administrators who provide them with advice and validated their experiences. They were all “other” and were on the margins

sharing tips for survival with each other. These Black and Latina women served as peer mentors as they began their careers in SA. The importance of peer mentoring among female administrators was highlighted in the literature as keys to the success of many women navigating academia as administrators (Gomez de Torres, 2013).

The Latina administrators overwhelmingly expressed their passion for working with students, even admitting how they may be choosing to pause advancement for fear of losing touch with students. Long (2012) said, “Student affairs professionals must ultimately care about the well-being of the students they serve” (p. 7). The Latina administrators understood the importance of serving and caring for students, clearly demonstrated by the majority of them sharing stories about how they assisted students during critical moments in their undergraduate years and served as mentors to guide them during their college years. The majority of participants shared how much they cared for the students and felt that it was a gift for them to be able to influence students during their formative years in college.

With regard to serving students of color, by virtue of their own experiences of marginality and isolation as they struggled through their own undergraduate years, Latinas can have an inherent understanding of the barriers that exist on campuses. Long (2012) speaks to how SA professionals need to have self-awareness and be able “to demonstrate their genuine concern for minority students’ success and work with college and university administrators to develop strategies for creating a welcoming, inclusive environment” (p. 10). Latinas were aware that in addition to advocating for the needs of students of color, they also served as role models for those students, whether or not they chose to serve in that capacity. Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, and Oseguera (2008) found that having Latina/o staff members as a support is a factor to increase Latino student retention.

Aside from being able to mentor and support students of color, some of the Latina administrators were able to use their bilingual skills as a way to help custodial and facilities staff members. In these service areas, are another group of employees where Latina/os are found to be concentrated at institutions of higher education (Alvarez, 2011). It was another way for Latinas to give back to their Latina/o communities and serve as role models for others. Having these special skills was perceived as positively when Latinas went up for promotion. For instance, they were able to use their Spanish language fluency to facilitate organizational communications among various types of workers, which provided them with opportunities to demonstrate superior communication skills.

Latinas also showed how they were able to create collaborative and productive workplace settings. As a result, Latina administrators felt appreciated and valued for a beneficial cultural attribute they shared with their campus community, further contributing to their positive outlook on their work and feeling of a natural fit. Davila and deBradley (2010) introduced how a disregard for Spanish speaking abilities has been prevalent in U.S. public education and “have been historically misunderstood as disabilities, leaving Latina/o students at a disadvantage” (Davila & deBradley, 2010, p. 50). Perceptions like these hamper the ability of this population to secure fuller integration into higher education administration.

All participants identified positive aspects of their work environments that made them feel connected to their campus environments. The way Latinas shared their appreciation for the variety of the work was consistent with findings from Rosser’s (2004) study on midlevel leaders in higher education in which ethnic minorities were found to have higher morale when they enjoyed working in their positions and the variety of their work (Rosser, 2004). Latinas also described the closeness they felt with their co-workers and how connected they felt to those

around them, prompting them to use the word “family” when describing their work environments.

The most significant group of supporters that the Latinas identified were other women of color who gave them advice and assisted them with navigating their institutions. Strayhorn (2009) studied peer to peer relationships in the socialization process, among 74 entry level SA professionals (81% of the sample were women). Staff peer relationships were found to be one of the most significant factors for job satisfaction and affected ways that new professionals learned how to do their jobs (Strayhorn, 2009). Strayhorn (2009) also found that professional and personal lives were often intertwined, based on the amount of contact the study respondents spent with their staff peers outside of work and after hours. It is worth noting that Strayhorn (2009) used the term “staff peer relationship” since the Latinas in this study did not use the word mentor when referring to the support they received from other women of color who were the Latinas’ peers, holding similar level positions.

Similarly, Burciaga and Taveras (2006) spoke of the pedagogy of sisterhood as was in which Latinas connect with each other to motivate and encourage and strategize against the political climate they find in academia. The idea of making social and professional connections goes against the grain of higher education where isolation and independence are taught and encouraged (Burciaga & Taveras, 2006). This kind of “sisterhood” as depicted by Burciaga and Taveras (2006) was apparent in the way that Latinas in this study described how women of color supported and motivated them by providing them tips for surviving the political environments at the institutions where they worked.

Several participants spoke about examples of the kind of career advice women of color provided to them. Latina administrators felt comfortable confiding in someone with whom they

felt instant connections, knowing that their ethnicities as Latinas provided them with a perceived familiar common ground due to their similar backgrounds. When a few of the participants did see women in positions of power, they were inspired by them and were able to see themselves as being able to reach a higher post in their aspirations. Findley (2007) found that having positive coworker relationships was a significant factor to midlevel staff intent to remain at their institutions. The fact that these Latina administrators stayed in SA for at least five years and as many as 23 years, with the average being 11 years, demonstrates the importance of connections with colleagues at work.

Latinas who had women as supervisors described their workplaces positively. Being exposed to women in positions of leadership played a crucial role in how some of the participants felt about their opportunities for advancement and hope for the future. They felt much more connected to their institutions when they witnessed women in positions of power who served as role models and represented examples of how women can lead in ways that were effective and affirming. Konrad and Pfeffer (1991) found that women were more likely to be hired into positions previously held by women. This is important when considering promoting women into senior-level leadership roles.

When they entered student affairs, Latina administrators were just like most other administrators. They found the careers in SA by happenstance, fell in and enjoyed the working with students so much that it felt like a natural fit, with the work reflecting who they were as individuals. The Latinas struggled through their undergraduate years knowing that the sacrifice would be worth it in the end, with the possibility of personal betterment and a brighter future. Latinas found support from mentors and supervisors who helped them through the journeys to graduation and introduced them to careers in SA. These supportive supervisors and advisors

tapped them and made Latinas feel “chosen” as they were invited to enter the field of SA. They found fulfillment in the work, formed positive relationships with students and co-workers, all contributing to that natural fit Latinas found in Student Affairs.

### **Major Finding Two: Latinas Move from Natural Fit to Misfit**

The second question focused on the impact of gender, race, and ethnicity on the career paths and opportunities for advancement of Latina higher education professionals. The findings of this study provide evidence that the intersections of gender, race, and ethnicity did indeed influence the career paths and opportunities for advancement for the 26 Latina administrators in negative ways. Despite the initial acceptance and celebrated entry into SA, the Latinas in this study told a story of the painful realization of how their gender, race, and ethnicity impacted their social and professional positions at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) and created challenges as they navigated their careers in SA. When comparing themselves to their White colleagues, they often felt they stood out or did not quite fit in.

All of the Latina administrators reported instances of microaggressions based on stereotypes about their race and/or ethnicity, posing challenges along their career paths that moved them away from that initial natural fit they felt in SA to feeling misfit. For some, this sense of otherness triggered efforts to assimilate by adjusting their appearance, including the ways they dressed and the ways they wore their hair. The idea of being conscious of dress and hair is not a new one for women of color and was consistent with the literature (Sobers, 2014).

Several participants used the word “token” as they described their experiences of being the only Latina at the institutions where they worked, but also Latinas observed how they



believed that being Latina helped them secure their job because they were specially selected to help advance diversity on their campuses – they were “chosen.” While seemingly positive at first, this led to a heightened level of self-awareness that influenced their work experience and made them stand out as tokens, a phenomenon I labeled, “the Chosen Token.” As the Chosen Token, Latinas first experienced a positive outlook as they entered SA, offered unique skills that helped the overall diversity of the institutions. However, as they tried to advance in their careers, they realize that the skills they brought, being able to translate, working with students of color, and serving as a diverse representation and perspective on committees and doing diversity work was all that the Latinas were seen as being able to contribute and not much more.

Latinas also perceived to be further boxed into very specific roles seen as specific to Latinas. In fact, these “Latina Boxes,” as many of the Latina labeled that feeling of being boxed in, dictated that Latinas had seemingly pre-determined places at their institutions with specific roles and functions with clear parameters, but not allowing them to succeed beyond (Hernandez & Morales, 1999). Collins (2009) acknowledged the concern that administrators of color may have with regard to being pigeonholed into multicultural roles. As early as 1979, Acevedo described the challenges of Mexican-American midlevel administrators and the “ethnic presence” activities that they took on at their institutions, such as getting involved in minority recruitment, initiating policies affecting students of color, and serving as role models for students of color and developing ethnic programming for the institution. Unfortunately, when attempting to map out pathways to the SSAO position, multicultural and diversity roles were not listed in the group of pre-SSAO positions, further reducing the likelihood of Latinas in this study advancing from these roles (Biddix, 2011).

Another reason why Latinas being placed in the diversity work box was problematic is that it shows an inherent bias as White colleagues don't have the same limitations or expectations. This creates an unequal work dynamic for Latina administrators that disadvantages their career advancement because they are then expected to do more than their White counterparts and most of the time they do not receive the same recognition or credit for this extra work. The only way to get it all done was for Latina administrators to work harder and longer to make sure their colleagues saw them as competent. There is no surprise here considering that the analytical framework was informed by the assumption that Latinas would eventually not fit in as they tried to advance in their careers. These feelings of misfit were consistent with ways Latina administrators have described their experiences working student affairs (Beck-Lethlean, 2008; Garza, 1996; Gallegos, 2012; Lopez, 2013; Mateo 2010; Montas-Hunter, 2012).

