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Activating Capital: Latinx Women Transforming a Predominantly White Women's College

Author
Ruiz, Sylvia Elizabeth

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Activating Capital: Latinx Women Transforming a Predominantly White Women's College

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in Education

by

Sylvia Elizabeth Ruiz

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Activating Capital: Latinx Women Transforming a Predominantly White Women's College

by

Sylvia Elizabeth Ruiz

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

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Professor Patricia M. McDonough, Chair

Women's colleges carry an important legacy of access and equity in higher education, even as they faced challenges of dropping enrollments, financial hardships, and the creeping threat of conversion to coeducation at different points in their historical arc. The research on women's colleges has touted the benefits of attending these institutions on students' satisfaction with academic experiences, visibility of women role models and leaders, and encouragement to pursue advanced degrees in fields in which women are underrepresented. Most studies are silent on the intersectionality of race and gender in student experiences and outcomes.

Using Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemological perspective as a way to focus Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) theory of social capital for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students, this study examined the factors and contexts that influenced the experiences of Latinx women at a women's college, paying special attention to the role of staff and faculty in the transmission of social capital. Employing a narrative qualitative method, the main sources of data were biographical background surveys,

one-on-one interviews with 15 Latinx women and five staff and faculty members, and documents analyzed for content related to campus diversity initiatives.

The findings of this study revealed that institutional investment in academic and mentorship support for Latinx and first-generation students; the role of family; supportive relationships with Latinx peers; and a culturally relevant curriculum, all positively influenced Latinx women's experiences. On the other hand, Latinx women's feelings of alienation at a predominantly white institution, and the campus involvement and student leadership paradox, were factors that challenged students. Other important findings revealed the characteristics of empowering relationships between institutional agents and Latinx women that facilitated the transmission of social capital. These included: the benefits that emerged from long-term relationships; the breaking down of institutional hierarchies to minimize the distance between faculty, staff, and students; and the ways in which interpersonal trust was predicated on a shared identity and political consciousness.

The implications of the study suggest opportunities for women's colleges' administrators, faculty, and staff to address the challenges of embodying the values of a truly intersectional feminist institution invested in the success of Latinx students, and underrepresented students more broadly.

The dissertation of Sylvia Elizabeth Ruiz is approved.

M. Kevin Eagan, Jr.

Victoria E. Marks

Linda J. Sax

Patricia M. McDonough, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2019

DEDICATION

Gracias a mi familia por ser mi motivacion, inspiracion, y por nunca perder su fe en mi.

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Finally, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the generous participants of this study. This dissertation is a testament to the power of Latinx women's stories to transform higher education.

VITA

2005	B.A., English Scripps College
2005 - 2008	Director, Scripps College Academy Scripps College
	Counselor, Office of Admission Scripps College
2009	M.A., Higher Education & Organizational Change University of California, Los Angeles
2010 - 2017	College Academic Mentor College of Letters & Science University of California, Los Angeles

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Founded on the radical idea that women should have the opportunity to engage in rigorous educational pursuits, women's colleges' contribution to higher education access is one of their enduring legacies (Langdon, 2001). Nevertheless, women's colleges have not always been inclusive or responsive to the needs of diverse student populations (Vaccaro, 2017). The existing body of research on women's colleges is mostly silent on how the intersectionality of race and gender informs the experiences of students of color (Smith, Wolf, & Morrison, 1995). As the presence of Latinx students, first-generation, and low-socioeconomic student populations on women's college campuses continues to grow (Sax, Lozano, & Vandenboom, 2015), researchers and practitioners alike will have to confront the unique institutional characteristics that act as bridges or barriers to academic success and well-being for these students.

The 1960s and 1970s era of massive higher education enrollment and institutional expansion opened the doors to millions of new college students, including populations that had been previously denied access because of their sex, race, or socioeconomic status (Gumport, Iannozzi, Shaman, & Zemsky, 1997). Colleges and universities that once closed their doors to the enrollment of women, now made themselves accessible, thereby setting in motion the decline of single-sex institutions in the United States (Langdon, 2001). In the 1960s, the higher education landscape reflected the presence of 230 women's colleges—a number that has precipitously declined in the ensuing 50 years. Historically significant as spaces where women overcame traditional barriers to entry to higher education, approximately 37 women's colleges have persisted as single-sex institutions. To illustrate, as recently as 2015, Sweet Briar College, a private, liberal arts women's college in Virginia, founded in 1906, found itself in the middle of a

saga that has become all too familiar for these institutions in the 20th and 21st centuries. Administration and trustees, in a decision that would spark a backlash among the campus community and its alumnae, planned the closure of the college citing declining enrollments, financial hardship, and flailing recruitment (Garsd, 2015). Although the decision galvanized the Sweet Briar College community and eventually resulted in the reversal of plans to close the school, it signaled what many believed was the inevitable fate of less well- endowed women's colleges. But, even as Sweet Briar College, or more recently, Bennett College, an historically Black women's college, struggled to stay open (Lee & Kaleem, 2019); some colleges, including Smith, have seen a bump in enrollment in the last decade (Jaschik, 2018). In light of scrutiny about the relevance of women's colleges, and a shift in enrollment demographics—specifically, the increased enrollment of "self-identified Hispanic women" since 2004 (Women's College Coalition, 2014), women's colleges are becoming bolder in how they articulate their missions, approach institutional priorities, and adapt to changing student populations (Biemiller, 2019). As such, an exploration of how this type of college can positively influence the academic outcomes of Latinx students must account for the institutional characteristics, resources, and support structures that have come to define women's colleges.

Research shows that women's colleges are admitting increasingly diverse groups of women—in terms of race, class, and age (Miller-Bernal, 2012). Often, women's college attendees are stereotyped as racially and socioeconomically homogenous, well-heeled daughters of coastal elites. But as this stereotype inches towards obsoletion, higher education researchers are presented with an opportunity to explore the unique benefits of attending women's colleges—their emphasis on the education and empowerment of women, opportunities for leadership and faculty mentorship (Miller-Bernal, 1993), strong community orientation (Kim,

2001), and greater campus engagement (Kinzie, Thomas, Palmer, Umbach, & Kuh, 2007)—that could prove attractive to an increasingly diverse population. In a study relying on the Cooperative Institutional Research Program's (CIRP) "Freshman Survey" data, based on enrollment data for female, first-time college students who attended four-year colleges and universities between 1971 and 2011, women's colleges were second only to public universities in the proportion of Chicana/Latina students enrolled (Sax et al., 2015). The question of how to better support this historically underrepresented, but demographically significant, college population could potentially have generalizable applications to not only women's colleges, but also coeducational institutions wrestling with the question of how to best address the academic, social, and post-graduate needs of Latinx students. Given women's colleges' documented ability to produce successful graduates (Duncan, Wentworth, Owen-Smith, & LaFavor, 2002); a more engaged student body (Smith et al., 1995); and who are more likely to enter academic fields historically dominated by men (Solnick, 1995); the changing demographics at women's colleges make it especially urgent for researchers to address how classroom interventions, co-curricular programs, and faculty and staff mentorship strategies are devised and enacted.

Women's Colleges in the U.S. Higher Education Landscape

To understand the urgency of women's colleges ability to adapt to serving Latinx students, first-generation, and low-socioeconomic status students, an overview of their historical context and contributions is necessary.

Women's colleges played a central role in providing access to higher education for women in the United States beginning in the mid-19th century (Hawarth, Maline, & DeBra, 1997). Their missions were clear—provide educational opportunities and participation in higher education to women, a population of students that had previously been denied access (Freedman,

1976; Lindquist & Rice, 1990; Rudolph, 1962). Though more than 700 women's colleges were open and in existence in the first half of the 20th century (Langdon, 2001), approximately 38 still operate as single-sex institutions as of the fall of 2018. As all-male colleges and universities began to open their doors to women in the 1960s and 1970s, the shift towards coeducation inspired women's colleges to innovate creative curricular, programmatic, and mission-driven solutions to the challenges they faced. Today, only 1-2 percent of college-going women choose to attend women's colleges (Brey, Dillow, & Snyder, 2016). Nevertheless, recent trends in the racial and socioeconomic profile of their applicants show that they have the potential to be a very relevant institutional choice for students from diverse backgrounds (Sax et al., 2015). Previous studies on women's colleges have largely focused on the outcomes including academic benefits (Astin, 1977), leadership opportunities and capacity building (Langdon, 2001), and affective outcomes for alumnae (Langdon, 1997). So, while we have a fairly good idea of how graduates of women's colleges benefit from their educational experience, we have a very limited understanding of how students of color, first-generation students, or other marginalized populations make sense of their lived experiences at these institutions.

One of the increasingly significant populations making up the student body of women's colleges are Latinx students. There are certainly areas of overlap in the characteristics of students who choose women's colleges, and issues salient for Latinx students as they navigate their college choice journey. For example, Sax et al. (2015) found that women's college attendees are the most likely of all groups of college attendees to choose a school due to the advice of a high school counselor, teacher, or relative (p. 17). Similarly, research on the topic of low-status, minority youth has explored the influence of school agents, finding that they play very prominent roles, especially in the lives of youth limited by the lack of access to resource-rich social

networks (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; Ceja, 2000; Hill, Bregman, & Andrade, 2015; Perna, 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Examining the factors that influence Latinx students' access to social capital, and trust-rich relationships with institutional agents at women's colleges has the potential to provide rich insight and expand our understanding of how women's colleges operationalize their commitment to student-centered learning, empowerment, and innovative co-curricular opportunities.

Broader shifts in women's colleges in the last two decades point to an increasingly diverse student body being served by these schools. The institutional and demographic profile of women's colleges is by no means homogenous. Today, approximately one-third of all women's colleges are minority-serving institutions. These include several Historically Black College and Universities and predominantly Black institutions; and three Hispanic-Serving Institutions. Although all higher education institutions are enrolling greater numbers of low-income and first-generation college students., these trends are more pronounced at women's colleges (Sax et al., 2015). Women's colleges are uniquely poised to deploy their historic mandate for equity and access to find creative ways to serve new populations of students.

Latinx Students in Higher Education

Addressing the gaps and problematic inconsistencies in Latinx college attainment and opportunity is an emergent concern that, as many researchers admit, is far from a well-developed vein of inquiry (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). Inequity in college access and success strategies for students from historically underrepresented backgrounds is a failure in a system that heralds a college education as a means to social mobility and economic success (Haveman & Smeeding, 2006; Morton & Sawhill, 2007). Despite both federal and state-level financial aid programs aimed at ensuring the equitable access to higher education for all students, inequalities persist

based on race (Bailey & Dynarski, 2011; Baum & Ma, 2007; Teranishi, Ceja, Antonio, Allen, & McDonough, 2004); socio-economic status (Bastedo & Jaquette, 2011; Solorzano, Datnow, Park, & Watford, 2013); and gender (Gonzalez, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; Jacobs, 1996).

Much has been made of the boom in racial and ethnic diversity in the United States—especially in terms of examining its implications for persistent inequality in economic and educational outcomes based on race (Gaddis, 2015). Of particular significance to the scope of this dissertation, it is estimated that Latinx women are one of the fastest growing female ethnic populations in the United States (Gonzalez et al., 2003). The college attendance rate for Latinas has not kept pace with their population growth in the 18-24-year-old demographic (Fry & Lopez, 2012), nor with female populations from other ethnic groups (Ginorio & Huston, 2001).

Although current research paints a bleak picture of the potential for higher education to serve as a vehicle for educational equity and academic success for Latinx students, there are opportunities for challenging these paradigms rooted in normative concepts, such as deficit-based theoretical perspectives. We can be creative in how we approach the problem of access and outcome parity for Latinx students by casting our nets beyond the usual institutions and theoretical frameworks that have informed our understanding of this issue.

Social Capital and Institutional Agents

Central to the research exploring the sociological perspectives that frame Latinx college experiences is the role of social capital. Defined by Stanton-Salazar (2011) as "key resources and support provided by institutional agents" (p. 1066), social capital can potentially fill the gaps in our understanding of Latinx student college success. Stanton-Salazar's emphasis of institutional agents in constituting his social capital framework adds an interesting dimension, especially when put in conversation with this study's purpose and research questions.

In essence, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on Latinx students' differential access to social capital based on, not only class-based distinctions, but also due to race and gender. This study focused on the opportunities to access social support and resources that emerge from interpersonal relationships between people inhabiting disparate social strata within the same institutional context.

This study draws its definition of social capital, and institutional agents from Stanton-Salazar's critical, network-analytic social capital framework (1997; 2001; 2004; 2010; 2011). Stanton-Salazar's work in deploying social capital theory in examining the socialization of racial minorities, the role of institutional agents embedded within multiple organizational environments, and the hierarchical, interlocking systems of oppression that contribute to the inequitable transmission of institutional resources and opportunities (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995; Stanton-Salazar, 2010; 2011) is rooted in the work of sociologists Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Lin (2001). According to Stanton-Salazar (2010; 2011), the ability of a student and institutional agent to build a supportive relationship is contingent, in large part, on whether or not the student is able to construct "interpersonal trust, solidarity, and shared meaning in the context of institutional realities" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011, p. 1088).

Stanton-Salazar (2010) uses a critical lens in explaining the characteristics of empowering relationships between students and faculty:

> The constructions of inter-personal trust, solidarity, and shared meaning, as the basis for authentically-supportive relationships…most consistently emerges in organizational contexts permeated by a culture of empowerment, a culture existing amidst a larger context of stratification and exclusion (p. 27).

In response to traditional conceptualizations of social capital, critical race scholars, charged with centering race in their research and exploration of inequality in higher education, have challenged deficit frameworks, and brought to bear the unique social, political, and educational experiences of Latinx students in educational research (Pérez Huber & Solorzano, 2015; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Solorzano & Yosso, 2012). While Stanton-Salazar's social capital framework may account for race in the differential access to resources, there is evidence to suggest that social capital is differentially distributed by gender (Lin, 2000). As such, it becomes necessary to build on Stanton-Salazar's insights on social capital by making gender an explicit component of the theoretical framework.

Chicana Feminist Epistemology: A Raced-Gendered Perspective

Sociopolitical and economic forces have indelibly shaped the experiences and educational trajectories of Latinx students, while also constructing physical and cultural borders (Huber, 2009; Morales, 2002; Wilson & Donnan, 1998). Drawing on the tapestry of Chicana feminist writing seeking to challenge dominant epistemological paradigms that assumed universal foundations of knowledge and cultural objectivity, Delgado Bernal (1998) calls on education researchers to "decolonize" their research by articulating Chicana feminist epistemological perspectives in their work. Chicana feminist epistemology arises as a counterhegemonic approach to the social, political, economic, and cultural realities lived by Chicanas and Latinx women—a significant step in creating a richer, and more nuanced portrait of college success and attainment for Latinx women in higher education.

In their study on the first-year experiences of Latinx undergraduates, Delgado Bernal, Aleman, and Garavito (2009) write about the unfriendly terrain that Latinx students navigate in order to succeed in higher education. Despite these inherent challenges, Chicanx students have

carved out a space of resistance, and found empowerment in their marginality (Solorzano & Villalpando, 1998). The study outlined herein explores the symbolic exchanges that occur within these spaces—specifically, the interpersonal exchanges between Latinx students and institutional agents, that lead to the activation of reservoirs of social capital.

As researchers attuned to the diversity in perspectives, we must bring to bear several tools in our arsenal—Chicana feminist epistemology, with its emphasis on the diversity in Latinx students' familial, schooling, and gendered experiences can enhance our understanding of the influence of racism, classism, and sexism on Latinx students' access to social capital at a women's college.

By engaging a Chicana feminist epistemological perspective in this study, we can shed a light on how Latinx students negotiate the hierarchically organized relationships and spaces at women's colleges, including implications that can inform higher education practice. As Delgado Bernal et al. (2009) explained, "In U.S. colleges and universities, there are boundaries between many different social groups that interact in vertical and horizontal ways. These differences affect relationships among different dimensions of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation" (p. 565). Using a Chicana feminist epistemological perspective in education research provided the freedom to interpret findings outside of established paradigms, while discovering better ways of addressing the how Latinx women made sense of their success, challenges, and relationships with staff and faculty at a women's college.

Research Purpose and Questions

Prior research on women's colleges has touted the benefits such as engagement, satisfaction with academic programs, access to faculty, and career outcomes, but has until now, not addressed these experiences as mediated by race. The existing body of research on Latinx

college student experiences has approached the topic from such diverse areas of scholarship as sociocultural (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Cole, 2008), psychosocial (Brown, 2008; Walton & Spencer, 2009), and the impact of institutional agents and actors (Arana, Castañeda-Sound, Blanchard, & Aguilar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; 2001; 2004; 2010; 2011). And, while research on women's colleges has measured the outcomes for its students, such as student engagement (Miller-Bernal, 1993), satisfaction with academic programs (Smith, 1990), access to faculty mentorship (Miller-Bernal, 2002; Whitt, 1994), and post-graduation career outcomes (Tidball, 1985); it has not fully addressed how race and gender intersect to inform the experiences of Latinx students.

To further examine the experiences of Latinx women and their access to social capital and positive educational outcomes at women's colleges, this study applied Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemological perspective to Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the specific factors and contexts that influence Latinx women's experiences at a women's college?

2. Do staff and faculty at a private, liberal arts women's college work to facilitate the transmission of social capital, and integration of Latinx women into the institutional community, and if so, how?

Significance

The majority of studies of women's colleges have focused on the histories of these institutions, including their role as an early access point to higher education for women; and more recently, the educational, social, and career outcomes of these students. Matters of diversity at women's colleges have been under-explored in existing higher education research (Guy-

Sheftall, 1999). As such, the ways in which women of color's experiences are mediated by their racial or ethnic backgrounds are not taken into account when discussing the impact and outcomes of women's colleges. This study examined the specific factors and contexts that influenced Latinx students' social and academic experiences, including the role that staff and faculty played in their access to resources and opportunities. The findings from this study could contribute to the women's college discourse by addressing the differential experiences of women of color, specifically Latinx students. This, along with the social capital theory, and Chicana feminist epistemological lens that undergirds it, makes strides in addressing the distinct diversity concerns that characterize these institutions. There are currently no qualitative studies that engage with the experiences of Latinx students from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds attending women's colleges. Given that Latinx students, students of color, low-income students, and non-traditional aged students represent the fastest growing populations on women's colleges (Sax et al., 2015), pursuing this research is vital for informing the adaptability of women's colleges in the 21st century. Besides adding to existing research on women's colleges, this study aimed to provide student affairs staff and administrators new insight that could influence policies and practices to better serve Latinx students and other marginalized student populations.

Definition of Key Terms

Latinx, Latinx women, and Latinx students: Latinx is a non-binary, inclusive term that emerged for the Latino/a community (Salinas & Lozano, 2017). The term was borne out of the data collection process as participants used "Latinx" and "Latina" interchangeably when referring to themselves. Students indicated that trans and non-binary Latinx students were present on campus.

Intersectionality: this term is rooted in "how Black women's life opportunities are constrained through interlocking systems of oppression." (Crenshaw, 1991). For the purpose of this study, I find it useful to adapt Núñez's (2014) theoretical framework of intersectionality for educational research that explores how multiple social identities and their relationships with interlocking systems of power influence educational experiences. Students, staff, and faculty participants all referenced the concept of intersectionality, especially in juxtaposition with the dominant narratives pervading Browning College related to what they interpreted as "white feminism."

Predominantly white women's colleges: colleges with more than 50% of the student population that identifies as white are classified as predominantly white institutions. At the time the dissertation's data was collected, Browning College, the study site, met this criteria of a predominantly white women's college.

Organization of the Dissertation

This chapter provided an introduction to the study, background of the study, research purpose and questions, and significance of the study. Chapter two presents a review of the literature pertaining to the history and research on women's colleges in the United States, and Latinx student college experiences. Literature on the sociocultural characteristics of Latinx student success will also be included. Chapter two will also present the overarching theoretical frameworks guiding the investigation. Chapter three provides the research design, describing the qualitative research methodology that guide this study, including data sampling techniques, and methods of data analysis. Chapter four will present the findings of the data collection, including in-depth interviews and document analysis. Chapter five will present a summary of the findings, in addition to a discussion of the results of the data collection. The discussion will include

connections from the data to the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. Chapter five will also discuss implications for theory, recommendations for higher education practice, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERTURE AND THEORY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the theory and literature related to the historical and demographic evolution of women's colleges in the United States, and the experiences of Latinx students in higher education. Chapter two is organized into three sections. The first section will provide a targeted review of all relevant literature on the historical background of women's colleges. The literature review will address the ways in which women's colleges have adapted to stay relevant—both in curricular opportunities for women in nontraditional fields such as science and medicine (Sebrechts, 1992); and in welcoming a more socioeconomically and racially diverse student population (Sax et al., 2015). The second section will provide a review of the Latinx college student experience literature. Given the increased presence of Latinx students in the K-12 student population, and estimates that Latinx people will make up 30% of the labor force by 2050 (Carnevale and Strohl, 2013), the persisting degree attainment gap must be addressed (Pérez Huber, Malagón, Ramirez, Gonzalez, Jimenez, & Velez, 2015).

Given the shortcomings of existing literature and theoretical perspectives in addressing the lived experiences of Latinx students at these colleges, the third section will introduce the theoretical frameworks that will be used for this study. This framework will apply Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemological perspective for higher education research and Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students. Delgado Bernal's raced-gendered research perspective will act as a microscope to focus on Stanton-Salazar's social capital theory to

examine the personal, institutional, and familial factors that influence the academic and social experiences of Latinx students at women's colleges. This section will conclude the review of literature and theory with a discussion of the specific gaps in the current conversation about diversity issues at women's colleges and the institutional characteristics and strengths that make them poised to serve as models for other institutions, specifically, in their approach to the academic and co-curricular success of Latinx students.

This study intends to shed light on the factors and contexts that influence Latinx students' experiences at women's college, including the role that staff and faculty play in their access to social capital in the form of resources and institutional support. It also explored the specific characteristics most often associated in research about women's college outcomes—including the relationships among students, faculty, and staff; campus culture, and leadership opportunities (Smith, 1990). As higher education researchers and advocates advance the field in its inclusion of diverse perspectives, it is imperative to explore all facets of the higher education landscape, including the unique contribution of women's colleges. As these institutions have evolved from gateways for the participation of women in higher education, to spaces relevant for combatting gender disparities in opportunity and attainment, women's colleges have the potential to be a transforming force in engaging and fostering the success of not only Latinx students, but other marginalized populations.

Literature Review

Today, women's colleges educate fewer than two percent of women attending post-secondary institutions and award about one percent of all degrees conferred (Snyder et al., 2016). Besides the historic significance of these institutions, current conversations are focused on the impact of women's colleges on

satisfaction with academics and social lives, opportunities for leadership and access to strong, women role models, and post-graduate career or graduate school success. Recent interest on the potential of women's colleges to transform the experiences of women in STEM, or debates about trans student admission policies, have brought attention to the ways in which women's colleges have adapted to survive. Nevertheless, much remains unknown about the institutional, personal, and academic factors that influence the experiences of Latinx students at a women's college; and how these students engage faculty and staff in order to activate sources of social capital and institutional support.

History and Research on Women's Colleges in the United States

The history of the emergence of women's colleges, and existing empirical studies on their impact on educational outcomes for women, lends itself to be organized into three broad categories: first, the historical context for their founding in the 1800s; second, their decline in enrollment in light of expanding coeducational opportunities for women in the 1960s and 1970s; and third, their emergence in the 1980s and 1990s as a site for achieving gender equity, and as places where the educational attainment and post-college success of women was centered and prioritized. While higher education researchers such as Astin (1977), Smith et al. (1995), and Sax et al. (2015), have pushed to frame the conversation around the educational outcomes for women who attend women's colleges, the field has several opportunities to explore how women's colleges serve an increasingly diverse student population—including whether women's colleges provide students with the opportunities to foster interpersonal relationships between themselves and faculty or staff members, thereby promoting the accumulation of social capital (Riordan, 1994).

At their inception in the mid-19th century as one of the only access points for women into higher education (Sax et al., 2015), the missions of women's colleges were "clear and compelling" (Langdon, 2001). Women's colleges were established to serve a student population that had been, for centuries, denied the opportunity to earn a post-secondary education (Freedman, 1976; Lindquist & Rice, 1990). Social forces such as women's suffrage and the anti-slavery movement, in addition to the expanding role of women in the political and social spheres, converged in the movement to found women's colleges (Langdon, 2001)—often in spite of continued resistance to the inclusion of women in post-secondary education (Rudolph, 1962; Tidball et al., 1999). Early women's colleges were, in general, tasked with serving as everything from finishing schools for the wealthy, teacher training programs to fulfill the demand for common school teachers, and institutions dedicated to the pursuit of earning a degree and fostering a woman's intellect (Harwarth et al., 1997). Institutional diversity among early women's colleges reflected adaptation to women's exclusion in higher education—for example, religiously-affiliated colleges, and historically Black women's colleges (DeBra, 1997). Although women's colleges provided students with unheralded access to education and vocational training, they were overwhelmingly perceived as inferior to men's colleges (Riordan, 1994), with the exception of the loosely associated group of independent, non-profit, elite, East Coast women's colleges that came to be known as the Seven Sisters schools (Harwarth et al., 1997).

By the end of the 19th century, women accounted for more than one-third of students who attended single-sex and coeducational higher education institutions (McDonald, 1979). This increase in attendance of baccalaureate-seeking women forced the hand of all-male institutions who were faced with the financial and enrollment imperative to open their doors to women (Stock, 1978). The historical shift in enrollment and access for women in the post-War years led

to severe consequences in the viability of many women's colleges. The civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s provided the backdrop for this decline in enrollment, as the country's institutions of higher education shifted to coeducation (Langdon, 2001; Sax et al., 2015). Based on their dramatic decrease in student enrollment—whether they closed their doors or transitioned to coeducational institutions—women's colleges suffered a great setback in visibility between 1960s and the 1980s. Some scholars report that fewer than half of the existing women's colleges in the 1960s survived as single-sex institutions into the 1980s (Langdon, 2001; Rice, 1991). The institutions that did survive showed adaptability of their missions to the education of women, including the addition of new programs, partnerships with other institutions, and increased outreach to diverse populations—including older students, and other under-represented groups (Greene, 1988). As women's colleges refocused their missions and programs to optimize their potential for viability, they shifted their purpose to advancing the equity of women by promoting institutional priorities that fostered achievement in academic fields traditionally dominated by men (Wolf-Wendel, 2003). The stratification of women in higher education within coeducational institutions into less prestigious academic programs, and less-selective colleges, in general, proved to be an important marketing strategy as women's colleges made their case to prospective students.

Approximately 37 women's colleges have emerged from the tumultuous decades of staggering decline of enrollment in the mid-20th century (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). The research agenda for women's colleges has primarily focused on academic and co-curricular outcomes for women who attend these institutions. They have pointed to better opportunities for women's academic development (Astin, 1977), effective educational practices, (Kinzie et al., 2007), the facilitation of social and academic involvement (Smith, 1990; Smith et

al., 1995), and overall satisfaction with college experiences, including leadership opportunities (Langdon, 2001). Existing research on students' experiences at women's colleges points to the potential of these institutions to foster the conditions that support women in their development as leaders, scholars, and as they break into professions previously dominated by men (Tidball, 1985).

Today, approximately one-third of all women's colleges in the United States are minority-serving institutions, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities and predominantly Black institutions in the Southeast; and Hispanic-Serving Institutions on the West Coast and Southwest (IPEDS, 2018). Additionally, women's colleges are becoming increasingly attractive to non-traditional students due to schedule flexibility, and supportive and empowering environment for students completing undergraduate degrees later in life (Propsner, 2017). The national profile for women's colleges is by no means monolithic, but, as a whole, these institutions are facing pronounced trends in increasing enrollments of low-income and first-generation college students (Sax et al., 2015). Women's colleges have reported a boost in applications, enrollments, and yield since 2016 (Crowe, 2018). While several factors have been suggested to explain the post-presidential election interest, the importance of empowering and inclusive learning environments for women does emerge as especially salient.

The contemporary discussion on women's colleges reflects their continued pursuit to remain adaptable to changing demographics in the baccalaureate-seeking population. Sax et al. (2015), in a study based on CIRP Freshman Survey data, found that changes in the socioeconomic backgrounds of women enrolling in today's women's colleges could open new possibilities for academic programs, student services, faculty-student mentorship, and for further informing our understanding of underrepresented students' college choices. Women's colleges

have transitioned from access points to higher education, to institutions where the empowerment of women is reflected in innovative teaching, mentorship, and leadership practices (Langdon, 2001). Their commitment to empowering and centering the experience of women as scholars, leaders, and role models is unique to their historical mission, and a defining feature of their resilience.

Latinx Student College Experiences

Although demographic projections indicate that up to 30 percent of the population of the United States will be made of up of Latinx people by the year 2050 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011), gaps in the educational pipeline continue to dampen the trajectory of Latinx socioeconomic progress. In short, while Latinx people are presently the largest minority group in the United States, and predicted to become the fastest growing, their level of educational attainment has continued to fall behind all other ethnic groups (Fry, 2004; Liu, 2011; Pérez Huber et al., 2015). In their study of Latinx college undergraduates, Delgado Bernal et al., (2009) wrote about the contradictions and unfriendly terrain that Latinx undergraduates navigate in order to succeed in higher education.

Santiago (2018) in a report based on data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center found that Latinx students are more likely than their Black, Asian, or white counterparts to begin their college education at a community college versus a four-year institution. Research on the college attendance choices and opportunities for Latinx students in the United States have explored this topic from various angles based on various theoretical approaches, including economic (Paulsen, 1990) and sociological perspectives (McDonough, 1997; Nuñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vázquez, 2013; Perna 2006). Researchers and policy makers have made urgent calls to action in order to address these staggering disparities in academic preparation, access to, and representation at the nation's most selective

four-year institutions. Concerns about college affordability loom heavily on Latinx college students. The presence of Latinx students at two-year colleges can partly be explained by their access, affordability, and the flexibility they offer low-income, first-generation students—specifically, those who are from a Latinx background (Liu, 2011).