Latinas in this study were cognizant of their identity in their administrative roles at their institutions. De la Luz and Halcon (1988) provided examples of what overt and covert forms of racism may look like – overt being “open and up front” when racist comments about faculty candidates were used to deny hiring opportunities and covert, more pervasive and easy to deny since it is so subtle. The categories de la Luz and Halcon (1988) developed under covert types of racism included, tokenism, the type-casting syndrome, the one-minority-per-pot syndrome, the brown-on-brown research taboo and the hairsplitting concept. Being mistaken for other Latinas was a microaggression that seems subtle, but is a frustration that Latinas experienced that is a phenomenon found in the literature. For example, Sobers (2014) reported that the Black female SSAOs in her study experienced several moments of embarrassment when they were called by the name of another Black female administrator and constantly mistaken for other women of color at their institutions.

Race was a major factor in causing isolation and alienation for Latina administrators. Latinas experience racial prejudice and bias depending on appearance and perceptions of their race. Skin tone and appearance made a difference as it pertained to their work experiences. Participants experienced this inequality negatively but less so if they had a lighter skin tone when purely by appearance they could “pass” for White. If they had lighter skin tone and appeared white, they described how they were treated differently than their counterparts of color and were able to identify some advantages. If they had darker skin tone, they experienced racism similar to their Black administrator counterparts, regardless of gender. Duran (1982) discussed ideas about skin tone with regard to Chicana administrators in Colorado and New Mexico, finding that the lighter skinned administrators were advantaged in their opportunities. It is unfortunate that over 25 years later, this is still a major issue for Latina administrators.

Furthermore, race issues negatively impacted the Latina administrators’ institutional experiences and discrimination made them feel invisible. Latinas felt invisible, but it’s not the same kind of invisibility Young (1990) spoke of when referring to midlevel administrators as “invisible leaders” and then revisited this issue about 17 years later and found that midlevel administrators were still not given credit for the kind of impact they have on their campuses (Young, 2007). The lack of representation in the literature on SA administrators is consistent with the way Latinas in this study felt ignored or omitted at their institutions.

An excellent example of Latinas being ignored in the literature about SA professional was in Kuk and Cuyjet’s (2009) chapter discussing what SA administrators need to learn in graduate preparation programs. They dedicate a section describing how the growing diversity among student populations would require additional preparation for SA practitioners, which would be true of Latina administrators. However, the addition of this line demonstrates that they

were not referring to administrators from underrepresented ethnic and racial populations, which is equivalent to omitting or simply ignoring them. Kuk and Cuyjet (2009) state,

The ability to work within this diversity and to provide all students with programs and services they need to be successful will require student affairs practitioners to develop core cross-cultural/multicultural competencies, community development skills within the content of diverse environments, and knowledge of underrepresented cultures and philosophies. (p. 104)

Unfortunately, in the same book Saunders and Cooper (2009) do the same thing with regard to ignoring administrators of color when they discuss diversity and state how, “supervisors cannot, and should not, assume that new professionals have had exposure to working with students with diverse populations prior to their employment” (p. 117). They all fail to acknowledge how administrators of color do have experience working with diverse populations due to their own identities and can serve as a guide for their White counterparts who might be able to learn from their non-White colleagues.

Latinas were conscious about the way that gender affected their workplaces and expected that there would be challenges with being female. A majority of the Latinas described SA as an “old boys club” and spoke of the politics they encountered that did not feel natural to them. Blackhurst (2000a) found that Hispanic women in her study of SA women professionals experienced significantly more sex discrimination than White women, so it is evident that gender discrimination was a reality for Latinas similar to all other women in SA, and they did not imagine the gender discrimination they described in this study.

In relation to issues with gender discriminations, Latinas also expressed a desire for much needed formal mentorship to help them navigate the higher education environment that became hostile to Latinas as they discovered that their gender was not as welcome to the SA field as they thought when they began their careers. This alienation stemmed from a series of experiences of

microaggressions and covert and overt reminders that men were most often seen as leaders and women in top leadership were not as visible. This idea of visibility was also reinforced by the findings in Blackhurst's (2000a) study where men were most likely to be promoted to more visible positions than women, which contributed to lower satisfaction levels for female SA administrators.

Latinas described how being female worked against them as most of them tried to assert themselves, and find their voices in male-dominated spaces, but were left feeling silenced. They noticed how men seemed to advance faster and were well represented in senior level positions. The collective sentiment conveyed by participants indicated that being passionate, qualified, and good at their work was secondary to their advancement because of gender discrimination. Further, despite SA being a female dominated field in terms of numerical representation in the administration ranks, SA continues to remain slightly more male-dominated in the executive leadership ranks (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes & Terrell, 2005; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). Nelson, Quick, Hitt, and Moesel (1990) commented on the issue of women struggling with politics and the glass ceiling problem with upward mobility to SSAO ranks despite SA being a profession that has been welcoming to women and female dominated within the entry and midlevel ranks. After more than 25 years later, Latina administrators still face similar issues.

All of the participants in this study shared how stereotypes about their Latina identities caused encounters with microaggressions and made them targets of the discrimination, but not due to any specific nationalities. Latinas were judged as a member of the collective identity as a Hispanic woman or Latina, but they expected this for the most part because it was consistent with experiences they had throughout their lives. What they did not expect was how much they felt they need to compromise who they were to try to fit in and this was not acceptable to them. They worked too hard to become the professionals they were and being themselves worked to

their advantages for the most part. If Latinas were taught their whole lives to speak out for what is right and suddenly they feel silenced this can begin to place a heavy burden on Latinas. The concern for having to hold in their opinions for fear of upsetting others was not uncommon among these participants.

### **Major Finding Three: High Aspirations Diminished by Barriers to Advancement**

The third research question asked about how the work experiences of Latina midlevel student affairs administrators influenced their career aspirations. Some Latinas chose not to advance and were content in their midlevel positions, which is consistent with studies that pointed out how most midlevel administrators are satisfied with where they are and don't necessarily feel like they are stuck in midlevel (Young, 2007). Still, others were considering leaving the field of student affairs for a variety of reasons, whether it was to pursue faculty positions or leave higher education altogether. One-third of the participants in this study considered leaving SA, a much lower percentage than the 50 to 60 percent cited by Frank (2013).

The majority of the Latina administrators had high aspirations, expressing how they wanted to be deans of students or vice presidents someday. However, these high aspirations were diminished by perceived professional and personal barriers to their advancement. The professional barriers included lack of support for professional development, scarce Latina role models in senior level positions and lack of upward mobility at Latinas' institutions. Latinas felt stuck in their midlevel positions due to limited promotion opportunities at their institutions, necessitating that Latinas relocated if they wanted to advance. The personal barriers included fear of advancement due to not being exposed to senior level leadership, considering motherhood and other family concerns and apprehension about advanced degree attainment. Some Latinas felt the need to choose between career advancement and motherhood or delayed getting a

doctorate until their children were older, pointing out the time commitment. One barrier that was not at all discussed and was different than what Kravitz (2006) found, was low expectations from their families for Latina career advancement. Because the Latinas in this study were all under 50 years old, that would be consistent with how Kravitz found that barrier only to be true to her participants over 50.

With regard to career development, a majority of the participants had a sense of frustration, sharing that they did not receive adequate financial support for professional development from their institutions and supervisors. Professional development is a form of career support described by Rosser and Javinar (2009) as “issues regarding the student affairs leaders’ professional and career development, opportunities for career enhancement, and job performance” (p. 31). Rosser and Javinar (2009) make a case for professional development being a requirement for new and midlevel professionals and insist that institutions provide support for administrators to be able to join professional associations and attend conferences and other learning opportunities. Professional associations can be used as a form of continuing education where SA administrators can continue to learn about trends and best practices in higher education, which enables them to perform better in their roles on campus (Janosik, 2009; Janosik, Carpenter & Creamer, 2006; Massé, Miller, Kerr & Ortiz, 2007).

Aside from the lack of funding for professional development, Latinas pointed to a lack of formal mentorship that they wished they had received from senior level administrators when they were navigating their careers from entry to mid level. Latinas were looking for advice on skills and competencies they needed to advance in their careers and how to seek out promotions. One of the biggest barriers to advancement senior level administrators faced was the lack of formal professional development or leadership programs for those looking to advance in their careers

(Kravitz, 2006). Mentoring has been consistently found to be beneficial to women SA professionals who needed someone who can help them reduce ambiguity and role conflict in their work settings, which in turn helped with their institutional commitment (Blackhurst, 2000b).

However, like the Latina administrators in this study, Blackhurst (2000b) found that only one in three participants reported having a mentor at any level of their institution. Furthermore, women of color were the most negatively impacted by not having a mentor and were more likely to report higher levels of role ambiguity and perceived higher levels of sex discrimination than White women with or without mentors. Twale and Jelinek (1996) identified the importance of mentoring and suggested that new professionals would especially benefit from having a mentor early in their careers. Although the mentor relationship was important at all levels, the specific use and purpose might change depending on career intentions.

Latinas found women of color in similar positions who provided them guidance with navigating their campus environments, but they did not regard them as mentors. In a study of the effectiveness of different mentoring approaches among female administrators in Tennessee, Dunbar and Kinnersley (2011), found that mentees perceived their mentoring relationships as more effective if their mentor was of a different race. The explanation for why the Latina administrator did not see their peers as mentors could be that they were looking for formal mentorship from senior level administrators, but men and White women were mostly the ones they saw in those positions. For these Latina administrators, ethnic or racial background of these mentors mattered, but when it came to looking for role models, it was more important to see Latinas in positions of senior leadership.



Movement within midlevel positions leading to possible internal promotions is viewed as an option for SA administrators (Findley, 2007; Miner & Estler, 1985; Sagaria & Johnsrud, 1988). However, when there is low representation of Latinas in senior leadership, hiring administrators did not see Latinas as qualified internal candidates for advancement. This means that Latinas then needed to look outside of their institutions if they wanted to be promoted. Latinas would then need to seriously consider moving to institutions that are geographically distant from the communities where they live. With pressure from family to stay close to home, advancement becomes an elusive goal for Latinas who choose to stay close to their families. Moving is not as easy for Latinas due to family and cultural issues that complicate relocation. Consequently, many of them end up staying in their current post.

The finding that the Latina administrators' hesitance to relocate and feeling constrained to their geographic area was similar to Lepkowski's (2009) finding that the women from all backgrounds were less likely to move geographically and were more limited in their upward mobility options than the men who were more willing to relocate for a promotion. Latinas in this study shared how they were more likely to stay in geographic areas where they felt comfortable and where the environment was more familiar and native to them. Jackson and O'Callaghan (2009) analyzed SA administrators by ethnic background and found that the concentration of representation of administrative positions matched the representation within each NASPA region. For example, the majority of Latina/o SA administrators were concentrated in Region III, the southeast region of the United States. NASPA Region III includes: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia; the Central American country of Mexico (<https://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/regions/region-three/history>).

An overwhelming majority of the Latina administrators discussed their hesitance with regard to career advancement. Some of this fear seems to be stemming from feelings of self-doubt, most likely reinforced by the stereotypes and microaggressions described in the second major theme, making Latinas feel that they had more to prove and not regarded as prepared and competent as their White male and female counterparts. Contributing to this fear was a lack of knowledge about role expectations as a Dean of Students or Vice President of Student Affairs. Latina administrators were experiencing the “Adobe Ceiling” effect as described in the literature, meaning that they don’t know what senior level leadership looks like, having never been exposed to it, which is different from the glass ceiling because at least with a glass ceiling, women can see what upper level positions look like, but just hit the ceiling trying to reach those positions (Alicea, 2003; Ramos, 2008). Aside from the fear of being in a vulnerable place as a senior leader at an institution, many of the participants expressed how much they feared losing touch with the day to day student experience and were not interested in the politics that become more complicated as they move up to roles with heightened responsibilities, bigger budgets to manage and larger numbers of staff to supervise.

Family considerations, contemplating motherhood and the pressures from their families to start their own family impacted the way the Latina administrators made decisions about how they navigated their careers, often experiencing such push and pull as a barrier to their advancement. The majority of Latinas in this study made choices to purposely limit their career advancement and opportunities due to the prospect of motherhood. Whether they chose to have a family or not, family considerations and making decisions about advancement and motherhood weighed heavily on the majority of the Latina administrators. They recognized how most workplaces, including SA did not seem to be friendly for families due to the late hours and

additional duties that demanded the time of administrators, especially those who were looking to advance to senior level positions.

Latinas are not far off from the reality of gender disparity that exists in SSAOs. Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes and Terrell (2005) studied these gender differences among SSAOs and found that women felt less balanced than men due to the stress they felt managing work and family and women often hid this stress because they did not want to be perceived as less competent. Women SSAOs experienced pressure from their families and shared how their partners made comments to them about their work commitments, further increasing their stress levels (Beeny, Guthrie, Rhodes and Terrell, 2005; Marquez, 2014).

Almost all participants acknowledged the importance of having a doctorate if they wished to pursue senior level leadership positions. This finding is strongly supported in the literature, with director level and higher positions increasingly being posted as doctorate preferred or required as a qualification for the position (Long, 2012). Two of the Latina administrators had already earned doctoral degrees and nine shared that they were currently enrolled in doctoral programs at the time the study was conducted. Fifteen Latina participants who had not earned doctorates or enrolled in a doctoral program expressed hesitance when they considered pursuing a doctorate. Howard-Hamilton (2004) said she pursued a terminal degree because she wanted to make sure she can avoid the “infamous glass ceiling.” Existing body of literature documents challenges that Latinas face in doctoral programs and even they endure the sacrifice it takes to complete a doctorate, there is no guarantee that it will lead to higher pay or a promotion (Daddona, Cooper & Dunn, 2006).

## **Summary**

Latina administrators experienced discrimination due to gender, race and ethnicity. As Latinas navigated careers in SA, their work experiences, career advancement and aspirations for advancement were negatively impacted by the microaggressions they experienced at their institutions. These Latinas shared remarkable stories about how they started out in their careers very positively, but then began to feel like outsiders due to microaggressions. Aspirations for future career advancement for most of the Latinas were high, but were diminished by professional and personal barriers they faced that were limiting their opportunities. The Latina administrators in this study seemed to be fearful of moving up or just not aware of what it would really mean for their work life balance, especially with regard to family, specifically motherhood. Nevertheless, these Latinas persevered, continued to value their work and remained hopeful about their futures.

## **Implications for Practice**

The findings from this study indicate that there are several implications for how Student Affairs (SA) can create work environments that improve recruitment strategies, preparation and training for staff who can help to prepare Latinas for senior level leadership positions. The following section includes implications for practice intended to improve conditions for Latina SA administrators. The first section describes recommendations and suggestions that institutions can implement to improve inclusive excellence for all administrators in student affairs, including Latinas. The second section provides recommendations and suggestions for the professional development of Latina administrators.

### **Developing inclusive excellence for administrators in student affairs**

As stated in previous sections, Latinas thrive in environments where they feel welcomed, affirmed, and valued and there are many ways to create inclusive campus climates. There are numerous best practices senior leaders can look to for ideas on how to foster SA environments where all staff members can feel a sense of belonging, including resources for training staff members and staff programs they can create on their campuses.

### **Recruitment strategies for student affairs leadership**

Recruitment does not seem to be an issue for Latinas entering Student Affairs. Latinas find their way to SA, but then find themselves being the only ones at their institutions. Rosser and Javinar (2009) stated simply, “to attain a welcoming and inclusive organizational culture, midlevel student affairs leaders must endeavor to recruit a diverse team that avoids the homosocial reproduction of the same or the similar” (p. 39). In the case of SA, similar would be White and female. More concerted efforts should be made from upper administration in order to continue to recruit and tap Latinas for leadership roles as undergraduate students, encourage them to pursue graduate degrees and recruit them for entry level positions in SA. What’s wrong is Latinas “fall in” with the illusion of inclusion. Skills and insight Latinas bring should be valued and appreciated and they should be treated as experts. Phelps Tobin (1998) acknowledged how the traditional recruitment avenues including the “old boy network” had once seemed to be advantageous because it provided a familiarity and ease of transition for those who benefited, but cites a major disadvantage because of the biased recruitment patterns it limits the diversification of SA.

The best way for all leaders to achieve diversity recruitment goals beyond having open minds is to get advice from search firms who specialize in diversity recruitment and to post

position openings in publications that cater to diverse audiences or focus on diversity.

Institutions should not rely solely on their Human Resources position listing websites to recruit for positions. Institutions can participate in special programs that encourage early recruitment of future SA administrators. One example of a pipeline program sponsored by one of the national student affairs associations, NASPA, Student Affairs Administrator in Higher Education is the NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Programs (NUFP). The mission of the NUFP program is:

The mission of the NASPA Undergraduate Fellows Program is to increase the number of historically disenfranchised and underrepresented professionals in student affairs and/or higher education, including but not limited to those of racial and ethnic-minority background; those having a disability; and those identifying as LGBTQ (<https://www.naspa.org/constituent-groups/professionals/nufp>).

NUFP is an example of a pipeline program that introduces students from underrepresented groups to the field of student affairs and provides them mentorship and funding.

### **Welcoming new staff members**

Peer relationships was described as highly positive in the Latina administrators' transition into their entry level positions and were found to positively influence the job satisfaction of new professionals (Strayhorn, 2009). Therefore, senior leaders should work to create a welcoming environment. Strayhorn (2009) suggests sending an email to key departments when a new staff member arrives, that shares some of their credentials, experiences and possibly, some interests that others can learn about and can help current staff members to reach out and create a welcoming environment for Latinas who might be nervous about coming into a new institution and department. It is not enough to recruit and hire Latina administrators. They also need to continue to feel welcomed and supported in their work environments. The message needs to be one that is shared with all co-workers who need to understand their roles with creating the kinds of environments where Latinas and other women of color can thrive.