The stark inequalities in bachelor's degree attainment have serious implications for the Latinx population's ability to compete in the modern workforce (Hoffman, Llagas, & Snyder, 2003), thereby contributing to higher unemployment rates, and decreased earning power (Pew Hispanic Center, 2005). While the drop-out rate for Latinx students has dropped from 32% in 2000, to 12% in 2014, in students ages 18-24, the rate still remains higher than that of Black, white, or Asian students (Pew Research Center, 2016). Swail, Cabrera, Lee, and Williams (2005) noted that differences between Latinx and white students in pre-college academic preparation led to substantial outcomes in enrollment in college. Liu (2011) points out that the growth in the Latinx K-12 population has outpaced their growth in numbers on the nation's college campuses, due to lagging enrollment numbers when compared to their white peers. The boom in the Latinx college-going population has become an increasingly imperative policy concern for states such as California, Florida, New Mexico, and Texas, where people from Latinx backgrounds comprise 20 percent of college students (Hatch, Uman, & Garcia, 2016; Liu, 2011). Following closely at the heels of these southwestern states, are colleges in southern states, which are predicted to see unprecedented growth in the Latinx population and could therefore expect similar growth in the Latinx college student population (IPEDS, 2010). Inadequate academic preparation and other "leaks" in the educational pipeline from elementary school to college (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005), threaten to undermine the educational attainment, progress, and future earning potential of people from Latinx backgrounds in the United States. In light of the evidence that

suggests that Latinx students are less academically prepared at all points (before, during, and after) of their high school careers (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Swail et al., 2005); and the dire consequences for enrollment in college (Zarate & Gallimore, 2005), improving Latinx academic and social experiences becomes a crucial component of higher education equity and success. A sustained focus on the conditions and experiences of Latinx students, especially as their population is projected to boom at all levels of the education pipeline, has become a critical national priority.

The literature on sociocultural characteristics, college experiences, including interactions with institutional agents, as they relate to Latinx academic success outcomes, will also be reviewed.

Sociocultural characteristics in Latinx women's academic success. Socioeconomic and cultural forces have indelibly shaped the experiences and educational trajectories of Latinx students (Donnan & Wilson, 1999; Pérez Huber, 2009; Morales, 2002). The development of social capital by individuals, and by extension, communities, has been associated with desirable educational outcomes (McDonough, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Previous research has found that gender is positively associated with academic outcomes for Latinx women. In a study examining the significance of race and gender in positive educational outcomes, Barajas and Pierce (2001) found that Latinx women successfully navigated the college environment, and defied negative stereotypes and feelings of exclusion by emphasizing their relationships with other Latinx women. Their findings contrast previous studies that did not consider the intersections of race and gender in exploring Latinx women's resilience.

It is estimated that Latinx women are one of the fastest growing female ethnic populations in the United States (Gonzalez et al., 2003). The college attendance rate for Latinx

women has not kept pace with their population growth in the 18-24-year-old demographic (Fry & Lopez, 2012), nor with female populations from other ethnic groups (Ginorio & Huston, 2001). Gonzalez et al. (2003) found that "Latina students are the least formally educated female ethnic group in the United States" (p. 147). The presence of Latinx women in higher education has increased across the national landscape, but enrollments have not kept pace with growth in the Latinx population overall (Aleman & Rorrer, 2006). The increased presence of Latinx women on college campuses, especially at two-year community colleges, has accounted for the progress that Latinx women have seen in the attainment of associate degrees or higher in the decade between 2003 and 2013. In spite of these gains, Latinx women have not been able to bridge the gap in degree attainment between themselves and other major racial and ethnic groups (Gandara, 2015). The persistent gap in degree attainment among Latinx women is not only consequential for their educational progress, but also has urgent ramifications for their viability in the United States economy and future earning potential (Acevedo-Gil, 2017). Latinx women continue to struggle to achieve college success proportionate to white students (De Jesus, 2005). Even as Latinx women have made progress in their presence on college campuses, they face an uphill climb once they arrive. In addition to being less likely than other women to be represented in STEM fields (Center for American Progress, 2013), Latinx women are less likely than other major groups to begin their college careers at four-year institutions, which only decreases the likelihood of earning a degree (Gandara, 2015). Latinx women's relationship to family, economic obstacles, dependence on financial aid, and likelihood to attend college on a part-time basis, have all been suggested as reasons for their tenuous foothold in higher education (Acevedo-Gil, 2017; Nieves-Squires, 1991).

Latinx women's specific socioeconomic, educational, and family backgrounds, demand creative approaches to stopping the leaks in the educational pipeline, and ensuring that one of the most vulnerable college-going populations has the opportunity to succeed. In light of the paucity of research drawing insights and conclusions about the intersectionality of race and gender on the experiences of Latinx women at women's colleges—this study intends to bridge the conversations about Latinx women and diversity and inclusion at women's colleges—to facilitate a way forward in bolstering their success and access to the benefits of social capital.

Theoretical Framework

Latinx students' differential access to social capital as a by-product of their relationships with institutional agents via informal, and formal social networks, has been found to constrain their college experiences and opportunities (Gonzalez et al., 2003; Perna, 2000). This study intends to explore the specific factors and contexts that influence Latinx women's experiences at a women's college, including the role that staff and faculty play in their access to resources and opportunities. The existing body of research on Latinx college student experiences has approached the topic from such diverse areas of scholarship as sociocultural (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Cole, 2008), psychosocial (Brown, 2008; Walton & Spencer, 2009), and institutional agents and actors (Arana, Castañeda-Sound, Blanchard, & Aguilar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; 2001; 2004, 2010; 2011).

And, while research on women's colleges has touted the benefits such as student engagement, satisfaction with academic programs, access to faculty mentorship, and career outcomes; it has not fully addressed how race and gender intersect to inform the experiences of Latinx women. While previous studies using social capital theoretical frameworks have served important roles in advancing our understanding of inequalities in education across socioeconomic status, the research remains situated in class-based distinctions. Stanton-Salazar

(1997), in his work on low-status, minority youth and their differential access to relationships with high-status, non-kin agents, has moved in the direction of examining the role of race in Bourdieu's work on social reproduction. The purpose of this study is to seek to integrate the critical network-analytic social capital theoretical insights of Stanton-Salazar (2010; 2011), and Dolores Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemological contributions to education research, in order to construct an overarching raced-gendered theoretical framework that will guide how I address my research questions. The framework that emerges intends to emphasize gender and race in the pursuit of a more comprehensive understanding of how these factors impact the access to social capital at a women's college for Latinx women from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Social Capital in Higher Education Research

The generation, accumulation, and erosion of social capital have been the focus of countless sociological studies attempting to theorize and model social behavior (Bourdieu, 1986a; Gamarnikow & Green, 1999; Lin, 1999; Putnam, 1995). Defined as the resources embedded in social structures, or the interconnections between individuals (Coleman, 1988), social capital is a commodity with direct implications for the development of human capital and acquisition of economic resources (Portes, 1998). The development of social capital by individuals and, by extension, communities, has been linked with such measures as collective well-being, and effective political institutions (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1995), and desirable educational outcomes (Goddard, 2003; McDonough, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). Understanding the specific educational environments that reproduce conditions conducive to the development of social capital for students has critical implications for their academic success. Social capital in the study of education has been widely theorized, and its accumulation

and manipulation has been cited as a positive influence on academic outcomes (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Yosso, 2005). Social capital can come in the form of information, access to those who can exert influence on the subject's life, or social credentials (Lin, 1999).

If students are exposed to opportunities to access social capital by engaging in social networks via their participation in educational institutions, then it is significant to the work of educators and policy makers to understand the building blocks that facilitate access to resources embedded within social structures, and the activation of reservoirs of social capital.

Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) Social Capital Framework for the Study of Institutional Agents

In his examination of the relationship between low-status, minority youth and educational institutional agents, such as teachers, staff, and administrators, Stanton-Salazar (1997) found that ethnic minority students were more dependent on social capital to succeed in school, and that this success was not exclusively a result of a student's individual abilities, but how that student negotiated the social networks in which they were embedded.

In response to what Stanton-Salazar (2011) refers to as "normative integrative" (p. 1083) interpretations of social capital that fail to account for the sociopolitical realities of interlocking systems of inequality, critical race scholars have brought to bear the unique social, political, and educational experiences of Latinx students in educational research (Solorzano et al., 2005). For the purpose of this study, I employed the concept of "empowerment social capital" as defined by Stanton-Salazar. According to Stanton-Salazar (2010), "Empowerment social capital refers to the resources and forms of institutional support which are embedded in 'connections' or relationships with high-status, resourceful, institutional agents oriented to go counter to the system" (p. 23-24). The institutional agent plays a very important role in facilitating access to

"empowerment social capital" in Stanton-Salazar's framework. Institutional agents are the vehicle for accessing resources and social support within the institution. They have the agency to deploy their role in a way that runs counter to what is expected of their position in the hierarchy of the institution. Otherwise, the agent runs the risk of characterizing the contributions of Latinx students in terms of deficits, as opposed to strengths (Yosso, 2005). A deficit framework would contend that these hierarchical, institutional borders are impermeable and immutable. On the other hand, an empowerment framework would contend that institutional agents committed to social justice and "counterstratification" (Stanton-Salazar, 2011) see borders as fluid and permeable. I find that this particular social capital framework and orientation, with its emphasis on the role of institutional agents, can lead to valuable insights into what previous empirical findings have revealed about the nature of student-faculty interactions at women's colleges (Riordan, 1994; Smith, 1990). Therefore, a critical social capital framework that centers the role of institutional agents as purveyors of empowerment capital, and just as importantly, the role of students as active participants in this exchange, will hopefully provide valuable insights into this dimension of the women's college experience.

To echo Stanton-Salazar (2010), institutional agents construct instrumental relationships "across sociocultural worlds" (p. 12). Latinx students with access to relationships with resourceful teachers and counselors benefit from being able to, as Holleran and Waller (2003) explain, "identify role models who have forged adaptive bicultural identities within the community" (p. 345). In other words, institutional agents who strive to narrow the hierarchical distance imposed by the social structure of schools, are recognized by students and imbued with trust. Empowerment agents have to maneuver between their perceived roles as institutional agents charged with upholding the dominant, racist, capitalistic, individualistic, hierarchical paradigm;

and the counter-hegemonic, empowering, trust-rich relationships they potentially share with Latinx students. Solorzano & Villalpando (1995) would characterize this as a form of collective resistance on behalf of agents in the service of students that challenges race, gender, and class oppression.

Women's colleges promote their small student-to-faculty ratios, commitment to student-centered pedagogical approaches, and opportunities for meaningful faculty mentorship. But, how might these experiences be different for a Latinx women? While Stanton-Salazar's social capital framework may account for race in the differential access to resources, there is evidence to suggest that social capital is differentially distributed by gender, as well (Lin, 2000). As such, it becomes necessary to build on Stanton-Salazar's insights on social capital by making gender an explicit component of the theoretical framework.

Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana Feminist Epistemological Perspective in Education Research

The opportunity to disrupt normative ways of how research on Latinx women in higher education is done has the potential to reveal ruptures in, and contradictions of, our understanding of Latinx women's college experiences. Chicana feminist epistemology, a counterhegemonic epistemology that arises from the social, political, and cultural conditions of Latinx women's lived experiences, provided a theoretical perspective for approaching the social and academic experiences of Latinx women at a women's college. As it related to the proposed goals of this study: How can Chicana feminist epistemology enhance our understanding of the influence of racism, classism, sexism on opportunity structure for Latinx women attending women's colleges. Delgado Bernal (1998) explains that, "a Chicana epistemology must be concerned with the knowledge about Chicanas—about who generates an understanding of their experiences and how

this knowledge is legitimized or not legitimized" (p. 560). A Chicana feminist research perspective provided the freedom to interpret findings outside of traditional, normative, patriarchal paradigms, while discovering better ways of addressing the unique concerns of this growing student population Centering the experiences of Latinx women provided an opportunity for deconstructing the ways in which race, class, gender, and sexuality impacted their higher education trajectories (Calderon, Delgado Bernal, Pérez Huber, Malagon, & Velez, 2012).

Exploring the Chicana feminist theoretical perspective's potential for shedding light on how Latinx women negotiate the hierarchically organized relationships and spaces in women's colleges—particularly, how their sociopolitical realities impact their ability to seek out institutional agents, can bring to light several nuances. Pasque (2011), in an investigation of feminist theoretical perspectives as they relate to women of color in higher education, advocates for the consideration of "various feminist perspectives based on the intersectionality of multiple social identities" (p. 41) as we embark on research that examines the experiences, and future of women of color in higher education.

Chicana feminist epistemology, as articulated by higher education researchers such as Delgado Bernal, is grounded in borderlands knowledge (Anzaldua, 1987)—a notion that provides a theoretical perspective for exploring the physical and symbolic borders and boundaries between groups embedded within hierarchical relationships. This perspective, therefore, becomes critical in examining the relationship between Latinx women—a group on the margins, or at the bottom of the higher education hierarchy, and institutional agents, who have the potential to facilitate their access to resources.

To recapitulate, employing a raced-gendered theoretical perspective within a social capital framework to examine the experiences of Latinx women in higher education recognizes

the multitude sociopolitical realities that inform student experiences, in particular, their access to relationships with institutional agents who build their capacity for accessing empowering social capital. A theoretical framework that takes into account not only the class, but race and gender-based forms of inequality could shine a light on these strategies by interrogating systems of oppression, and thereby encouraging the fluid exchange of information, capital, inter-personal trust, and reciprocity. Fostering these interpersonal exchanges characterized by trust and reciprocity between Latinx women and institutional agents, facilitated the exchange of capital, while also stemming the negative effects of exclusion and isolation.

Identifying the Gaps: Latinx Women's College Experiences at Women's Colleges

Sax et al. (2015) addressed the topic of college choice in students who attend women's colleges. Interestingly, they found that unlike coeducational institution attendees, women who choose women's colleges are more likely to attend because of advice they have received from high school counselors, teachers, and relatives. Furthermore, with the exception of Catholic-affiliated post-secondary institutions, women's college attendees were most likely to attend because of the direct influence of their parents. Sax et al. (2015) write, "Although these reasons are far less influential than the academic and financial reasons cited by the majority of students, they do suggest a unique role of significant "others" in the decision to attend a women's college" (p. 15). Research on the factors that influence successful academic outcomes for Latinx women pointed to relationships with supportive individuals as a source of social and institutional support that is especially significant in predicting their academic success and integration (Arana, Castañeda-Sound et al., 2011; Cole, 2008; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Therefore, the theoretical framework selected to guide the study, with its emphasis on the role of institutional agents in the

facilitation of access to social capital, could provide a glimpse into how these relationships are navigated, and whether they can be spaces for transformation and activation of social support.

While this is not a study on college choice, I do find it valuable to examine the ways in which certain characteristics of the Latinx women's college choice process provided a valuable way of framing Latinx women's experiences at women's colleges. In their exploration of Latinx college choice using a social capital and chain migration theoretical framework, Perez and McDonough (2008) explained that Latinx college choice is mediated by race, gender, and a student's relationship to a network of social actors who either constrain or expand their college choices. Most importantly for the purpose of this study, the authors noted that Latinx students lean very heavily on their networks of high school counselors, teachers, relatives, and friends for college information (p. 255). In their chapter on the social construction of college choice for Latino students within the organizational context of an urban Catholic high school, Valle, Núñez, Cabanach, Rodríguez, Rosário, and Inglés (2015) also emphasize the significance of the role of relationships and social ties to Latinx women in making college choices (p. 29). Based on prevailing research on Latinx women's college choice, there appears to exist a window of opportunity for the institutional goals of women's colleges to align with the trends in their attendees' college choice strategies.