## **Valuing diversity**

There are many mission statements at institutions of higher education that explicitly include diversity and inclusion as a guiding value. However, this study and many others highlighting the negative experiences of marginalized students, faculty and administrators provide evidence that there is still much work to be done to improve campus climates (ASHE, 2009; Gloria & Castellanos, 2003; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Presidents and executive level leadership need to evaluate their campus climate and make changes to the campus based on the data in order to improve campus experience for Latinas and all other marginalized groups (Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, Allen & Milem, 1998; Mayhew, Grunwald & Dey, 2006). They need to make more visible and open gestures about the values of diversity and educating majority staff members about what they can do to contribute to a more welcoming environment. Brazzell and Reisser (1999) discussed the importance of cultivating inclusive campus communities, but they focused on the students and failed to mention how recruiting more administrators of color may also be a way to welcome diversity and provide diverse campus leadership with new perspectives who can also serve as role models for students of color.

## **Understanding campus climate**

Have campuses participate in campus climate surveys to get a better understanding of their unique campus issues and use the data to improve the conditions on campus to make it more welcoming and easier to recruit. Campus leaders can get a sense of their campus climates by getting to know the students on their campuses and simply asking them how connected they are feeling and, reviewing enrollment and retention information by student type and backgrounds. There are several firms, many founded by former SA administrators and scholars who recognized that there is a need for outside researchers to study campus climates to give each

institution a personalized assessment of their environments, while being able to benchmark with similar campuses (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson & Allen, 1998; Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman & Oseguera, 2008; Rankin & Reason, 2005).

### **Diversity training**

Aside from professional development for Latina administrators, there also needs to be professional development for SSAOs and administrators at all levels to promote a better understanding for the experiences of Latinas and other underrepresented groups on campus so that they can be better supported as they navigate their campus experiences and advance in their careers. Effective diversity training helps to educate employees how to look beyond stereotypes and assumptions based on implicit or overt bias. Each campus needs to figure out where the gaps are in terms of populations that may be feeling marginalized and look to fill them through campus engagement in diversity and inclusion workshops and awareness events that bring a variety of perspectives and voices to the institution.

### **Sharing the diversity work by moving beyond the Latina boxes**

All SA administrators need to learn how to mentor students of color so that this function does not become the sole expectation of staff members of color, specifically, Latinas. Unfortunately, Latinas are most likely evaluated on the work listed on their job descriptions and not the extra diversity work they do for the institution, often after hours and without additional compensation. Therefore, supervisors need to capitalize on Latinas' willingness to serve as mentors for underrepresented student populations by putting mentorship activities on their job descriptions and providing additional compensation or work release options when they sign for diversity activities. For equity, institutions can do the same for all administrators and that will avoid giving "White colleagues an out" from supporting students of color, as Evelyn, one of the



participants in this study stated. There should be an expectation that all staff members are culturally competent and can relate to and assist all students, regardless of gender and ethnic background.

### **Providing supportive environments for family care and parenthood**

Institutions need to provide better support systems for motherhood and family care. Institutional policies and professional development offerings may not be supporting Latinas and other women in SA who are considering how career advancement will affect their family lives. Stimpson (2009) found that most of the SSAOs who identified as female were single, which was starkly different from the SSAOs who identified as male and were mostly partnered. The nature of SA work is that hours may vary depending on student advisement and programming needs, so finding a partner and starting a family may be negatively impacted (Stimpson, 2009). Anderson, Guido-DiBrito and Morrell (2000) suggest that work environments in SA may need to be restructured to provide the flexibility for all administrators to allow them time to care for their families, whether it is children or aging parents.

### **Positioning Latina administrators for success**

There are many ways that Latinas can be positioned for success in higher education administration. Supervisors can be instrumental in providing support for Latinas that moves beyond focusing on their career aspirations and assisting Latinas with developing the skills and competencies they need for advancement (Tull, 2006). Latinas need increased self-efficacy, credentials and skills that will place them on pathways to senior level leadership. Beyond recruitment, clear pathways to advancement need to be promoted to Latina administrators.

Biddix (2011) posits how, “ill-defined pathways, vague entry points, and inexplicit criteria for determining mobility have added confusion over routes to senior leadership as well as

contributed to attrition” (p. 443). Therefore, senior leaders should find ways to expose Latinas to advanced leadership positions so that they can have a clear view of what that means for them personally and professionally and be able to prepare accordingly. This could include formal mentoring and shadow programs and provide funding and time for professional development. While there have been many studies looking at career pathways in student affairs, career advancement is not always clear. Thus, advancement can become problematic for anyone who does not know how to prepare for promotion. Latinas have a particularly difficult experience that causes them to have negative experiences at their institutions which then diminishes their career aspirations.

### **Structured performance appraisals and feedback**

The Latinas in this study reported receiving indirect feedback and conflicting messages about how they should behave in the workplace and were hesitant in many of the spaces they navigated due to feeling different than others and not understanding unwritten rules of academia. This was consistent with Sandler’s (1992) finding that women of color were less likely to receive feedback about their work than white women due to their small numbers on most campuses. Latina administrators would benefit from receiving formal, written feedback from supervisors that is clear, consistent and focused on their work performance and not on their mannerisms or other cultural attributes.

Women thrive in environments where there had a formal appraisal process that was structured and focused and when career development and advancement were directly linked to that process (Corral, 2009). However, before being evaluated, administrators would need to have clarity about their work duties and expectations. Blackhurst, Brandt and Kalinowski (1998b) found a connection between role ambiguity and commitment and satisfaction with their work

settings, in that the higher ambiguity meant lower commitment and satisfaction among the women in their study. A formal process that is transparent about role and work expectations, evaluates performance in a predictable manner and includes feedback from campus partners would be helpful for Latinas to be able to get a sense of how others are perceiving their work and collaboration efforts.

### **Clear and intentional career pathways and planning**

Ensuring the diversity of future leadership in SA and all of higher education means preparing the increasingly diverse SA entry-level and midlevel staff for their senior leadership roles. This must be built into strategic planning processes with guidelines Latina administrators can follow (Betts, Urias, Chavez & Betts, 2009; Gonzalez, 2010). Providing clarity on moving up or advancing can then be seen as appealing as when Latina SA administrators first began their careers in student affairs. Higher education institutions should create environments where internal promotions are valued and people are trained for next level leadership. Creating pathways to promotion within the same institutions would address issues that Latinas have regarding limited geographical mobility.

### **Formal mentorship**

In this study, Latinas found mentorship from women of color in similar positions, who helped them navigate challenges they experienced at their institutions. Similar to the findings in my study, the Latina administrators in Garza's (1996) study identified the lack of formal mentorship, but shared how informally, women of color were helpful to them in their career trajectory. Although Latinas viewed these peer mentorships as helpful in their day to day survival, they did not see them as providing overarching career advice. Formal mentorship is strongly suggested by scholars like Blackhurst (2000b) who posits how beneficial a structured

mentoring relationship would be for women student affairs professionals, especially for women of color because it can help them learn about the informal, unspoken rules for organizational behavior that would otherwise go unnoticed. The best way to set up formal mentorship is to be deliberate in assigning a senior level administrator with an administrator who is aspiring to move up the career ladder. This kind of mentorship can provide exposure to what senior leadership looks like, helping with their fear of advancement, one of the personal barriers described by the Latina administrators.

It is likely that fear might be preventing some Latinas from taking risks and applying for advanced positions. Create a shadowing program can be useful, where midlevel administrators can spend time with SSAOs to gain exposure to what senior level leadership looks like. If more environments like this are created, there would be a glimmer of hope of upward mobility for these Latina administrators. Then we won't hear things like, "I don't even know if I can move up" or "I don't know what moving up looks like." The women who shared these sentiments seem hopeless for their future career prospects and then expressed that they have had to adjust their aspirations.

Latinas also need to rethink who they believe could be mentors, adding men and White administrators to the list of possibilities. If Latinas don't see themselves in positions of senior leadership, they may need to rethink mentoring relationships and seek out mentors from a variety of backgrounds. The Latina community college presidents in the study by Maes (2010) reported having male mentors. According to Blackhurst (2000b), "the need for this commitment is even more apparent for women of color, who have the fewest options for same-race, same-sex mentoring relationships (p. 583). Therefore, Latinas need to challenge themselves and connect with mentors from all backgrounds, who are in positions they might be considering in the future.

### **Support for advanced degree attainment**

Senior leadership need to work on ways in which they can help facilitate Latinas getting their doctoral degrees. Administrators need to find the time and resources to work on their doctorates. Institutions can grant flex time at work and resources should be provided to administrators as part of their compensation if they desire to pursue an advanced degree. Tuition assistance is not available at all institutions, especially if Latinas are working at 2-year or 4-year institutions that do not have a doctoral program.

Therefore, institutions may need to be creative in the ways that they could offer financial assistance for Latinas who want to pursue doctorates. Komives and Taub (2000) reinforced the connection of advancing professionally through doctoral education. Almost every study tracing the pathway to SSAO positions documented the importance of obtaining a doctoral degree as a key qualification for advancement (Biddix, 2013; Doman, 2016; Marquez, 2014; Stimpson, 2009; Tull & Miller, 2009; Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014; Wolfe, 2016; Woodard, 2009). Encouraging enrollment in advanced degree programs and providing the financial and professional support to help them complete doctoral degrees is one of the most significant ways to position Latinas for future advancement.