It is interesting to note that several of the background characteristics that higher education researchers will usually point to in order to make the case for why Latinx college access is constrained—family income (Heller, 2005), parents' level of education (Auerbach, 2004), or lack of willingness to move away to college (O'Connor, Hammack, & Scott, 2009; Perez & McDonough, 2008); all emerged as characteristics of key demographic shifts at women's colleges in the last decade.

Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds have historically been denied access to critical educational resources, including opportunities to interact with high-status faculty and administrators on college and university campuses. As colleges and universities reach out to their surrounding communities to meet the challenge of serving an increasingly diverse student population, there emerges a need for programmatic interventions that combine purposeful interactions and comprehensive dissemination of information and outreach aimed at mitigating the constraints imposed by socio-economic factors. It is important that Latinx women—especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, be informed about the range of institutional diversity of American higher education (Rodriguez & Nuñez, 2015).

Given the shortcomings of existing research on Latinx women's experiences at women's colleges—specifically, how race and gender influence their access to social capital and all of its benefits—this study engages in previously unexamined theoretical and methodological approaches in tackling this emerging imperative.

CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Women's colleges are admitting an increasingly diverse group of women—in terms of race, class, and age (Miller-Bernal, 2012). As women's colleges enroll an increasingly racially and socioeconomically diverse student population (Miller-Bernal, 2012; Sax et al., 2015), higher education researchers are presented with an opportunity to explore the unique characteristics of women's colleges that could prove attractive to an increasingly diverse population of students. Most of the existing research on women's colleges is quantitative, and focuses on student outcomes, such as career achievement and post-graduate outcomes (Anderson, 1988; Duncan, Oates & Williamson, 1978; Sax, 2008; Sax et al., 2015; Wentworth et al., 2002). Even fewer studies make race or ethnicity explicit in their analysis of the disparate impact and experiences of students at women's colleges (Sax et al., 2015; Vaccaro, 2017; Wolf-Wendel, 1988).

The intent of this study was to explore what factors and contexts influence Latinx students' academic and social experiences at a women's college, including the role that staff and faculty play in their access to resources and opportunities. The question of how to better serve this historically underrepresented, but demographically significant, population in higher education could potentially have generalizable applications to women's colleges across the nation looking to attract students through the addition of academic programs, or more intentionally recruit students of color. What are the distinct diversity issues that emerge at women's colleges against the backdrop of the unique, historical missions? Changing demographics at women's colleges make it especially urgent to explore how curriculum, student affairs, and faculty and staff recruitment and retention strategies are devised and enacted.

Therefore, a qualitative research design was appropriate given the research questions that guide this study. This qualitative design will not only fill a gap in the existing research on women's colleges but will also provide rich and insightful descriptions of participants' experiences to shed light on personal, social, and institutional factors that influence Latinx students' college experiences.

Research Method

Embarking on a project informed and guided by the epistemological lens of Chicana feminist epistemology and a counter-hegemonic interpretation of social capital, requires that the methodological strategies reflect and re-center the voices, experiences, and cultural knowledge of Latinx women. As Pillow (2000) states, "One cannot separate the epistemologies of feminist or race theory from their methodological and epistemological practices" (p. 23). In this pursuit, Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemological perspective in higher education research applied to Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students, as derived from the existing scholarship by Bourdieu (1986), Coleman (1988), and Lin (2001), provided the framework necessary for analyzing how race differentially influenced the academic and social college experiences of Latinx women attending a women's college. A methodological approach informed by a raced-gendered epistemological perspective provided a way of recognizing the counter-narratives to the existing research on women's colleges, the outcomes being measured, and the way in which those outcomes are measured. A qualitative method facilitated the weaving of Latinx women's voices, relevant cultural practices, and institutional politics in re-framing "race-neutral" theoretical and methodological paradigms.

Guided by the perspective that qualitative researchers are interested in how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world (Merriam, 1988), and that recounting narratives is a central way of making sense of the human experience (Seidman, 2013), this dissertation incorporates narrative strategies of qualitative inquiry. In-depth, semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2013) with Latinx women from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, in addition to women's college faculty and staff, were employed to shed light on their lived experiences. By approaching this study with a theoretical framework sensitive to racial and gendered dimensions of Latinx women's experiences, this method allowed for deeper insights into the personal, familial, and institutional factors that facilitated or constrained their access to social capital. Therefore, this study featured 90-120 minute-long, semi-structured single interviews with the student, staff, and faculty participants, in an effort to capture the complexities of social interaction (Bogden & Biklen, 2007).

Research Questions

Prior research on women's colleges has touted benefits such as engagement, satisfaction with academic programs, access to faculty, and career outcomes, but has until now, not addressed these experiences as mediated by race. The existing body of research on Latinx women's college experiences has approached the topic from such diverse areas of scholarship as sociocultural (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Cole, 2008), psychosocial (Brown, 2008; Walton & Spencer, 2009), and institutional agents and actors (Arana et al., 2011; Stanton-Salazar, 1997; 2001; 2004; 2010; 2011). However, it has neglected the gendered experiences of Latinx women, and how women's colleges are positioned to deploy their institutional resources in support of their positive educational outcomes and experiences.

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic and social experiences of Latinx students' educational experiences and their access to social capital at a woman's college. Specifically, the factors and contexts that contributed positively, or challenged their success.

In examining the educational experiences of Latinx students at a predominantly white women's college, this study applied Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemological perspective to Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the specific factors and contexts that influence Latinx women's experiences at a women's college?

2. Do staff and faculty at a private, liberal arts women's college work to facilitate the transmission of social capital, and integration of Latinx students into the institutional community, and if so, how?

Research Design

While the discourse advanced by the existing research on women's colleges has focused on post-graduate outcomes, academic engagement, student satisfaction, and student-faculty interactions; few studies have examined the ways in which race plays a salient role in influencing student experiences and outcomes (Sax, 2008; Watt, 2006). As such, this study intended to fill a gap in the existing literature—and in the process, centered Latinx students within the narrative of the future of women's colleges. A qualitative study allowed for the emergence of the interrelated themes of identity, as situated within a very gendered space.

Institutional Setting

Founded in the early part of the 20th century, Browning College was planned in response to the educational needs and development of women in the years following the First World War (Horowitz, 1984). Located in the Western states, Browning College is a selective, four-year, private, liberal arts college that served as the site for this study. At the time of its founding, Browning College was one of only a few institutions dedicated to the education, empowerment, and professional engagement of women in the Western states. Browning College's mission makes explicit its commitment to women, civic engagement, and the liberal arts (Browning College website).

Enrollment at Browning College is reported as approximately 1,000 degree-seeking undergraduate students. Based on the most recent demographic data, over half of students at Browning College identify as white, while one third identity as students of color. Approximately 10% of students identify as Latinx. All of the undergraduate students at Browning College are traditional-age college students, with 100% of the population in the "24 and under" age range (Browning College website). The low student-to-faculty ratio, and emphasis on collaboration enable the close, personal community that Browning College attempts to foster (Browning College website). Over 50% of Browning College students receive some form of financial aid. Finally, Browning College was selected as a research site given the researcher's ability to gain access and establish an understanding based on a shared background and experience.

Sampling

This study utilized purposeful sampling techniques (Seidman, 2013) to identify 20 participants, including 15 self-identifying Latinx women; and five faculty and staff members at Browning College. I make the distinction here that my sample included Latinx students who all

self-identified as women in the biographical background survey. As such, I refer to them as "Latinx women." Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to select "information-rich" cases that allow for in-depth probing, regardless of a small sample size (Patton, 2005), and best answer the research questions (Creswell, 1994). Following Patton's (2005) suggestions for purposely selecting cases that will yield information-rich data, I used maximum variation sampling in order to account for the variation that will be present and, potentially, problematic in such a small sample. For the purpose of this study, the parameters for selection of student participants in this study included: (1) Self-identifying as Latinx; and (2) Enrolled in Browning College. By using purposive sampling, I hoped to find common patterns that emerged across the data. By including a socioeconomically diverse sample of Latinx women, the study spoke to the socioeconomic and racial dimensions of the overarching theoretical framework. I posited that social capital frameworks—even those providing a critical, non-normative approach incorporating race, fall short of addressing the raced-gendered experiences of Latinx students. Three faculty and two staff members at Browning College were selected in order probe the second research question addressing the ways in which faculty and staff facilitated the transmission of social capital.

For the purposes of addressing the research questions outlined above, the parameters included selecting the most productive sample for exploring the experiences of Latinx students from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. In order to maximize this sample variation, student participants completed a biographical background survey with questions pertaining to their parents' educational background, estimated family income, first-generation college status, G.P.A., and class year (see Appendix A for Background Survey). The participant sample included students in their sophomore through senior years at Browning College, with self-reported income ranges from less than $24,999 a year, to between $100,000 and $124,999 per

year. Finally, approximately half of the sample's student population reported being a first-generation college student.

Recruitment Procedures

Recruitment of self-identifying Latinx student participants occurred through recruitment e-mails sent to the Browning College Latinx student organization and the campus' multicultural resource center. Faculty and student affairs directors who had working relationships with Latinx students at Browning College made classroom announcements, sent several recruitment e-mails, and reached out directly to prospective student participants on behalf of the researcher. Additionally, Latinx student leaders on campus were asked to send recruitment e-mails at several points during 2018 to encourage participation. The researcher reached out to the Browning College Dean of Faculty and Dean of Students explaining the project and its purpose, in order to secure permission to move ahead with recruitment of faculty and staff. Faculty teaching in Chicanx/Latinx Studies, Political Science, Chemistry, Psychology, Humanities, History, among other departments were sent recruitment e-mails. Additionally, faculty who were recommended for interviews by Latinx students were also sent a recruitment e-mail. Finally, student affairs staff with relationships with students of color on campus, specifically Latinx students, were recruited via direct e-mail or personal conversation. All word-of-mouth and e-mail recruitment included a description of the researcher's personal background and connection to Browning College, and contact information for interested participants to reach out for additional details on the study. Thanks to a contact at the multicultural resource center who was able to forward the recruitment e-mail to every Latinx student at Browning College, recruitment efforts were broad, and not limited to one Latinx identity-based club or organization, as to avoid drawing easy and possibly biased conclusions from my research (Seidman, 2013).

Study Sample

Overall, 15 self-identifying Latinx women who completed a biographical background survey were all selected to participate in the study. Participants identified in the following groups: All 15 students reported being self-identified Latinx women currently enrolled at Browning College. During the course of the interviews and biographical background surveys, students identified as Latinx, Mexican-American, Chicana, and one student identified as Mexican and Black. While participants all reported a G.P.A. between 3.0-4.0, on average participants reported a cumulative G.P.A. of 3.4. Four students reported being seniors, six reported being juniors, and five reported being in their sophomore year. Of the students who participated, eight indicated that they were first-generation college students. All participants reported receiving some form of financial aid (i.e. federal or state financial aid, or scholarship, grant, or fellowship aid).

In terms of students' self-reported household total income, three students reported an estimated total household income of less than $24,999; one reported $25,000-$49,999; seven students reported $50,000-$74,999; two reported $75,000-$99,999; and two students reported $100,000-$124,999. Finally, of the students that made up the sample, four out of 15 reported that they had applied to other women's colleges during the college application process. Table 3.1 below describes the student interview sample according to their class year, first-generation college status, major, and whether they received any financial aid.

Table 3.1
Student Interview Sample

Name	Class Year	First-Gen College	Major	Financial Aid
Becky	2019	Y	Politics	Y
Celia	2018	Y	Politics and Chicanx/Latinx Studies	Y
Lily	2019	Y	Environmental Studies and Spanish	Y
Cierra	2019	N	Psychology	Y
Jennifer	2019	Y	Computer Science	Y
Yesenia	2021	N	Undeclared	Y
Andi	2019	N	Biology	Y
Sol	2018	Y	Environmental Studies	Y
Luz	2018	Y	Gender Studies	Y
Maximillian	2018	N	Psychology	Y
Alexis	2019	Y	Humanities	Y
Mary Ann	2021	N	Politics and Chicanx/Latinx Studies	Y
Sam	2021	Y	Sociology	Y
Gaby	2021	N	Biochemistry	Y
Teresa	2021	N	Human Bio-Undeclared	Y

The original target for staff and faculty recruitment for this study was five participants. Staff and faculty who were recognized as working closely with Latinx students, either due to the nature of their positions, or subjects taught, were prioritized for recruitment. Initially, five staff members in departments related to admissions, student affairs, and high school outreach were recruited to participate in the study through e-mail and one-on-one conversations. Two of the staff members who were approached agreed to participate. Originally, six faculty members were

recruited to participate in the study, including faculty referred by student participants. Of the faculty members targeted for recruitment, three agreed to participate. Therefore, the total staff and faculty study sample was made up of five participants.

Data Collection and Management

Data collected for this dissertation were gathered over the course of one year (2018), which included Browning College's spring 2018 and fall 2018 semesters. Data collection included a biographical background survey featuring questions that required students to self-report biographical information (see Appendix A for Background Survey). Additionally, a single one-on-one interview with each student, faculty, and staff participant (see Appendix B for Student, and Faculty/Staff Protocols) was conducted (approximate 60 minutes for faculty/staff; 90-120 minutes for students). In addition, online admissions office marketing items, and information on campus diversity initiatives were analyzed together with the analyzed interview data and background surveys, contemporary interview notes and memos, to determine general themes that informed the student, faculty, and staff's lived experiences.

The in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Latinx women attending Browning College shed light on how race, class, and gender intersect to influence these students' experiences at a women's college. Staff interviews provided insight into their interpretation of the mission of the college (for example, how staff articulated the purpose and benefits of Browning College), how they managed the responsibility of providing access to accurate and trustworthy information, and how they facilitated students' access to social capital and social support. Faculty and staff interviews provided perspective on their engagement with students, their roles as mentors, and perceptions about the Browning College community, as a whole.

A semi-structured interview protocol allowed for flexibility and a deeper understanding of the experiences of participants. Interviews with students were aimed at the collection of

themes that provided insight in to how the programmatic objectives and institutional characteristics of Browning College impacted the experiences of its Latinx students by facilitating a social network built on shared norms, trust, and expectations. Given that no in-depth qualitative studies have engaged the experiences of Latinx students at women's colleges (Vaccaro, 2017), the goal of this study was to gain a better understanding of the ways in which Latinx students made sense of the impact that their race had on their experiences at a predominantly white institution. In particular, I was interested in gaining an understanding of how the lived experiences of Latinx students represented a counter-narrative to the dominant ideologies that have persisted in the current research on women's colleges, and their impact on the educational outcomes of their students. As such, the purpose of how this was operationalized into a student interview protocol was to gain a deeper understanding of what institutional policies, mentorship relationships, classroom interventions, and overall narrative instilled by the mission of this woman's college, influenced the academic and social experiences of Latinx students The interviews with Latinx women, and those with faculty and staff are described in further detail in the section below.

Latinx Student Interview: Academic and Social Experiences and the Role of Institutional Agents

Identifying Latinx students throughout their educational journeys at Browning College allowed for a diversity of experiences, both those of students adjusting and persisting in the critical first two years of college, and those in their junior and senior years, as they reflected on their experiences and made sense of the impact of having attended a predominantly white women's college. Prior to their interview, students were required to complete a biographical background survey. This biographical background survey was used to collect basic background

information about the students' educational experiences prior to arriving at Browning College, first-generation college status, G.P.A., major information, and self-reported total household income. The pre-interview survey provided basic biographical information as stated above, but also give context to the educational experiences described by students during their interviews. For example, a student who indicated being first-generation could have their academic experiences and relationships with faculty or staff influenced by their involvement in campus outreach for this particular student population. A participant profile including the background survey, interview transcript, contemporary notes and memos were organized for each student in a file created by the researcher.