### **Latina leadership and professional development**

Latinas should be provided opportunities for professional development, a form of career development that can occur in and out of the institutions where they are employed. Nuss (1993) discussed the importance of getting involved in professional associations and Janosik (2009) describes the benefits of involvement as a valuable resource and means of socialization for new SA professionals. Although Schwartz (2003) found that the early deans of women developed the skills they needed to be successful in their roles through their memberships in professional

associations, Latinas don't need to only rely on involvement in and attending professional conferences as a way to gain skills. Senior leaders in HE should create stronger support for professional development by creating programs on campus that Latina administrators can easily access and speaks to their unique campus experiences.

Senior level administrators were found to be most involved in professional associations as they advanced in their careers (Chernow, Cooper & Winston, 2003). This could be due to the increasing funding support SA administrators receive as they move up the ladder. Entry level staff are least likely to get their travel to conferences funded. This trend should be reversed. Entry and midlevel staff should be provided more funding since senior level leadership probably have more discretionary funds that they can use for professional development and may not need as much of the content. If financing professional development seems to be a challenge for less resourced institutions, SSAOs should encourage internal professional development opportunities within the institution. There are many ways to draw from the experience among the ranks of the student affairs staff at each institution by getting them involved in assisting less experienced administrators with their career development.

### **Latinas taking charge of their professional development**

Latinas can also take charge of their own career development instead of waiting for their supervisors to facilitate that for them by making a commitment to fund their own development. During tight budget seasons, supervisors might be well intentioned and have the desire to financially support professional development, but might be limited in the funding they can offer. Latinas would then need to evaluate their personal expenses and consider making investments in their own professional development. There are also ways to create professional development by asking supervisors to appoint them to campus wide committees within their institutions that are

not focused on diversity, but have a wide-reaching focus, such as assessment and strategic planning committees or those focused on student retention. Finally, Latinas can benefit from hiring a career coach to help establish professional goals and prepare for advancement by having the coach assist with preparation for interviews as Haro (1995) found that White male administrators utilized a career coach in preparation for Vice President and Presidential searches in a study on executive search processes.

### **Latina involvement in professional associations**

There are numerous professional associations that SA administrators can join to inform their work. Professional associations can provide networking connections and content that can improve the work performance of SA administrators (Janosik, 2009). On a web page maintained by studentaffairs.com, there are 68 distinct organizations listed, ranging from those specific to job functions, such as ACUHO-I for residence life professionals and NACE for career development (<http://www.studentaffairs.com/web/professionalassociations.html>). Evans and Ranero-Ramirez (2016) also offer a comprehensive list of professional associations representing a variety of student affairs areas and functions that is too long to list here, but is a great resource for those seeking additional information on the role and history of SA professional associations.

There are two well-known general SA organizations currently active that SA administrators from all functional areas can join. They are ACPA and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, widely known as NASPA. The American College Personnel Association (ACPA) has its headquarters in Washington, D.C. at the National Center for Higher Education and describe their organization as, “the leading comprehensive student affairs association that advances student affairs and engages students for a lifetime of learning and discovery” (<http://www.myacpa.org/who-we-are>). NASPA describes their organization as “the

leading association for the advancement, health, and sustainability of the student affairs profession” that serves “a full range of professionals who provide programs, experiences, and services that cultivate student learning and success in concert with the mission of our colleges and universities” (<https://www.naspa.org/about>).

**Leadership development programs.** Leon and Nevarez (2007) reviewed several models of leadership institutes for increasing top Latino administrators and found that participation in these experiences was a major factor in the success of senior Latina/o administrators. Maes (2010) found that 20 of the 22 Latina community college presidents in her study had participated in leadership development programs prior to being appointed to the presidency. The programs that the Latina presidents participated in, included the following in order of participation numbers: the National Community College Hispanic Council Fellows (10), National Institute for Leadership Development (6), League for Innovation in the Community College (4), Harvard Fellows (4), State Leadership Program (3), American Association of Community Colleges and Universities (2), Hispanic Association of College and Universities (2), Kellogg National Fellowship Program (2), American Association of Community Colleges Future Leaders Institute (1) (Maes, 2010).

Crespo (2013) also studied participants from two nationally recognized leadership development programs, the ACE Fellows Program coordinated by American Council on Education and one for women only, the HERS Leadership Institute coordinated by the Higher Education Resource Services organization. More information about those two leadership development opportunities are described in the study by Crespo (2013) and also on their respective websites (ACE Fellows Program:

<http://www.acenet.edu/leadership/programs/Pages/ACE-Fellows-Program.aspx> and HERS



Leadership Institute: <http://hersnet.org/institutes/what-are-the-institutes/>). Finally, Lopez (2013) underscores the importance of leadership development programs for professionals aspiring to the college presidency and lists a number of professional and leadership development programs that the executive leaders in his study indicated as key to their successful advancement. The following is a brief listing and description of a few professional associations that are primarily focused on Latina/o leadership and success.

**American Association of Hispanics in Higher Education (AAHHE).** AAHHE is a national organization that is “primarily focused on the need to develop Latino/a faculty and senior administrators as well as serving as a leading research and advocacy group for Hispanic higher education issues (<http://www.aahhe.org/About/vision.aspx>). This association coordinates a leadership academy that Latina/o administrators and faculty can apply and participate in to make connections and build their leadership potential as they advance in their careers (<http://www.aahhe.org/leadershipacademy/ela.aspx>).

**Hispanic Association of Colleges and University (HACU).** HACU is a national organization with 470 colleges and university committee to higher education success for Hispanics in the United States, Latin America and Spain that has several committees and leadership opportunities for Latinas ([http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HACU\\_101.asp](http://www.hacu.net/hacu/HACU_101.asp)). HACU offers resources and several opportunities for leadership development.

**The NASPA Escaleras Institute.** NASPA has developed several recent initiatives to support the professional development of Latina/o administrators to position them for senior leadership in the near future. One of these initiatives is the NASPA Escaleras Institute, launched for the first time in October of 2015, with the second one taking place in October of 2016. The description of the institute is as follows:

The NASPA Escaleras Institute – *Latin@/x Student Affairs Professionals Scaling New Heights in Leadership* is designed for Latin@/x student affairs professionals who aspire to senior student affairs officers roles, including the cabinet-level vice president for student affairs position, at colleges and universities. The Institute is appropriate for emerging Latin@/x leaders in assistant/associate director, director, assistant/associate dean, dean, and AVP roles. This three-day, cohort-based institute offers an intensive, challenging, and collegial learning environment for Latin@/x student affairs professionals as they develop culturally relevant leadership skills that leverage their unique ethnic heritages and histories. (<https://www.naspa.org/events/2016Escaleras>)

Professional development experiences like these acknowledge the unique experiences of Latina/o administrators, provides a space for camaraderie among Latina/o professionals, and provides strategies for career advancement that speaks to how it might be different for Latina/os. Having attended, the first institute, I would have to say that the most important takeaway of the Escaleras Institute was the exposure to Latina/o senior level administrators ranging from Deans, to Vice Presidents to Presidents, who shared details about their career journeys and provide insight into what their daily work and home lives look like in their roles.

Such shared experiences go a long way to alleviate the fear and “Adobe Ceiling” detrimental to advancement for a majority of the Latina administrators in this study. In addition, the connections to other midlevel Latina/o professionals helps to combat the feeling of isolation and provides a network of professional support with amazing potential for peer mentorship. I am still very much in touch with the wonderful administrators and faculty members I met at the first NASPA Escaleras Institute and feel indebted to NASPA for nurturing this brainchild of Dr. Mary Jo Gonzalez and giving it the support and wings it needed to soar.

While attending such an institute could serve to be professionally invaluable, encouraging Latinas to get involved in committees on campus and in local, regional or national professional associations would go a long way to raise their awareness of wider reaching issues in higher education, improve their collaboration skills, and provide them exposure to leaders from diverse

backgrounds at different kinds of institutions. In addition to career development and professional association involvement, Latina administrators must also find ways to manage their stress and take care of themselves. The next section provides some ideas for self-care that Latinas can consider as they navigate their careers.

### **Latina self-care**

This study brought to light many issues that Latinas faced as they navigated careers in Student Affairs administration and worked towards advancement, many of these causing high levels of pressure that cause anxiety and stress that needs to be addressed. It is clear that a combination of racism and sexism have caused confusion and frustration for Latinas that disregards their hard work and questions their competence despite their years of professional experience and credentials. As Latinas face the reality that they are often regarded as outsiders, they struggle to find their places in academia and that journey can cause an emotional and psychological toll. The isolation and discrimination Latinas face in higher education can also be mentally draining and debilitating, diminishing self-esteem and self-efficacy, further limiting advancement opportunities.

In addition, the Latinas' family lives and relationships may suffer from the late hours and elevated stress levels that Latinas may experience in their efforts to work harder to be perceived as competent and to keep up with their work when workplace discrimination causes distractions for them when they are just trying to complete their work assignments. As a result of all these negative consequences of being Latina in spaces that hostile to them, there needs to be additional support as Latinas need to acknowledge that they need to seek out resources to learn life strategies to cope with negative professional and personal issues.