The goal of the student interview was to have the participants put their experiences in context (Seidman, 2013) by asking as much as possible about their academic and co-curricular involvement, campus contexts they experienced, significant relationships with institutional agents, the role of family in their college experiences, and relationships with peers, within the parameters of the protocol and time frame. The student interview protocol was clustered into the following themes: (1) Pre-college experiences; (2) Transition to college; (3) the Latinx student experience; (4) Interactions with staff and faculty; and (5) Life goals. Each cluster of the protocol was designed to transition into a new phase of the student's understanding of their experience while establishing their frame of mind or sense of political or racial consciousness.

Faculty and Staff Interview: Institutional Agents and the Pre-Conditions for Transmission of Social Capital

For interviews with faculty and staff, the protocol provided more about their own interpretation of the mission of Browning College and its place among the constellation of women's colleges; the institutional commitment in terms of programs, curricular initiatives,

support for students of color; and their own relationships with Latinx students in and out of the classroom. The faculty and staff interview protocol was organized into the following themes: (1) Personal background and relationship to women's colleges; (2) Institutional priorities and adapting to diversity; and (3) Significant interactions with Latinx students. Taking into consideration that the experiences of faculty and staff could vary greatly based on the college's hierarchical structure, and types and frequency of interactions, interviews were adjusted based on the staff or faculty person's individual experiences.

The process of organizing the materials generated from the in-depth interviews of 20 total participants, including contemporaneous notes, memos, and biographical background surveys; required a pre-established game plan for data collection, organization and data management guided by the recommendations of Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2013) and Patton (2005). All data was collected and stored by the researcher during the span of the collection phase of the project. As such, the researcher kept tabs of the organization of the data being collected from multiple data sources. These data sources included, a background biographical survey, transcribed student interviews (one per participant), transcribed faculty and staff interviews (one per participant), contemporaneous field notes, memos, and audio files for each participant. All interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and then uploaded to a password protected, encrypted data storage system. Each audio file was stored by a participant pseudonym and file name (i.e. "S" for student, and "FS" for faculty and staff; in addition to the pseudonym that each student and faculty/staff member chose). Verbatim transcription of the interviews was completed contemporaneously as interviews were being conducted. The transcribed interviews were stored by participant pseudonym to the researcher's password protected, encrypted data storage system.

In addition to keeping field notes during the interview process, memos were also created in order to help determine when data saturation was reached, and interviews could be concluded.

Data Analysis

As encouraged by Creswell (2009), data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously during the course of collecting interview data and field notes from the student, faculty, and staff participants over a one-year period in 2018. Verbatim transcription for interviews began right away in order to remain in-tune and responsive to what data revealed about participants' experiences, and mindful of adjustments to how the protocols were designed, but most importantly, organized. For example, the first few student interviews revealed that I could get better data by organizing the student interview protocol into clusters. Furthermore, questions regarding their experience as Latinx women at a women's college were addressed in a much more comprehensive way when asked earlier on in the course of the interview instead of after questions about significant institutional agents. Analysis occurred within each student, staff and faculty interview, as well as across all interviews.

The first step in the data analysis process was to develop a coding scheme to guide the analysis (Saldaña, 2009). In order to develop the coding scheme, the researcher reviewed transcripts line-by-line. All transcripts were transcribed verbatim and checked for accuracy by the researcher. During line-by-line review of the transcripts, themes emerged from the data and were coded by hand by the researcher. The construction of the codebook was guided by Patton (2005) and Saldaña (2009): (1) Emergent themes from the line-by-line analysis of the transcripts; (2) Central themes from the literature review and theoretical framework in Chapter two; and (3) Specific questions from the student and faculty and staff protocols.

Data analysis was organized around steps that consisted of open, axial, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) in order to allow categories and themes to emerge from the data. Creswell (2009) reminds us that qualitative analysis is predicated on the researcher's ability to "reduce" overwhelming quantities of raw data into patterns that will eventually form the big picture of the project. The first stage of data analysis was a line-by-line examination of each interview transcript and then determining the open codes that emerged from this line-by-line reading. In the second wave of coding, I began to identify and compare the codes generated in the first wave to create broader categories of codes that were relevant to the themes established by the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter two and specific questions from the interview protocols. Finally, the axial coding phase consisted of organizing the emerging codes into relevant themes (Saldaña, 2009). Guided by this analysis, rich descriptions provided by student, staff, and faculty, and different themes from the lives of the study participants were able to emerge (Creswell, 2009).

Rigor and Validity

This section will include a discussion of the efforts that were made in order to ensure the validity and reliability of the data collection, analysis, and reporting. In a discussion of verification of data within a qualitative procedure, Creswell (1994) explains that determining the validity, generalizability, and replication are all considerations that must be made in order to account for the validity and reliability in a scholarly study. Creswell suggests addressing these concepts by discussing them as part of your research plan (p. 158). In light of the criteria that Creswell suggests, I will address the trustworthiness of my study and validity of its conclusions.

In order to address concerns about the study's internal validity (Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1988), efforts were made to triangulate the interview data across participant populations—students, staff, and faculty, in addition to biographical background survey data, document

analysis, field notes and memos. These field notes, observations, and descriptions could then be used by other researchers to "trace my steps" in order to provide validation of the study (Creswell, 1994), in addition to adding context and rich descriptions of my study participants and research site. The use of a critical raced-gendered methodology serves the study's efforts to address its internal validity. As I discussed in Chapter two, the theoretical framework and epistemological assumptions of the study called for greater involvement of the informants in the research process. I purposely selected a research design that allowed me to minimize the distance between the students, institutional agents, and myself in order to adjust to the feedback that I received throughout the research process.

Position of the Researcher

This section describes my role as a researcher, and connection to the Browning College community and study participants. Researcher reflexivity received very close consideration throughout my study. Fortunately, my theoretical framework encourages self-reflection, and the acknowledgement of the researcher and participants' shared social, cultural, and political backgrounds; and how those might influence the researcher's perceptions. My personal experiences and educational trajectory as a Latinx graduate of a predominantly white woman's college shaped the conception, design of the study, and analysis of the data collected. As a first-generation Latinx college student at a predominantly white women's college, I faced many of the same challenges and frustrations described by the study participants and was supported by empowering institutional agents. While I was able to benefit greatly from supportive institutional agents, peers, and administrators who looked out for me, I also struggled with racial microaggressions that chipped away at my self-confidence and sense of belonging. After graduation, I was asked to stay on to direct my college's academic outreach program for young

women from socioeconomically diverse backgrounds. As the director, I was able to provide guidance to students who also resembled my own academic journey. As an institutional agent myself, I used my position of privilege to leverage the institution's resources to facilitate the transmission of social capital to our population of underrepresented college students. In addition, I attended similar high school settings as many of the students who participated in my study. As such, I believe my life experiences enhanced my understanding of the contexts and factors that influenced the academic and social experiences of Latinx students at a predominantly white women's college.

Limitations

While the study was designed to address the two research questions, and despite efforts to address issues of researcher reflexivity and validity, it is important to discuss the limitations of this study.

Merriam (1988) suggests that qualitative research does not necessarily intend to produce generalizable findings, but to present a unique interpretation of the events in the lives of our informants. Nevertheless, there are limitations in the research design to note. First, the size of the study sample, and my decision to conduct only a single interview with each participant lead to a lot of variation between my participants, so that sufficiency and data saturation (Seidman, 2013) was difficult to achieve. Additionally, the study was bound to one site, and the site was not representative of the institutional diversity of the nation's women's colleges in terms of race or socioeconomic background. Another limitation that emerged during the data collection phase was the impact of a confluence of troubling incidents in recent history on campus. Creswell (2009) warns of the perception that researchers may be intruding into the lives of their study participants. Once I engaged with students during the recruitment process, and then during the

course of the interviews, I was able to counteract this perception by using my own personal background and insider knowledge to establish trust.

Despite these limitations, the data gathered in commission of this study can contribute rich insights into our understanding of the factors that influence Latinx women's' academic and social experiences at a women's college, including the role that staff and faculty play in their access to resources and social support.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology, research design, and an overview of the data collection of this project. This chapter also includes insights into the researchers' positionality and approach to the study based on the theoretical framework and interview protocol specific to each population interviewed for the study. Guided by a raced-gendered perspective applied to a social capital framework, this chapter outlines the research purpose, design, steps of the data collection process, and considerations taken to ensure research validity. Following guidance by Patton (2005) on in-depth interviews regardless of small sample size, I provided details about the study's sample selection process, and interview protocol design. This chapter concluded with the researcher's description of the study's limitations.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of Latinx women and their access to social capital and positive educational outcomes at women's colleges applying a race-gendered theoretical perspective to a social capital framework (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 2010; 2011). This study sought to answer the following research questions: (1) what are the specific factors and contexts that influence Latinx women' experiences at a women's college?; and (2) do staff and faculty at a private, liberal arts women's college work to facilitate the transmission of social capital, and integration of Latinx women into the institutional community, and if so, how?

Analysis of 15 semi-structured individual interviews with Latinx women at Browning College, and five Browning College staff and faculty, served as the primary data source for understanding the experiences of students, and the role, if any, that staff and faculty play in their everyday lives. A biographical background survey was used to add detail and context to the individual interviews collected from the 15 Latinx women participants. Chapter three referred to the demographic survey, which included basic background questions related to the students' demographics and academic and family history. Surveys included questions about family, academic, and socioeconomic backgrounds, major/minor aspirations, GPA, college generation status, and post-college plans.

Chapter four contains highlights of the findings addressing the research questions applying the raced-gendered theoretical perspective to a social capital framework (Delgado Bernal, 1998; Stanton-Salazar, 2010; 2011) outlined in Chapter two. Findings are

presented in two sections, each related to its respective research question. First, research question one is addressed with an overview of the factors and contexts that positively influenced Latinx women's experiences at a predominantly white women's college. Additionally, this section will highlight factors that challenged Latinx women as they navigated their college experience. Finally, findings that addressed the characteristics of empowering relationships between students and staff and faculty are presented.

Part I: Factors and Contexts that Influence Latinx Student Experiences at a Predominantly White Women's College

The limited existing research on women's colleges has emphasized the benefits for women, including academic and social engagement (Smith, 1990), leadership roles on campus (Kim, 2001), finding supportive women mentors and role models (Miller-Bernal, 2002), and satisfaction with the campus climate compared to co-educational institutions (Smith et al., 1995). What these previously studies have neglected is how women of color, and specifically Latinx women, have experienced predominantly white women's college campuses differently.

The factors and contexts that Latinx students reported influenced their experiences at a women's college include: (1) the importance of institutional investment (e.g. resource program for first-generation students; the high school outreach program for underserved local students; and admissions office admitted student events geared at increasing diversity); (2) relationships with Latinx peers; (3) the role of, and relationship with, the family; and (4) the impact of a culturally relevant curriculum on academic experiences. All of these factors and contexts had a positive impact on Latinx women's lives at Browning College. On the other hand, participants reported that: (1) Latinx student alienation at a predominantly white women's college; (2) limitations of the school's dominant "women's empowerment" ideology; (3) the campus involvement and student leadership paradox; and (4) mental health challenges and stigma, all

negatively impacted Latinx women's engagement and success. Surprisingly, several factors in this section challenge narratives and findings in the existing literature about women's colleges, including ideas about campus involvement and leadership (Kim, 2001). Additionally, this study found that the banner of sisterhood was critiqued by the majority of participants along the lines of race, class, and gender inequalities.

While identifying the factors and contexts that were most significantly cited by Latinx women at Browning College might help us better serve Latinx students at women's colleges, it also sheds light on their understanding of the differential college experiences for students of color on campus, and Latinx students specifically. Furthermore, section two of this chapter will address the role of significant institutional agents on campus (staff and faculty members), and the role they play in acting as bridges to resources and opportunities in the face of an often-alienating racial climate.

The Importance of Institutional Investment

According to most recently available documents related to campus diversity initiatives, Browning College touts a decade-long pivot toward becoming a more diverse and inclusive campus and community. Chief among its goals for these initiatives is "committing resources, programs, and events" while prioritizing "trust" and "buy-in" from the student, staff, and faculty. Funding priorities include increasing the number of tenure-track faculty of color, staff of color and other under-represented backgrounds, scholarship support for undocumented students, and improving mental health services. Browning College also double-downs on its commitment to funding the Browning College Success Institute, and its outreach into the broader community—all while acknowledging the tough work it has ahead as it centers the experiences of students of color, differently-abled students, gay and transgender students, and religious minorities (Browning College website).

The students interviewed as part of this study, the majority of whom participated in the support programs outlined in the Browning College diversity mission statement, referred to their experiences interacting with staff, relationships with faculty, and connections with peers as the "most important resource offered by Browning College." Students, staff, and faculty referred to the following programs and policy changes as examples of how Browning College has evolved to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population. The programs referenced below provide support, representation, and visibility for Latinx students as they navigate their college environment.

First-Generation Future Program. Launched within the last decade as a pre-orientation program, the First-Generation Future program (FGFP) now has a dedicated staff that includes faculty who identify as first-generation college students, current students who serve as head mentors, and a staff member who oversees the program out of the Browning College Dean of Students office. Every student interviewed for this study (n=15), including those who were not flagged as first-generation college students upon entering the College, but who have been invited to participate in programming and developed relationships with members of First-Generation Future program, credited the program as one of their most meaningful connections to the community, a source of academic support, and a bridge to resources, jobs, and research opportunities.

Luz, a graduating senior majoring in Gender Studies, and who self-identified as a first-generation student in a pre-interview biographical background survey, articulated the significance of the First-Generation Future program community—paying particular attention to the continued support throughout all four years of her Browning College education.

> I came to a lot of different events that Browning College offered. I ended up coming for a first-generation, pre-orientation event, which I thought was really important because it was the first community that I really found at Browning, and that I continued to have throughout my four years. I really appreciated that experience from a first-generation perspective, because I was coming in with very limited knowledge of what a college would be. I also attended an admitted students' day, did the [outdoor adventure orientation] trips with students, also a lot of the more diversity-based trips.

Browning College's investment in programming for students who are first in their family to attend college extends their diversity ideas and initiatives from the plane of rhetoric to reality. When asked about the specific ways in which Browning College has adapted to its increasing Latinx student population, Linda, a faculty member in the Political Science department, and self-identified first-generation college student, gave the institution credit for its investment in this growing demographic.

> I think greater institutionalization and investment in two programs in particular: the Browning College Success Institute and the First-Generation Future program. Investing money, and time, and resources, and personnel, and regularizing those programs, I think, has been really important for attracting, identifying, and retaining first-gen students of color. I think the sciences have, through those programs, also invested in the success of first-gen students of color. We know the statistics, they often come in declaring science, and end up dropping out of STEM fields because oftentimes they come in with public school educations that they're playing catch-up, and it's super competitive, so we have these classes now that are really focused on those particular students and helping them

> get a leg up in their first year, and semester. So, I think there are specific investments that the college has made.

The First-Generation Future program provides a pathway for first-generation Latinx students at Browning College to successfully navigate those crucial first years at an elite institution. Gaby, a second-year, first-generation student majoring in Biochemistry, described the importance that her participation in the FGF program had on her transition from high school to college, including the access to upper-class-women, mentors, and resources.