Latinas can practice self-care by taking advantage of their health coverage and seeking out counseling and other resources to overcome feelings of inadequacy and depression. Garza (1996) suggested the following self-help strategies for Latinas, still relevant 30 years later:

1. Lead a balanced professional and personal life.
2. Identify a mentor who can provide valuable, professional guidance.
3. Stay abreast of current issues in higher education as well as global concerns so as to universalize your thinking and, as a result, enable you to make a greater contribution.
4. Voice issues relevant to the Latina staff in higher education.
5. Communicate with other professional Latinas nationwide.
6. It is imperative to organize formal and informal gatherings for Latinas and other people of color to promote the exchange of ideas and create support systems.
7. Seek to participate in activities that will enhance your visibility within the organization and create opportunities for upward mobility.
8. Have a solid understanding of the terms of your employment.
9. It is absolutely essential to assertively seek out career options that allow for growth and skills building in budget management, supervision, and administration. (Garza, 1996, p. 112 – 114).

Garza's recommendations provided professional and personal suggestions useful for any professional who is looking to advance in their careers. Based on information learned from the data in this study, I add the following recommendations for self-care for Latina administrators:

1. When being asked to participate in additional responsibilities beyond the scope of your position, think carefully about how they will contribute to your future career goals before saying yes to make sure the extra time spent on these will be worth it.

2. Do not be afraid to ask for the support you need at home and at work. Traditional family roles have been changing and this is a great time to consider how your own mindset about gender roles and other family considerations might be affecting the decisions you are making with regard to your career.
3. Utilize Employee Assistance Programs and/or health benefits to set up counseling and other mental health support systems when stress levels are high.
4. Make the time to connect with close friends and family to feel grounded and connected to those you care for and care for you. This is also a reminder that while work may seem like it is life, at the end of the day it is not and as some employees learn the hard way, staff members are replaceable, but family and close friends are not.
5. When negotiating for a new position, be sure to include requesting support and funding for professional development so that it is already planned for as you begin your new job.

Again, I cannot stress enough how important joining professional associations can be for career development, but a major benefit to getting involved and finding affinity groups centered on educating the profession about a variety of identities, can also be a place to find peer mentors, camaraderie, friendships, and most importantly, an empathetic group of professionals who are likely to have an understanding of what marginalization is like and can provide personal support. Holder, Jackson and Ponterotto (2015) used the term “sanity checks” for the kind of support Latinas can get from other professional women of color who understand their struggles “to help validate the existence of microaggressions and to check perceptions of racist incidents” (p.166). Finally, another way for Latinas to care for themselves is to care for their bodies by making healthy food choices and incorporating physical activity into their routines to relieve their stress.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Although this study only focused on Latina SA administrators in midlevel management positions, it is clear from the findings in this study that there needs to be more research on all SA administrators. The following are recommendations for research that can serve to further explore some of the concepts discussed. While this list is not comprehensive and other ideas may stem from the findings in this study, my hope is that some of these suggestions sparks the curiosity of researchers in the future.

1. This study included Latina student affairs administrators from 26 different higher education institutions, each having their own unique campus cultures. A suggested study would be to compare and contrast the experiences of administrators who are at the same institution, but are from a variety of ethnic backgrounds different than Latina/o to see what the differences and similarities might be when compared to the experiences of Latina administrators.
2. This qualitative study explored the career experiences of Latinas. Given that most other studies on Latina administrators in higher education are qualitative, it would be useful to conduct a quantitative study of Latina/o experiences as administrators in student affairs that measures factors that affect work experiences and career advancement including: burnout, job satisfaction, resilience and other concrete measures of career competencies and readiness for advancement. One suggestion is to update the surveys used in the early studies by Esquibel (1977) and Lopez (1978) to see if there are differences in the way that Latina/o administrators experience their work lives over four decades later. The survey used by Bonilla-Rodriguez (2011) in her national study of Latina leaders

would also be useful in creating an updated one to administer to Latina student affairs administrators.

3. Latinas in this study spoke broadly about their ethnicities and only a few mentioned their nationalities when discussing their experiences in terms of the stereotypes and microaggressions. In a follow up study, I would ask more targeted questions about specific nationalities, regions and other details about Latina ethnicities to try to gain more insight regarding in-group and out-group prejudices among Latinas. Hints of some of these came up in this study, but not significant enough to include in the findings.
4. In addition to the previous idea about adding more in-depth interview questions about nationalities and other specific identities, I would conduct another follow up study with as many of the 26 participants in this study as possible to find out how their career trajectories have unfolded over time and if they remained in their positions, were promoted within their institutions or moved outside of their institutions to lateral moves or promotions. I would also inquire if any of the participants finished their doctorates if they were enrolled, or if they started doctoral programs if they were not enrolled. Finally, I would ask how participation in this study influenced the way they thought about their career paths and aspirations and informed career decision making.
5. This study explored the intersections of gender, race and ethnicity. Gaining an understanding of other aspects of Latina identities, such as, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, physical and mental ability, and immigration status would be helpful to discover additional ways to provide support along their career paths in student affairs.
6. Latinas were concerned about how their family lives might be impacted if they were to advance to SSAO positions. A closer examination of issues of work and life balance

among female SSAOs would be beneficial and could provide insight into how women currently in SSAO positions are able to do both without negatively impacting their family lives.

7. This study only looked at the female perspective of the Latino identity due to the nature of the criteria for this study, but it would be beneficial to gather data from the Latino male perspective to provide a source for comparison and to see what differences exist in the way Latina administrators and Latino male administrators navigate careers. Early studies discussed Latino male administrators primarily due to the low number of Latina administrators during that time (Acevedo, 1979; Esquibel, 1977; Lopez, 1978; Lopez, 1984). Trends seem to be changing, as Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) point out the “vanishing Latino male” in their empirical study on the lack of attention and research on Latino males, finding that there seemed to be a broken educational pipeline and diminishing educational attainment in higher education – lagging behind Latinas in their educational achievements.
8. As described earlier in this chapter, there are several initiatives aimed at developing and supporting Latina/os in SA that are being coordinated by NASPA and other professional associations. It would be useful in developing strategies for advancement for Latina/os if organizations tracked the participation and learning in these Latina/o leadership focused programs to see if these efforts actually translate to career advancement and explore how much involvement in professional development influenced them as they sought advancement.
9. The Latinas in this study discussed how White males seemed to be promoted over them for senior level positions. This perception might not be too far from reality when the



number of SSAOs continue to have White males in the majority (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). A qualitative study of Presidents who hire SSAOs and asking them what qualifications and personal characteristics they sought in their SSAOs would provide insight into why they may be selected over qualified diverse candidates.

10. One more study that would be interesting would be to explore the professional careers of Latina faculty members who aspire to senior academic administration leadership to see if they perceive “Adobe Ceilings” as barriers to their future advancement as compared to Latina student affairs administrators.

## **Conclusion**

The findings in this study shed light on a group of Latina midlevel student affairs administrators and how gender, race and ethnicity influenced their institutional experiences, career paths and aspirations for advancement. Although there were studies that looked at work experiences of Latinas in higher education at different points in their careers, no other study to my knowledge explored the work experiences and career aspirations simultaneously within a single study, specifically with Latina administrators in midlevel positions in SA. The women in this study were generous in sharing details of their career journeys and boldly told their painful stories of starting out with optimism, but then slowly tempering their aspirations as they faced the reality that they were outsiders at their institutions and in their work lives in SA.

The intersections of identity brought a mixed experience of otherness, when sometimes “the old boy’s network” seemed to be most salient, or they experienced “White spaces” as they experienced race as a dividing factor. However, it was clear that ethnicity was the strongest attribute to workplace challenges with discrimination and feelings of isolation at higher education institutions where at first, Latinas felt welcomed and chosen. It seemed like a natural

fit, but then they began to feel out of place as they received reminders of their status as outsiders, stereotyped and enduring experiences of microaggressions. It was evident that they were tokens. These negative work experiences tainted the Latina administrators' experiences, causing disillusionment and diminished aspirations for advancement, placing perceived personal and professional barriers in the way of their career progressions.

However, there is hope for the future of Latina leadership development and advancement in SA, evident in recently developed programs aimed at increasing the career enhancement and advancement of Latina/os in student affairs. Latinas wanted to belong at their institutions and in academia as a whole and never imagined that they would have encountered so many barriers along the way no matter how hard they worked or how much experience they gained. Johnsrud, Heck and Rosser (2000) stated that the morale of midlevel administrators "is determined by their perceptions that they are treated fairly, that they and their opinions are valued, and that their work is meaningful" (p. 54) and that is exactly what the Latina student affairs administrators in this study desired all along.

### **Final Thoughts and Dedication**

The entire field of academia is broken and erases the narratives of people like me. We all have work to do to fix the lack of diversity and understanding among marginalized communities. We all have work to do. Academia needs work.