> I feel that something that made it easier is that there's a First-Generation Future program. I came for a pre-orientation and that gave me some resources that I needed to access during the school year and it also helped me meet people who were also first-years, or first-generation. There were also upper-classmen who were on campus at the time, so I got to meet them. I felt I could go to the interns who ran the program for help or guidance. Later on in the first semester, we had a First-Generation Future program mentor, that was really helpful because I had someone I could go to.

Gaby referred to the friends and community she fostered based on her involvement in the First-Generation Future program as "her people"—Latinx and first-generation peers she could turn to and always feel comfortable around.

Participants identified Browning College's institutional support and investment in this support program for first-generation program (the majority of whom were Latinx students), as helping them navigate these critical first years, as seen through the experiences of Gaby and Luz, and confirmed by faculty.

The Browning College Success Institute. The Browning College Success Institute (BCSI) is a high school outreach program housed on the Browning College campus that focuses

on the academic preparation of high-achieving high school-aged female students from lower socio-economic backgrounds from the surrounding community. Once students are accepted into the program, they become part of an extended network that includes current program participants, program alumnae, staff, and faculty that teach the program's curriculum and host academic workshops. According to Bill, BCSI program director, the program's curriculum is designed to mirror Browning College's inter-disciplinary emphasis while also featuring an analysis of race, class, gender, and power.

> The program's mission is to identify those students who are high-achieving, that may fall through the cracks, based on, you know, lack of counseling at their school, lack of resources, or family resources. They have the high grades, they have the good test scores, but they either undermatch themselves when it comes to college, or they are told that they shouldn't go to a four-year, so they go to a two-year. We try to identify those students and try to give them that extra push to go to a four-year college.

In over a decade of its existence, several BCSCI students have participated in the outreach program, and then successfully applied and been accepted into colleges across the country, including Browning College. The majority of student participants are Latinx women, with a smaller percentage of African American, Asian American, Native American, and White students completing the overall racial profile of the program. A large proportion of the student population is the first generation to attend college in this country.

Browning College administration proudly tout the BCSI's success in promoting campus diversity in the College's diversity initiatives. As the program has grown, its reach has extended to impact current Browning College students who are alumnae of the program who have continued to participate as student staff members, tutors, and mentors to high school students.

Bill proudly held up BCSI as a space on campus where Latinx students were able to leave behind the slog of the world of theory, campus politics, and racial microaggressions, and focus on the work of educational equity and access.

> The role of the Browning College Success Institute on campus is one of a 'getaway.' What I get from the students is they appreciate that BCSI is on campus, because it's a space where they can come and get away from Browning, and the everyday of Browning, and do work that is tangible. And that it helps Latinx communities, or just communities of color, and so they feel good that they can get away, and do this kind of work, and that it's meaningful, whereas in class, you know, they're talking about theory, and all these things that 'one day' make a difference for them. They do appreciate that we're a little separate from the College. Not in a bad way, but I guess the work that we do just allows us to have a lot of freedom from a lot of the politics on campus. And so, the students really appreciate that they can have a getaway.

For Latinx students who participated in the program as high school students, the BCSI represents a years-long, committed relationship with Browning College staff, faculty, and peers. Yesenia, a second-year Browning College student, and alumna of the BCSI, credited the program with helping her integrate into the campus community, providing the security that she would have a job waiting for her on campus, and the built-in peer network that spanned across multiple grade-levels of Latinx students on campus.

> I think it was the Browning College Success Institute. Working for the BCSI was a whole new experience for me. Having the BCSI director there for me was super important. Once I got to know a lot of my co-workers, they became my friends, so having that job made everything so much easier. I knew that I had people to count on, that I worked with, but I

> could also go to their dorms, and if I needed anything, they were there for me. I was one of the first-year employees in the BCSI. All of them were upperclassmen, so it was really nice to have an experienced—all of them were Latinx, so having that connection was good, too.

Linda, a Browning College faculty member with several years of experience teaching and mentoring in the program, pointed out the unique opportunity the BCSI offered undergraduate Latinx students who work as student staff during the summer residential program, specifically regarding their ability to be resilient in the face of adversity on campus.

> Quite a few of [current Latinx students] had some connection to the Browning College Success Institute. A couple of them as high school students who came to the program, but, more importantly, 90 percent of them had experience teaching and facilitating, or running that program. And I think that experience really provided a launching pad for incredible amount of learning and connecting with professors that they were co-teaching with. I think that experience was invaluable for all the students, now that I think about it. I think most of them had a certain kind of drive that despite, challenges on campus—not letting those challenges divert them too much from a focus on what they were trying to achieve.

The BCSI's curricular focus on examining dynamics of power, race, class, and gender draws faculty and staff committed to serving students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Alumnae of the program generously shared anecdotes about the ways in which faculty have gone out of their way to provide them with resources such as letters of recommendation, internship and research opportunities, and meaningful mentorship. Similarly, faculty noted the positive pedagogical and personal benefits of working with BCSI students and faculty. Faculty

who have taught in the program and were interviewed for this dissertation point to several ways in which the program has pushed the College to evolve: making pedagogy more inclusive and collaborative, providing more responsive financial aid support, facilitating the transmission of social capital through the networks that have been fortified, including the program in the formal budget, and expanding and institutionalizing the program as a whole. Students alumnae of the BCSI were in positions of leadership on campus and credited the program with helping them form connections with staff and faculty that lasted throughout their college careers.

Admitted Students Day at Browning College. Latinx students in my study all reported very significant experiences during their on-campus visits prior to enrolling at the College. Their conversations with current students shed light on the lack of diversity and institutional support on campus for Latinx students. Nevertheless, students felt like the campus was open to change, and they wanted to be a part of that change and evolution.

When the student participants were asked to recall their first significant point of contact with the Browning College campus and community, all 15 students emphasized the impression made by their campus visit on the Admitted Students Day hosted by the Admission Office for students of color. Latinx students in the Browning College class of 2021 (n= 5) visited campus for this admitted students' program during an especially fraught time on campus.

Luz, a fourth-year student described how she remembered stepping on to campus for that event.

> I think that Browning College is very purposeful in how they show off the school to prospective students. And especially for students of color, that was a very purposeful way. Like, for me, getting there and being surrounded by students of color I thought that the demographics would reflect that, and I didn't really think about it. I don't think that

> when I looked into Browning, that I looked into the demographics in terms of race. So, being there, and being surrounded by all these other amazing folks of color, and then getting to campus and realizing that actually, the group that I thought was quite large was, in comparison to all the other students that were there, it felt like 10% of the rest of the school, which is something I didn't realize because I was at that event and surrounded by those students. Whereas, the demographics of Browning College are actually majority white.

Looking back, Luz recognized that the event may have given her a false impression of the reality of the campus demographics. Yesenia, a second-year student who attended the admitted student recalled a riveting experience during a break-out meeting organized by the Latinx student organization at Browning College for prospective Latinx students.

> I think the most memorable moment for me during that time was when we went into the multicultural resource center, it was the Latinx student group meeting night. They had elotes [corn], masks, so we were just enjoying ourselves and each other. And then we started talking more about Browning College, and it was during that time…everyone was pretty on edge, and the conversation got really heavy, very quickly. People were talking about the [campus unrest], and how the [administration] doesn't really do anything for them, or their graduating class. I remember there were a lot of [prospective] students who had their Browning College caps on and by the end of the night, all of them had taken off their caps. To end that night the way it did—some people had already accepted their admittance, some were Early Decision. So, being in that room was so tense. Because like I said earlier, that weekend was all about 'Look at how great Browning College is!' Then coming into this space, it was like, 'No, look at everything that's wrong with it.' So, I

> remember just going back home and thinking, maybe I don't want to go to Browning College anymore. But the more I thought about it, there were all these problems, but there are probably similar problems at other colleges, too. So, I just said, you know what, if something needs changing, I don't mind going into a college where I'm also in the protest. I'm part of organizing. I'll be part of that change instead of just running away from it. That's one of the things that really pushed me to go to Browning College.

Although prospective Latinx students were presented with evidence of the racial microaggressions and institutional alienation that faced many students of color on campus, students such as Yesenia nonetheless felt empowered by the institution to work to enroll and engage with the community to be part of the solution and be an agent of change.

Maximillian, a fourth-year STEM major, pointed to the importance of forming relationships with other students of color, in addition to staff and faculty.

> Admitted Students Day was really cool because it was for historically underrepresented students, and I found a really good community, especially because before stepping foot on campus, I knew it was a predominantly white institution. I had the lowest expectations, and by that, I mean, I just knew I was going to have only white friends. I knew that I was going to interact with only white people, and that was all I was going to see. That's what I expected. Then going to Admitted Students Day, I see all these admitted students, and it was really fun. The admission counselors that were there would bring us food and make us feel welcome. We had a community talk with current students. I really enjoyed that experience because the students there were historically underrepresented, and a lot of the volunteers were people of color. That was the first moment on campus that I really got to interact with other people of color.

Students from every class year who participated in this study could recall the impressions made by students, staff, and the campus itself. For many, the Admitted Students Day event served as a warning of the fraught space Latinx students inhabited on a predominantly white campus, but also a call to action: a place where they could begin to build a community based on shared values of social justice, and meet staff and faculty who would eventually facilitate their access to jobs and academic opportunities.

Relationships with Latinx Peers

Having to build the infrastructure of a supportive Latinx peer network, including providing references to staff and faculty advocates, and sharing advice on how to maneuver within the institution, was a theme that emerged from the data. Latinx women described the Importance of positive interactions with Latinx peers on their academic and social experiences at Browning College. These interactions spanned across class years, majors, nationalities, and generation status. As explained by Luz, Latinx students' connections with those who shared similar identity characteristics and family backgrounds served to soften the "culture shock" of attending a predominantly white institution. She went on to identify the role Latinx students played in each other's persistence and success at Browning College.

> There are so many issues that Browning has, and that I think made going through those four years quite difficult. But the one thing that I always appreciate so much, and that is my favorite thing about Browning College is the other students there, in particular the other students of color, and more particularly, those friendships with the other Latinx students I made, within spaces like [Latinx campus organization]. I think we were integral to one another's success, to graduating from Browning College. We talk about it a lot—but I sincerely don't think I would have made it without them. We pulled each

> other through that graduation stage. I think that was something that was so important to me, building up that community, making sure that everybody had what they needed. The folks who were seniors helping out those who were incoming, always making sure you always build that in.

Luz captured a glimpse of the struggle, persistence, and community-building inherent in the experiences of Latinx students. The sentiment that Latinx students relied on each other to build a supportive community that reflected their values was echoed by Mary Ann, who credited the mentorship and advising of her Latinx peers as instrumental in persisting through the four years of college at Browning.

> I think people that helped me were members of the [Latinx campus organization]. Just going to one of our first meetings, current students in the club, or older students, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, would talk about this experience, and how it wasn't pertaining just to me and that it happened to them, and that sadly it continues to happen. But, falling back on them, and hearing their stories, but also them reminding me to take up space in those classrooms, and to correct people when they say something problematic. Sometimes, if it took venting because I was mad about a comment that some student said, crying, just going to them, that core group of friends that knew what I was going through, and understood, and sometimes just listened, and offered advice.

Being able to fall back on the community built through the Latinx student organization or other programs that prominently served Latinx students, was an antidote for the absence of what students perceived as a lack of formal support structures responsive to the needs of students of color at Browning College. Mary Ann found that connecting with supportive Latinx peers was

"empowering"—whether it was to vent about a difficult situation on campus, or to work together to pool resources for the Latinx community.

Latinx students also relied on other Latinx students for references to trusted faculty and staff who can either provide advocacy for accommodations, counseling, or academic resources.

The Role of Family: "Remember why you're there."

In this study, the theme of the role of family focused on the incongruity that many students felt about their families. While family served as their primary motivator, students also had to shield from their families the social, academic, and financial challenges they faced at a predominantly white institution.

Alexis, a fourth-year student at Browning, who was the first in her family to attend college, memorably referred to her family as both her biggest "source of stress," but also a constant source of support. This was a common sentiment among students—they explained that while their white peers could count on their families for support with everything from editing their essays to advocating on their behalf with the financial aid office, Latinx students had to serve as cultural brokers, translators, financial aid and tax experts in both English and Spanish, while working multiple jobs to send money back home during times of financial uncertainty—all while keeping up with college coursework. Mary Ann captured the dichotomy of the role of the family for Latinx students attending an institution where they are a racial minority.

> A huge role, which can be a good thing, and a bad thing. My family has always emphasized the importance of getting an education because it was inaccessible to a lot of them, so being here at Browning there's a lot of pressure for me, to not only meet their expectations, but also prove that it was worth the sacrifices they're making, both financial and otherwise. My grandparents are always like, 'Pura A!' You can only get A's! You

> have to be a straight 'A' student, and them not understanding. I think this has been enforced in me, I feel bad for getting a 'B.' Anything less than a 'B' is horrible. These expectations that I have for myself, it puts a lot of stress and anxiety on me when I'm writing papers and taking tests and doing my work. I see other students say, 'I'm going to take a day off and not go to class!' Even just the thought of that gives me anxiety—what am I going to miss, am I going to fall behind! I'm always monitoring myself because of that. But at the same time, my family is a huge support when I am feeling down, or just too stressed, they are the first people that I call crying. They do remind me that I am here for a reason, and just reminding me that I'm a good student no matter what, and that I'll get through it, it'll happen, and that this is just one of those moments where everything is coming at me. Reassuring me that it'll be fine.

Latinx women at Browning College described the careful dance they had to perform in order to protect their families from the hardships they faced on campus. Andi, a fourth-year student in STEM, emphasized the messages she received from her mother and father—to "remember why you're there!" Even in response to Andi's attempts to share how difficult it was to live in what she described as an alienating campus community. Time and again, the unwavering support of family, even when the dissonance of the two worlds could not be more aggressive, was a hallmark of the Latinx student experience. As Becky illustrated:

> My parents, even though they don't really understand why I was struggling with adjusting to Browning, they just kind of told me their stories of coming to the US, and how they had to adjust to the new life here, so then I was like, 'Why am I crying? They had to move a whole country, a whole different culture.' They don't know the language,

still. It's really hard for them, so then I just realized I just need to stop, and just go to class, and that kind of thing.

Becky also brought to light the cultural impasse that exists between Latinx students and their families.

I think they're just there to support me in whatever way they can. They don't really understand what it's like being a person of color. When I do tell them I'm not feeling well, or if I'm feeling sad, they say, 'You shouldn't be sad because you have your family.' So, that's like the one thing they always tell me. That's the one thing they always tell me, 'You have your family here to support you.'

Attempting to draw parallels between the immigrant experience and adjusting to a new culture at a predominantly white college campus was echoed in several accounts from Latinx students. This sense of self-reliance, toughing it out, and enduring, made up the Latinx family formula for success.

Students also struggled with feeling distance from their families when they were back home to visit—they recognized their families' internalized homophobia, racism/colorism, and "machismo." The Browning College curriculum and atmosphere centered the experience of women, and for many students, this gave them the courage and language to confront their family members.

Family was also found to influence a student's feelings about reaching out for advice or attending office hours. From the faculty perspective, Linda interpreted the apprehension about asking for help as a consequence of a student's personal, familial, or socioeconomic background.