~ Tiffany Martinez

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the story that was not officially part of my study, but is a prime example of why this study matters for all Latinas trying to find their place in higher education. A story that was covered by the Chronicle of Higher Education on October 28, 2016 and Inside Higher Ed on November 4, 2016 of an incident that occurred involving a Latina undergraduate student named Tiffany Martinez. She was accused of plagiarism by her professor

because they did not believe she was capable of scholarly writing. When the professor handed her back a paper she had written, they not only humiliated her by having her come to the front of the classroom, but the professor had circled the word “hence” and wrote “this is not your word” with the word “not” double underlined. Tiffany empowered herself by sharing her story in a blog post describing this and many other microaggressions she has experienced as she navigated her undergraduate experience as a Latina. The ignorance and insensitivity displayed by this professor was reprehensible and it was clear they were operating with an assumption that this Latina was not capable of academic rigor and that there were certain words that belonged to some and not to others. In the words of this brilliant young woman who happens to be a McNair scholar, Latinas in higher education have one thing to say: “Academia, love me back!” (Martínez, 2016)

Yes, Academia, Latinas love higher education so much and appreciate the elevated status that Latinas and their families have been able to enjoy as a result of a solid education and credentials that provide access to positions that might not have been previously accessible. We have worked hard (often harder) to be seen as legitimate members of (your) elite society and would like to be given that love back in return. I have high aspirations and high hopes for a world that has seen so many changes over the years and while those changes have not always been embraced wholeheartedly, higher education has made the necessary adjustments for all who want to find their place.

**Hence**, it is possible for academia to create those welcoming and affirming environments that have been enjoyed by majority populations for centuries. This dissertation is dedicated to all Latinas working to make their way and improve their lives through education and hard work. May they always find supportive families, friends, teachers, mentors, supervisors and colleagues to help them along their life paths and can see their outer and inner beauty and wisdom.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Institutional Review Board Letter of Approval for Research



March 10, 2014

Sofia B. Pertuz  


Dear Ms. Pertuz,

The Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board has reviewed the information you have submitted addressing the concerns for your proposal entitled "Exploring the Work Experiences and Career Aspirations of Latina Midlevel Student Affairs Administrators". Your research protocol is hereby approved as revised through expedited review. The IRB reserves the right to recall the proposal at any time for full review.

Enclosed for your records are the signed Request for Approval form, the stamped Recruitment Flyer, and the stamped original Consent Form. Make copies only of these stamped forms.

The Institutional Review Board approval of your research is valid for a one-year period from the date of this letter. During this time, any changes to the research protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to their implementation.

According to federal regulations, continuing review of already approved research is mandated to take place at least 12 months after this initial approval. You will receive communication from the IRB Office for this several months before the anniversary date of your initial approval.

Thank you for your cooperation.

*In harmony with federal regulations, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision.*

Sincerely,

Mary F. Ruzicka, Ph.D.  
 Professor  
 Director, Institutional Review Board

cc: Dr. Eunyoung Kim

Office of Institutional Review Board  
 Presidents Hall • 400 South Orange Avenue • South Orange, New Jersey 07079 • Tel: 973.313.6314 • Fax: 973.275.2361 • [www.shu.edu](http://www.shu.edu)

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## Appendix B: Recruitment Letter

Dear Potential Study Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study on the work experiences and career aspirations of Latina midlevel Student Affairs administrators titled: **Exploring the Work Experiences and Career Aspirations of Latina Midlevel Student Affairs Administrators.**

My name is Sofia Bautista Pertuz, and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy program at Seton Hall University in New Jersey. The purpose of this study is to explore the work experiences and career aspirations of Latina midlevel Student Affairs administrators and specifically, how race, ethnicity and gender may have impacted their career advancement and opportunities.

All Latinas who are currently holding a full time midlevel administrative position (with a title ranging from Assistant Director to Associate Dean) and has been working in higher education for at least five years is eligible to participate in this study. Each Latina administrator who agrees to participate in this study will be asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire and will participate in a 60 to 90 minute interview. The interview will be conducted at a place and time that is convenient for you between March 10, 2014 and May 10, 2014. During the interview, I will ask you questions about your work experiences and career aspirations and how your Latina identity may have impacted these experiences.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and highly appreciated. If you grant permission, the interview will be recorded with a digital voice recorder. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. **All conversations will remain confidential; your name and other identifying characteristics will not be used in reports and presentations.**

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration of this study. I really hope that you will grant your consent to participate in this important study. If you have any questions or would like to participate, please contact me as soon as possible at [sofia.pertuz@student.shu.edu](mailto:sofia.pertuz@student.shu.edu) or (917) 569-7084.

I look forward to hearing about your career path and aspirations.

Sincerely,  
Sofia Bautista Pertuz  
[sofia.pertuz@student.shu.edu](mailto:sofia.pertuz@student.shu.edu)  
Doctoral Candidate  
Seton Hall University College of Education and Human Services  
Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy

Appendix C: Study Participant Recruitment Flyer

# Looking for Research Participants for a study titled:

## Exploring the Work Experiences and Career Aspirations of Latina Midlevel Student Affairs Administrators

**Purpose of Study:** To explore the work experiences and career aspirations of Latina midlevel Student Affairs administrators and how the intersections of their identities, specifically race, ethnicity and gender, may have impacted their career paths.

**Eligibility:** Potential participants must meet the following criteria:

1. self-identify as Latina, 2. currently hold a full time midlevel administrative Student Affairs position (ie. Assistant Director to Associate Dean level) and
3. have 5 or more full time years experience working in higher education.

**Participation:** A 60-90-minute, audio-recorded interview will be set up and conducted at a place, date and time convenient for participants between March 10, 2014 and May 10, 2014.

**Researcher Information:** *Sofia B. Pertuz is a doctoral candidate in the Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy program at Seton Hall University conducting research on Latina Student Affairs administrators.*

\*\*\*\*\* Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board

**NOTE: Participation in this Study is Voluntary.** All conversations will remain confidential. Names and other identifying characteristics will not be used in any reports or presentations. All information will be safely stored.

**Any questions about this study or interest in participating should be directed to Sofia B. Pertuz as soon as possible at sofia.pertuz@student.shu.edu or 917-569-7084**

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board  
Approval Date  
MAR 10 2014

Expiration Date  
MAR 10 2015

MAR 10 2014  
Approval Date

## Appendix D: Research Participant Consent Form



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Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

MAR 10 2014

Appendix C

Approval Date

### Research Participant Consent Form

#### Exploring the Work Experiences and Career Aspirations of Latina Midlevel Student Affairs Administrators

**Researcher's Affiliation:** Ms. Sofia Bautista Pertuz is a doctoral candidate in the Seton Hall University College of Education and Human Services, Ph.D. in Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy program.

**Purpose of the Research:** The purpose of this study is to explore the work experiences and career aspirations of Latina midlevel Student Affairs administrators and specifically, how race, ethnicity and gender may have impacted their career advancement and opportunities.

**Research Procedures:** Research procedures include participation in one digital audio recorded, in-depth, open ended, semi-structured interview not to exceed 90 minutes, conducted by the researcher. Participants' information and identities will not be released. Interview questions will focus on the participants' intersections of Latina identities, specifically, how race, class and gender have impacted their work experiences, career path and aspirations. If the subject agrees to their interview being audio recorded, the participant may review the recording for accuracy at the conclusion of the interview.

**Interview Guide Instrument:** Sample questions that will be asked of each participant will include:

- What led you to pursue a career in Student Affairs?
- Do you believe that Latina Student Affairs administrators navigate their careers in different ways than non-Latinas? Why or why not?
- What have been some key influential experiences or factors that have impacted the progression of your career?
- What are some institutional or work-related challenges that have impacted your career advancement?

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Individuals who choose to either participate or decline will not have their decision revealed to anyone else. Participants in this study may limit or end participation in the research at any time. Refusal to participate or discontinuing participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits.

**Anonymity:** Anonymity is not possible because the researcher will know the participants as part of the interview process. However, confidentiality will be ensured by using a pseudonym (alias) for the institution and for the participants and by omitting from reports any personally identifiable information about the participants.

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**Confidentiality:** All interview responses will remain confidential and numbers and pseudonyms (aliases) will be assigned to each participant in the order of interview sequence. Participants' identities will not be revealed in preliminary and final reports, or published materials. During the study, the dissertation mentor and committee members will have access to the coded information through the researcher.

Approval Date

**Storage of Data:** If the participant agrees to have their interview digitally audio recorded, the data file will be stored on a password protected USB memory drive in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. The researcher will transcribe the interview without identifying the participant by name, only by assigned number and pseudonym (alias). The electronic copies of the interview transcript documents will be stored along with the digital audio file on a password protected USB memory drive. After the research is completed, the digital audio files, transcripts and print material will be destroyed.

Expiration Date  
MAR 10 2015

**Access to Records:** Only the researcher will have access to records associated with this study. The dissertation mentor and committee members will also have the right to view the records of this research upon request. The participants will also be given access to their respective data upon request.

**Possible Risks:** There are no anticipated risks involved with taking part in this research study, including potential physical or emotional stress or discomfort. The measure that the researcher is taking to safeguard participants' confidentiality ensures that their identities will not be revealed. The information provided by a participant will not be traced to her participation.

**Benefits:** While there are not foreseeable direct benefits, it is anticipated that the results of this research will help the participants better understand their work experience and career paths by reflecting on their identities and the impact on their career trajectories. This study intends to provide a voice for Latinas to describe the barriers to career advancement that they may face as they navigate careers in Student Affairs. By bringing these to light, the researcher hopes that executive leaders in higher education will work towards improving conditions for Latinas in administration and at all levels of academia.

**Participant Compensation:** There will be no monetary compensation provided to participate in this study. All participants would be volunteering their time to be part of this research.

**Contact Information:** At any time during the project or after the study is completed, questions regarding this research and research participant's rights can be directed to the principal researcher, Sofia Bautista Pertuz at (917) 569-7084 or sofia.pertuz@student.shu.edu. The Dissertation Mentor, Dr. Eunyoung Kim can also be reached at eunyoung.kim@shu.edu or by phone at (973) 275-2156 in the Department of Education Leadership, Management and Policy at Seton Hall University, 400 South Orange Avenue, South Orange, NJ 07079. If you have questions about your rights as a human research subject, you may contact Dr. Mary Ruzicka, Director of the Seton Hall University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Subjects Research at (973) 313-6314 or irb@shu.edu.

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**Audio Recording Consent:** A digital recorder will be used to record the interviews if participants provide consent. Participants will be identified by a pseudonym (alias). Audio files will be kept confidential on a separate, password protected USB memory drive, transferred from a digital audio recorder and transcribed by the researcher. Only the researcher will have direct access. However, the dissertation mentor and committee members will have the right to access the data files upon request. The USB memory drive and transcripts will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the personal possession of the researcher until the study is completed. Participants will have the opportunity to obtain a copy of their interview (both audio and transcribed). Participants should notify the researcher if a copy of the interview is desired. After the research is completed, the audio files, transcripts and print materials will be destroyed.

**Consent:** To indicate consent to participate in this research study, please sign and date this form in the space provided below. Participants will be provided with a copy of this signed and dated consent form for their records.

\_\_\_\_\_ **I understand the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of this study. I agree to participate in this study.**

\_\_\_\_\_ **I agree to be audio recorded during my interview.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant Name (Please Print)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**Expiration Date**  
**MAR 10 2015**

Seton Hall University  
Institutional Review Board

**MAR 10 2014**

**Approval Date**

## **Appendix E: Interview Protocol**

**Research Project Overview:** This is a qualitative study designed to explore the work experiences and career aspirations of Latina midlevel Student Affairs administrators and specifically, how race, ethnicity and gender may have impacted their career advancement and opportunities. The title of this study is: Exploring the Work Experiences and Career Aspirations of Latina Midlevel Student Affairs Administrators.

**Process:** Study subjects will be participants in a semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interview that will last between 60 and 90 minutes. This study utilizes the qualitative research methodology strategy of investigation, narrative inquiry. Therefore, the interview questions will be used as a guide to help maintain the focus of the interview, and to assure that the research questions are thoroughly addressed. While the study will be told that they may share as much and as little as they like, all stories each participant chooses to share will be accepted. There are several pre-determined questions probes in the interview protocol in order to elicit specific information that provide background information about the subject and address the research questions.

**Letter of Consent Process:** Once identified, subjects will be contacted by email and will be sent an electronic letter of solicitation via e-mail from the researcher's Seton Hall University email account. Once a subject expresses interest in participating in the research and agrees to an interview, I will ask them to read the informed consent form, sign two copies, retain one for their records and forward the other copy to me.

**Interview Session Protocol:** After, I confirm that subjects signed the Informed Consent Form and before I begin the interview, I will read the following interview script:

*“The purpose of this study is to explore the work experiences and career aspirations of Latina midlevel Student Affairs administrators and specifically, how race, ethnicity and gender may have impacted their career advancement and opportunities. The title of this study is: Exploring the Work Experiences and Career Aspirations of Latina Midlevel Student Affairs Administrators.*

*My name is Sofia Bautista Pertuz, and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education Leadership, Management and Policy program at Seton Hall University in New Jersey. You were invited to participate in this study because you shared that you identify as Latina, are currently a midlevel Student Affairs administrator and have at least five years full time experience. During this 60 to 90 minute interview I will be asking you questions about your background, work experiences and career aspirations and how your Latina identity may have impacted these experiences.*

*As stated in the Informed Consent form that you signed, your participation in this study is voluntary and the interview will be recorded with a digital voice recorder if you granted permission. Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. All conversations will remain confidential; your name and other identifying characteristics will not be used in reports and presentations. Thank you in advance for your time and for being part of this study”*

**Next Steps After the Interview:** If consent is granted by participants, all interviews will be recorded with a digital audio recorder and transcribed. All transcriptions will be sent to the respective subject for verification and to provide participants an opportunity to clarify or add information that might have been missed or omitted during the interview.

**Interview Guide:**

**Participant Number and Pseudonym:**

**Date of Interview:**

**Start Time:**

**Location:**

### Latina Midlevel Student Affairs Administrator Protocol Guide

Interview Question	Research Question Addressed
<b>SECTION I: Background</b>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ethnicity (Must self-identify as Latina to participate)</li> <li>2. Gender (Must self-identify as female to participate)</li> <li>3. Race</li> <li>4. Nationality/Country of Origin</li> <li>5. Current Age</li> <li>6. Single, Partnered, Married, Separated or Divorced</li> <li>7. Children: Yes (How many?) or No</li> <li>8. Residence: Reside in on-campus housing, off-campus housing or off-campus in own housing</li> <li>9. Highest degree earned</li> <li>10. Currently enrolled as a student? Full or Part Time? If yes, degree and program of study.</li> <li>11. Years of full time professional experience (Must currently be working full time and have at least 5 years of full time experience in order to participate)</li> <li>12. Current job title</li> <li>13. Current Division and Department</li> <li>14. Number of years in current position</li> <li>15. Number of years at current institution</li> <li>16. Current institution profile – Size, Type – Public, private, religiously affiliated, 4-year, Associate, etc. (Based on Carnegie classifications)</li> <li>17. Primary area(s) of job responsibility</li> <li>18. How many direct reports who are full time and/or part time?</li> <li>19. Current salary range</li> <li>20. Title/Level of Direct Supervisor(s)</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Demographic Questionnaire Responses</b></p> <p>Establish background, ensure criteria and study eligibility and get an overview of career trajectory. Asking some family and residency questions helps to get a sense of some work-life balance issues.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What led you to pursue a career in Student Affairs?</li> <li>2. What are your primary responsibilities?</li> <li>3. Describe the workplace culture at your current institution.</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>How do Latina midlevel Student Affairs administrators describe their institutional experiences as they have negotiated their career paths?</b></p>



<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Describe your relationship with your supervisor.</li> <li>5. Describe your relationship with co-workers.</li> <li>6. Describe your relationship with students.</li> <li>7. Do you believe that Latina Student Affairs administrators navigate their careers in different ways than non-Latinas? Why or why not?</li> <li>8. What have been some key influential experiences or factors that have impacted the progression of your career?</li> <li>9. Do you have a mentor or mentor(s)? If so, who is that person/who are those people?</li> <li>10. What do you enjoy about your current position or about Student Affairs in general?</li> <li>11. What are some institutional or work-related challenges that have impacted your career advancement?</li> </ol>	<p>Overall experiences and career paths</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>12. How do you think your race (skin tone and appearance) has impacted your work experiences and career path?</li> </ol>	<p><b>How do Latinas describe the impact of their race on their career paths and opportunities for advancement?</b></p> <p>Race as distinguished from ethnicity or nationality.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. How do you think your nationality and ethnicity have impacted your work experiences and career path?</li> </ol>	<p><b>How do Latinas describe the impact of their ethnicity on their career paths and opportunities for advancement?</b></p> <p>Ethnicity as distinguished from race.</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>14. How do you think your gender (being female) has impacted your work experiences and career path?</li> </ol>	<p><b>How do Latinas describe the impact of their gender on their career paths and opportunities for advancement?</b></p> <p>Gender as distinguished from race, nationality and ethnicity.</p>

<p>15. Where do you see yourself professionally in 5 years?</p> <p>16. Do you see yourself in positions of senior level leadership in the future?</p> <p>17. What do you think would be some of the challenges you might encounter as you advance in your career?</p> <p>18. What do you think you need in terms of professional development to advance in your career?</p> <p>19. Name three things senior level university administrators can do to help advance the careers and leadership of Latina Student Affairs administrators.</p> <p>20. Do you think Latinas make good college or university presidents? Why or why not?</p>	<p><b>What are the career aspirations of Latina midlevel Student Affairs administrators?</b></p> <p>Thoughts on career aspirations and overall state of Latinas advancing in higher education</p>
<p>21. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your career path?</p>	<p>Opportunity to share additional comments or elaborate on anything already shared.</p>

## Appendix F: Sample Member Checking Email

**Subject:** Interview Transcript Check and Resume Request

Dear study participant,

I hope you are well. I would like to thank you again for participating in my dissertation study. As promised, attached is the full **transcript of your interview**. Please review and let me know if it seems to be accurate. I would like to ask if you can **respond by Friday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>**. If I do not hear from you by then, I will assume that the transcript correctly reflects what you shared.

One more thing that I would like to ask is if you can send me your current resume as an attachment. I would like to get a sense of your career trajectory and paint a fuller picture of your professional life. Please don't worry about it not being extremely up to date. The resume would not be shared with anyone and is for my own review to assist with my study.

As always, feel free to call me at (917) 569-7084 if you have any questions or concerns about your participation in my study. Again many thanks and I hope you enjoy the rest of your day.

Warm regards,  
Sofia Pertuz