I still think there's a disparity, in terms of the folks who are comfortable seeking-out help, you know, I think the students who are comfortable in the academy whose parents

> are professors, or whose parents went to college, or all of those who have had family friends who are professors or professionals, all of that I think gives students a level of comfort that makes it—they see those as their resources. I think for working class students, and students of color in particular, and students who are first-gen, that they are naturally much more apprehensive about seeking out those resources, so I think it takes real institutional commitment and work to give, to make resources available, and to reiterate how much we're there for them in various ways.

Becky echoed this finding in her explanation of the importance of recognizing the differences in the experiences of Latinx students, and other students of color, as they persist through academic struggles.

> Asking for help is really hard. My parents are always telling me, 'you need to work through this yourself.' Asking for help is a sign of weakness. I feel like it's a generational thing, specifically first-gen students, I feel. If you ask for help you're gonna seem too demanding. Out of respect that's where I see it coming from. Because I know my parents don't tell me, 'you should ask for help from people in power.' Like that's disrespectful, or not the right thing to do.

Faculty, staff, and students concurred that office hours and seeking help were a form of cultural capital that not everyone had equal access to. Families play a role in either encouraging or discouraging their daughters from reaching out to faculty and staff by enforcing messages of self-sufficiency.

The Impact of a Culturally Relevant Curriculum on Academic Experiences

Of the 15 student participants in this study, the academic emphasis or major choice broke down as follows: seven students reported majoring in the social sciences, six in STEM fields, while one was a Humanities major, and one student had yet to declare a major.

Students reported the importance of engaging in academic work that was in some way relevant to their personal identities. When asked about what the college was doing to engage students from Latinx backgrounds, students referred to their classes in Gender Studies or Chicanx/Latinx Studies to illustrate spaces in which they felt comfortable to voice their ideas openly. Faculty members who participated in this study point out the ways they have witnessed the college evolve over the years to engage students with more culturally relevant curricular choices, and in particular, how faculty have responded to these challenges. Linda, a Political Science professor gave her impression of the evolution.

> I started out 25 years ago teaching pretty traditional political economy stuff. And if we talked about race, class, or gender in the classroom, it was a side note. It was just not how I was trained, and over the years, it's literally been my own re-education. Between co-teaching with colleagues, and reading whole new literatures, and training myself in critical race studies—which I never did in graduate school—now I personally integrate it into all of my classes in a pretty substantial way. To the point where, some of the classes, are primarily about those structures of power. That has changed the way I interact with students of color. I do think that the content of what one teaches signals that one cares about these things, and I think opens up the possibility for dialogue and connection with folks who have those experiences. And it also shifts what kind of knowledge is being rewarded in the classroom.

Linda brought up the importance of critiquing the traditional humanities and social science curriculum in order to make salient issues of power, race, class, and gender. Her commitment to retraining herself as a professor signals to Latinx students, students of color, or other marginalized groups on campus, that she is willing to engage in a mutual and reciprocal academic experience.

Linda found that increased curricular relevance has led to better mentorship and relationships forged with students of color on campus. The Latinx student experiences captured in this dissertation reflected this belief—students such as Becky, Celia, Mary Ann, and Sam who were majoring in the social sciences and humanities, reported feeling more engaged in their classroom discussions, while students in STEM majors, such as Maximillian and Sol, reported a lack of discussion of socially or politically relevant issues. As Mary Ann explained, classes that center on issues of race, class, gender, and power not only sparked important class discussion and engagement, but also served to connect Latinx students to faculty mentors who served as role models and advocates.

> I have been satisfied with my classes. Most of the classes that I've taken that I'm satisfied with are my Chicanx/Latinx classes. Just because learning about my history and other people's history was denied to me up until this point. In high school, we're written out of history books. We don't read texts written by Chicanx or Latinx authors, or black authors in English class. And if we wanted to, it was offered as an elective, not as the core curriculum, which I think is problematic, in and of itself. Coming here and learning about all these things that I've experienced but being able to put a name to a lot of these experiences. And just looking up to these professors who have lived these experiences,

and now are teaching in higher education institutions is so empowering for me, so I'm most satisfied with them.

Interestingly, Mary Ann revealed that her high school did not offer classes that prominently featured authors of color, or a politically conscious curriculum. Browning College provided her with the opportunity to study a part of her history that had been previously denied to her.

Becky explained that her connection with the material covered in her Politics classes, along with her identification with the faculty of color in the department, have positively impacted her classroom experiences at Browning College.

> I know in Politics [classes], I feel more connected to the Politics side of things because I grew up witnessing what we talk about in class. Like poverty—I'm low-income, so I can have a conversation with the professors, or the readings, it just makes sense, and I can put my own story in those conversations, and it makes it more meaningful, personally. I know a lot of people are like, 'You're not in charge of teaching all these white people your experiences.' I feel like it's important for them to know just a little bit, and just see different sides of things. Because even though the readings do say this one thing, my experience is completely different.

A common theme among the STEM students was a sense of resignation that they had to go outside of their major for culturally relevant academic engagement, and a deeper sense of connection to faculty. Anna, a professor in Chemistry, pointed to the efforts made by the College to evolve to meet the needs of Latinx students and first-generation students who were often scared out of the sciences by fast-paced introductory classes geared at weeding out students struggling in math.

> The science curriculum has definitely changed. We offer a lot of different versions of intro Chemistry now. Specifically, for trying to increase success for marginalized students, or students who are underrepresented in science. [Over a decade ago], we started a class called Intro to Science Support, which is our regular General Chemistry class that allows students to self-identify as underprepared in math or science. So, it's up to them to say they're uncomfortable, or say that they need more help. That class meets 4 hours a week instead of 3 hours a week. It's capped…so that the faculty member can spend more time with the students. When we use self-identification, the class is remarkably more diverse than you would expect in our general population. It's predominantly women and people of color. What's really exciting about that class, is that in the 10-year study of it, we had the retention rate of students in that class into science majors exceeded the general population. Which is really surprising when you think these are mostly women and students of color.

Students and faculty in STEM both agreed that more can be done to increase representation of students of color and first-generation students in the sciences.

Sol, an Environmental Studies major in her fourth year, shared her thoughts on the lack of representation of Latinx students in STEM majors, and its impact on her academic experiences at Browning College.

> I feel like in every one in three [science classes], there might be one or two [Latinx students]. I think half are Browning students who took classes at [campus science center/building]. So, a lot of women presence, but not a lot of women of color presence. In the staff, too, and the faculty. You'd think there'd be a lot more classes at a college about that representation in science. But it wasn't really talked about in science classes.

> That's interesting because it affected me towards the end of my major requirements, because I was tired of taking science classes, and I was older, so I was more aware of everything. I just remember taking a marine ecology class and being so done with it because we would be talking about all these cute crabs, and how we need to help them, and I was just like, 'Oh my god.' I just remember being mad and thinking, 'Why don't these people care about humans as much as they care about these rare marine creatures?'

Sol deftly wove together her observation about the lack of cultural relevance in STEM major classes and lack of STEM faculty diversity in the beginning of her interview. She asserted the importance of Latinx students to be reflected in their coursework in order to persist in the field.

> I think Browning could do a better job at making students of color feel more comfortable in fields that may not have faculty of color. It's kinda hard to imagine succeeding in a class, or a field where there's no one that looks like you with that knowledge.

Student participants across majors and class years brought up the benefits in classroom engagement, academic success, and access to mentors when discussing the importance of a culturally relevant curriculum.

Latinx Alienation at a Predominantly White Women's College Campus

The raced-gendered social capital theoretical framework that undergirds this study seeks to examine the experiences of Latinx students as they interact with the institutional and individual socio-cultural contexts that influence their relationships and engagement. The stories shared by students, whether they were discussing their arrival on campus, classroom experiences, building relationships with staff and faculty, were all in some way impacted by experiences as racial minorities on a predominantly white campus (made up of more than 50% white students).

Reflecting on her experiences in predominantly white classrooms, Luz brought up the idea of the "impostor syndrome" which was echoed throughout the narratives of several student participants.

> Things like impostor syndrome, I think goes together with multiple identities but I think, for me, specifically as a first-generation Latinx student, having my classroom experiences not reflect my experiences in terms of the students that were there, made it really difficult to feel that I belonged there, or that what I had to say was important or valuable.

Racial microaggressions and alienation in college classrooms have been found to hinder the achievement of Latinx students at non-women's colleges (Yosso et al., 2005). According to student participants interviewed for this dissertation, there was a disconnect between their expectations of the espoused values and missions of women's colleges and the reality of what they perceived as a non-intersectional feminism. Jennifer, a fourth-year student majoring in Computer Science, summed up her feelings of alienation by directly confronting the dominant women's empowerment ideology that permeated the campus culture.

> I don't really like it here that much. When I came into Browning, I thought it was an encouraging and empowering environment for all students, and no, that's not the reality at all.

Mary Ann also described how the classroom experience and institutional climate felt invalidating of the knowledge she brought with her to campus.

> Always having to compare myself to other students, feeling like I was less than, or didn't belong. Always struggling to, to this day, speak in class, because I'm always doubting what I have to say. Or thinking that it doesn't sound as smart enough because other students had a different vocabulary growing up. It has been difficult since high school

> until now, being able to find my voice in these classes, and reach out to professors, teachers. Feeling like an imposter. Imposter syndrome has always been something that I dealt with. Feeling like I had to work twice as hard as other students just to be at the same level.

Cierra, a fourth-year student, remarked that increasing diversity at women's colleges does not necessarily reflect progress, much less the eradication of institutional policies that alienate Latinx students.

> The demographic is shifting, but the institution is not, and that's where the problem is. I know they're getting more diverse, but the structures they have in place are not meant for diverse people, they're not meant for people like me, people like my friends. Friends of mine who transferred out because they were not having their needs met. Some of my best friends I had to tell, 'It's okay. Go, leave, be happy!' The big thing is to say, 'Colleges are more diverse!' They're more diverse but you're using the same policies that benefit one people over another, the same type of people over and over again. Your policies are still hindering people, it's still making it difficult for your diverse people. It's shifting, but you're not changing with them.

Cierra poignantly stated that women's colleges are in a unique position to push the envelope when it comes to fighting for equality, but "policy doesn't meet progress." Cierra's frustrations with Browning College's "classist" policies were based on the belief that these policies send messages to Latinx students that they were tokenized, commodified, but not fully supported.

Other students echoed Cierra's thoughts on feeling that that the institution's plans for promoting diversity, lacked commitment to overhauling policies. Teresa, a second-year majoring

in STEM, returned frequently to the topic of "intersectionality," and her desire for a more representative definition of "women's empowerment."

> I came in here thinking all of us were going to be empowered. As a gender, as women, there was that connection of what I could do, or what we were doing by being at a women's college. But also coming to a women's college, there was no intersectionality, it was this woman's college for white women. It was much harder to understand that because I came in here thinking that I was going to be empowered. 'Women's empowerment' can pick and choose who can be empowered.

A common refrain from students was that the College's gestures towards diversity were performative. For example, Becky referred to the experience as "tokenizing," especially when juxtaposing the prominent presence of Latinx students and other students of color on Browning College's promotional materials, with the reality of the College's lack of engagement beyond touting increased Latinx student enrollment numbers.

I would be remiss if I proceeded any further in this section without addressing the very sensitive social and political events that transpired on the Browning College campus during the course of my data collection. Each student, staff, and faculty member interviewed for this study framed their responses to questions about the impact of the current political climate and campus events on the lives of Latinx students. What these events brought to the surface were unexamined racial tensions among the women on campus, and a perceived lack of appropriate institutional response that made Latinx students feel unsupported. A confluence of troubling incidents in recent history had long-lasting effects on Latinx students' sense of safety and trust in the administration's capacity to engage with them in a culturally responsive manner.

Lily, a third-year student who was directly involved in organizing a gathering for students of color that was targeted by far-right activists outside of Browning College, described feeling disappointed by the administration's response to the incident.

> How is this going to impact the school's image, and if it's negative how are we going to deal with it? It's this approach of, we're going to sweep it under the rug, even though the students are still scared, or the students are left feeling like they're floating in the air, or don't feel supported. It doesn't matter as long as the school as the brand is taken care of, it's fine.

This sense that the College's first instinct is to "save face" was echoed by Celia, who pointed out that the College was more interested in being able to defend itself from criticism than be a truly inclusive and welcoming environment for Latinx students. The aftermath of Donald Trump's election in 2016 was a harrowing time for the Latinx women who spoke to me. Those whose families were undocumented lived an especially insecure time. In the weeks following the gathering for students of color that was targeted by far-right activists, the Latinx community rallied in order to face the adversity, with the support of allied faculty and staff. Yesenia described the role that faculty played in advocating for Latinx students during this difficult time.

> My Spanish professor reached out to the board of [Latinx student group] and had written a whole e-mail with how it was sad that this event had happened and that she was sorry for what had happened. That it's ridiculous, and as POC students you're going to have to go through things like this, and that if you ever needed help or resources, to contact her. She was very prominent in recovering from that event.

Although students perceived the administrations' "neutrality" as an insufficient response to such a violent incident, students did point to the staff and faculty who stepped in to fill the vacuum of advocacy and support.

Limitations of the School's Dominant "Women's Empowerment" Ideology

Latinx women referred to the ways in which Browning College—the administration, students, and policies, fell short of a truly intersectional feminism. Surprisingly, the vast majority of student, staff, and faculty participants indicated that Browning College's role as a historical women's college was not made explicit in their everyday life. While admission catalogues tout the themes of women's leadership, empowerment, and diversity; the Latinx women I interviewed felt like the College had fallen short of its mission, and at times, even left them vulnerable.

When prompted with questions about the experience of attending a women's college as a Latinx woman, Becky explained that the limiting ideology of white womanhood was a factor in the discussions inside the classroom.

> There's so much more we can talk about, like what it's like being an undocumented woman of color. We just don't talk about them, but we should, because, being a woman is like, yes, we get it, but then there's so many more identities that move you further down the ladder. Being Latinx women, being Latinx first-generation, you know, these identities pile up. That's the only way I can think of them two coming together. It's either talking about being a woman or race and ethnicity. It's never together. And when it is, it's only 5 minutes, it's never the full class time.

The inability to juggle both identities within one analysis was a recurring theme throughout the interviews. Latinx students felt left out of discussions of feminism, while confronted with the dominant women's college ideology that centers white women's experiences.

For Yesenia, the limits of this ideology could be felt even as a discourse plotted onto everything from issues of belonging, to body image. Yesenia's conversation with a supportive faculty mentor about her doubts and insecurities as a Latinx student at a predominantly white women's college were laid out below,

> It was mostly just, even though they say 'all women,' as an umbrella, I remember [my professor] telling me that they don't really focus on what makes us different as women, too. And that goes race-wise, body shape-wise. Browning College probably has this image of what the 'perfect' Browning College student should look like, and that's white, and being well-off, and she succeeds no matter what. She just told me, you don't have to fit a certain image that Browning College might make it seem like you're supposed to be. You are a Browning College student, and you will have to do whatever you have to do to succeed and graduate from here, and she said, 'I'll be here for you.'

Latinx students at Browning College struggled with reconciling the messages of empowerment and sisterhood, with the realities of being a minority whose presence on campus was constantly in question and in need of affirmation from supportive school agents.

As Anna, a faculty member at Browning College, explains below, women's colleges have the potential to be spaces for radical progress.

> When it comes to students of color and women's colleges, the buzzword of the decade will be 'intersectionality,' and recognizing what white feminism is, and making sure that Browning doesn't stay a white feminist institution but instead evolves into an intersectional feminist institution. I think we're working our way there. I think there's a lot for all of us to learn. But I think that that is the next evolution. To be seen more

instead of as this white feminist institution that has some people of color, to be seen as an intersectional feminist institution, and that nobody's othered. Someday, we'll get there.

Both faculty and student participants shared this common sentiment—that the shortcomings in bridging the experiences of people of color to an intersectional feminist critique shortchanged the potential of Browning College to be a place where all students could feel empowered.

Campus Involvement & the Student Leadership Paradox

The students who participated in this study all described being deeply involved with campus clubs, organizations, all while juggling work-study jobs to help their families pay for school. As such, this section will focus on the paradox of what it means for Latinx women to engage in clubs and campus leadership—the double-edged sword of engagement and burn-out.

Luz illustrated the multiple roles Latinx students must take on while navigating their academic lives at Browning College.

> When students of color get to a campus, they don't just get to be students in the way that other more affluent, or white students, they get to take that on as their main identity, or main objective. Whereas people of color always have to take things on. Whether it's a job, or multiple jobs for a lot of students, to try to live on campus and try to afford books, expenses. But also take on a lot of leadership roles which are very important because you want to be able to build that community for one another, and it falls on students of color to do that. That was really formative in my time at Browning College—of asking Browning to be more accountable to its students of color, and of thinking through what it means to be a student on campus. Latinx women don't just get to take on just the student role, because we have to do so many other things just to survive on campus, to make it to those four years and beyond.

The differential lived experiences and the pressures incurred by Latinx students compared to their white peers belied the assumption that women's colleges provided an environment where every student could thrive as a leader, because of the institution's focus on women.

Yesenia described the pressure that Latinx students placed on themselves to take active roles in changing the campus climate for students of color.

> I feel like there is a lot of pressure on Latinx students who are already there because if you want to see a change happen, you yourself have to be active in that, and you have to take on those leadership roles amongst all the other things you might be involved in. I think it's very difficult for those students paving the way for us. I admire the upperclassmen a lot because they've gone through a lot, and they've taken up all of these leadership roles to create programs like the admitted student campus visit program that I have been a part of. I think that would be one of the barriers that I have seen. Even though it is pushing them to become leaders and do all these wonderful things on campus, it would a lot for anyone to take on a lot of responsibility like that.

Students discovered that if they wanted to see institutional responsiveness to the needs of Latinx and other students of color or marginalized students, they would have to play an active role. And while they do recognize the benefits of taking on these roles on campus, they also described feeling overwhelmed with balancing their roles as scholars, activists, leaders, and sometimes part-time workers.

Mental Health and the Stigma of Culturally Relevant Support

An emphasis on the availability and access to mental health resources on campus emerged as a concern for student participants. A recurring motif throughout the interviews were the barriers that Latinx students faced in addition to those experienced by the general student

population, including cultural stigma around asking for help, cost prohibitive insurance co-pays, and lack of therapists and mental health service providers that reflect their identities and experiences. Students tearfully recounted mental health struggles, and how it impacted their academic experiences, and ability to build community, due to the isolating effects of depression, anxiety, and academic difficulty.

Of the 15 Latinx students interviewed, all had either direct or indirect experience with the mental health services offered by the college. When prompted with a question about the most significant resources requested by students of color, Luz immediately replied that more emphasis on mental health services for students was a priority.

> More access to mental health resources—I think that was something vital that students have been talking about. I do recognize that there were some resources, but just the fact that they were inaccessible in terms of having professionals in that setting who matched our identities and we felt comfortable going to. The wait times were really long, so that also created inaccessibility.

Studies on the college experiences of Latinx students point to the mental health challenges that this community faces, including "discrimination" and "cultural isolation" (Gloria & Castellanos, 2003). This is another example of how Latinx students experienced the women's college environment differently than their majority white peers. Studies on women's colleges have reported that women's college students were more likely to report feeling satisfaction with their college experiences—including a campus climate more conducive to their learning and well-being compared to their co-educational counterparts (Smith et al., 2005; Miller-Bernal, 2002). However, Latinx women in this study felt cultural stigma surrounding the need to ask for help from faculty or student affairs professionals.

When asked about her thoughts on the stigma that other Latinx students in this study described feeling when asking for help, Celia pointed to something specific to the Latinx community and messaging from her parents.

> It speaks to not being comfortable asking for help. It's not a 'pick yourself up by your bootstraps,' sort of thing, but a lot of our parents never had help. So, asking for help, not even knowing that there is help there, I think that's what really marked me.

Celia explained that it was a process to learn how to advocate for herself with faculty in order to obtain extensions for papers, referrals to mental health services, or accommodations for mental health reasons.

Part II: Characteristics of Empowering Relationships between Institutional Agents and Latinx Women

The themes addressing the conditions for the activation of the transmission of social capital between institutional agents and Latinx students are organized in the following manner: (1) The benefits that emerge from long term relationships between students and institutional agents—or, interpersonal trust gained over time; (2) The need to minimize the distance between faculty and students, and staff and students—or, breaking down of institutional hierarchies; (3) Building interpersonal trust predicated on a shared identity and political consciousness; and (4) The importance of honesty and transparency for Latinx students at a predominantly white institution.

Interpersonal Trust Gained Over Time

According to the students, staff, and faculty interviewed for this study, interpersonal trust was a characteristic of purposeful relationships that were fostered over time. Mutual commitment

over the years that a Latinx student is enrolled at Browning College appeared to provide the time and space for faculty, staff, and students to build relationships based on similar goals.

Maximillian, a student in the sciences, recounted the impact of a long-term relationship she formed with an African American faculty member she had known since her first year at Browning College.

> During [first year interdisciplinary humanities program], my professor was a woman of color, specifically African American. She was awesome, cos like I said, in [first year interdisciplinary humanities program], sometimes people talk too much, or sometimes they would say things that were baffling, and she would shut it down. I guess I got lucky with that, too. We really connected because I was one of few students of color in her class, so she would e-mail us, or I would go to her office hours for help on a paper. She would ask me, 'How are things going? How are you acclimating? How are you doing with class? Outside of class?' We really built a relationship, and then every year from that point on, we would meet and have lunch and talk. We even did a few events, we travelled together, we had a thing my senior year where we talked about our experiences. I think she was—I wouldn't say a life-saver, because I wasn't in any life-saving moments, but she was definitely a part of my experience that I was grateful for.

Maximillian made a point of explicitly referencing the professor's race, and also her motivation for connecting with students of color in her classes. Furthermore, Maximillian credited the long-term nature of the mentorship as a key to opening doors to travel, having access to advising, and a feeling of belonging. The professor in this anecdote seemed to recognize the barriers to success for students of color at a predominantly white institution and made a special effort to reach out to support.

Celia, a first-generation student double majoring in Political Science and Chicanx/Latinx Studies, who experienced academic difficulty in her first year at Browning College that forced to withdraw from two classes, and earn an "F" in another, lamented not forming supportive relationships with faculty during such hardship.

> I really started to develop them more my sophomore year. Professor Linda was my advisor, so she would help me with my classes and make me feel like I was academically on track. I feel like I would be completely different if I had gained access to supportive professors that popped up throughout sophomore and junior years during my first year.

For current Browning College students who were also alumnae of the BCSI, the relationships they formed with staff and faculty was a constant source of support since their high school years. Yesenia explained the degree of familiarity and support that she was able to access from Bill, the director of the Browning College Success Institute.

> I think it had to do with the fact that I knew Bill for a long time. He was always just very welcoming and very open minded, which I admired a lot growing up, because me and my dad didn't have a good relationship, so having that male role model was really important to me. Once I entered college, getting to know him more, I think the main thing was him being open minded. He never shut anyone down. He always listened. He was ready to give his feedback whenever they asked for it. He was never pushing on anything, and he was very fair, he just made me feel very comfortable where I worked. He made me feel like I could talk to him about anything, because if it was affecting me, it would affect my work, it would affect my academics. He just made sure that I was okay.

Yesenia's relationship with the director of the BCSI, built over several years, not only yielded a campus work-study job as soon as she stepped foot on campus, but also provided access to a supportive adult who advised her during the coming out process to her family.

The benefits of committing to students of color, and specifically Latinx women, over time, was also reflected in the interviews with staff and faculty. Anna, a professor of Chemistry, and self-described "feminist scientist" who was the faculty advisor to the Browning College First-Generation Future Program, described her department's initiative for supporting students of color in the sciences, of which, Latinx students comprised the predominant underrepresented group. The class meets for four hours a week, instead of three, and has a capped class size to ensure one-on-one time with faculty. In the ten-year study of the program, they found that the retention of these students in a STEM major exceeded that of the general Browning population. Anna explained the important role that time plays in building these trusting, resourceful relationships with students.

> I came here because I wanted to be a teacher, and I wanted to be an effective teacher, and I wanted to help people who were afraid of STEM do well. I interact a lot with students, and more and more with students of color. They've been really generous in teaching me things and helping me know how I can change things. That certainly has affected my pedagogy. I developed that [science department initiative] class in response to what I considered were really poor retention rates. I wondered what could help my students engage better, and what I learned from my students was one-on-one interaction. They needed someone to help them, they needed someone to believe in them, somebody who would encourage them even when they did badly. Make that connection and say, 'You

> can do this even if you weren't well prepared.' That's what [science department initiative] is about—it's me taking that time and getting to know them.

Anna's investment in Latinx students over time provides her the legitimacy that she can then exchange for interpersonal trust among a marginalized student population at Browning College.

Interestingly, several students, without prompting by a specific question in the interview protocol, brought up the issue of staff and faculty turnover as a barrier to building resourceful relationships with institutional agents. Luz, a graduating senior, reflected on the negative consequences of what she perceived as the institution's lack of commitment to retaining faculty and staff of color.

> It's really interesting because a lot of people I felt like I could count on at Browning are no longer there. There's been a huge turnover of faculty and staff. I think on the faculty end, mostly because a lot of amazing faculty members are tenured, and that has a lot to do with capitalism and Browning as an institution. On the staff end, everyone who was there when I was in my first year is now gone, and that's mainly all the staff of color are gone. I think a lot about how that affects and is going to affect our communities of color, because these are the folks that we relied on for help throughout this process, especially now. The first-generation staff is gone, people in the Dean of Students office who people relied on, they're gone, as well. A lot of the staff members are gone or are in transition. Some deans who students really relied on to get things done—they're gone. I think a lot about what students are going to do now in terms of who's gonna take their spot, and whether they can help the communities in the same way as other staff members have.

Luz worried that Latinx students, or other students of color would have to fill the gaps left by staff departures to provide resources and support. Maximillian, a student in STEM, also pointed out the difficulty of forming supportive relationships in the sciences.

> Being a Latinx woman in the science department and being pre-med—we didn't see a lot of us there. And sometimes it was hard being there, cos there were visiting professors, they would leave, it was hard to build community. The faculty were predominantly white.

Students interviewed for this study seem to be aware of both the presence and absence of the element of time in fostering the connections between themselves and supportive institutional agents, and the implications for reaping the benefits of attending a small, private liberal arts college.

Overwhelmingly, participants reported the idea of building relationships over time that would then result in the form of letters of recommendation, research opportunities, emotional support, and advocacy in the face of administrative bureaucracy.

Minimizing the Distance Between Students and Institutional Agents

Faculty and staff at Browning College operate within a specific sociocultural and institutional context. Minimizing the distance between faculty and students can be interpreted as willingness by faculty to explore their role as empowerment agents in concert with the students they serve, thereby breaking down the hierarchical distance that characterizes normative relationships between faculty and students, or staff and students at Browning College. Linda, a Political Science professor, referred to several actions she implemented in order to break down some of the hierarchical distance that she interpreted as "normative" or "patriarchal." For example, Linda regularly opened the floor for Latinx students to speak up in class but did not rely on them to face the burden of having to be the spokesperson for all Latinx students, or

students of color. For Anna, a Chemistry professor, breaking down these barriers was central to Browning College's "mission as a feminist institution."

Luz described the effect on students when a faculty or staff member made themselves available and empathetic.

> I remember them being very approachable with students, in terms of being with us in spaces that were more community-based spaces, where we could sit down, and talk with one another, and it didn't feel like there was a hierarchy between us, like, they're professionals and we're incoming students, it was more like we were all coming with the same sort of identities and experiences, and being able to share that with one another, it was really comfortable.

Celia recounted a turning point after her first year when she became increasingly comfortable with the idea of interacting with faculty, seeing them less as gatekeeping authority figures, and more as partners in her academic journey.

> But it changed me, because I was able to reach out more, because the resources are there. People genuinely care, but you have to reach out to them. Me learning to make my own support system is what really helped me get through and helped me become better. Especially in terms of faculty. In high school we were taught that the teacher has a position of power. The authority figure, and students are just there to listen and learn and do whatever they want. But I think I broke that down more that I was here at Browning and realized the professors were there to help you. They're allies. They hold a position of power, but they're not there to boss you around, you can talk to them, especially at a small school like Browning.

Several students shared stories like Luz and Celia's—of faculty members who expressed a commitment to social justice, a critical consciousness, that informed their interactions with Latinx students, and fostered a trust-rich relationship where students felt safe and empowered. Yesenia described a deep and meaningful connection she made with her Spanish professor, a woman of color.

> But in the time that I've been here there's been one professor that has made me feel really empowered, and that was my Spanish professor. She made me feel very comfortable about being bilingual, and being in an all woman's space, and trying to navigate that. She was the only professor who would welcome me into her office hours just to talk. We would talk about politics, we would talk about our cultures, and traveling. She was very supportive. During that time, I remember feeling so happy that I had finally made that kind of connection with a professor, because no matter how hard I tried with the other professors, it just wasn't there. It was mostly just, even though they say 'all women,' as an umbrella, I remember her telling me that they don't really focus on what makes us different as women, too. And that goes race-wise, body shape-wise.

Faculty's willingness to extend themselves beyond their official institutional roles in order to create meaningful personal connections with students had a positive impact on a student's sense of belonging and their likelihood to engage with faculty both inside and out of the classroom.

This phenomenon could also be observed in the types of structural, or organizational, characteristics of the Browning College Success Institute. By creating a supportive network, made up of resourceful empowerment agents the Browning College Success Institute fostered an environment imbued with purposeful interactions between its members. This process is by no means spontaneous or arbitrary. Sophie, a faculty member in the Psychology department, and

long-time part of the BCSI staff, indicated that the structures that make these relationships possible are embedded within the program purposefully and carried out by faculty and staff. For example, Sophie mentioned:

> I think that built into the BCSI is this non-hierarchical, collaborative kind of experience between faculty and staff and to a certain extent even with the students. It breaks down a lot of barriers. Maybe that's one of the myths that can be dispelled, that the hierarchy is not as rigid as you imagine it to be. There's nothing to be scared of.

By minimizing the distance between students and program staff and faculty, the BCSI's structure is conducive to promoting mutual investment between faculty, staff, and students.

Whether it was a student happily recounting a time when a panel of faculty of color joined the Latinx student group on campus to talk about their work-life balance, or descriptions of faculty and staff stepping outside of their professional roles to help students with personal matters such as how to open a bank account, Latinx women benefitted from their relationships with faculty and staff who built bridges instead of acting as gatekeepers at Browning College.

Interpersonal Trust Predicated on a Shared Identity

As mentioned earlier in Part II of Chapter four, faculty and staff at a college or university face barriers in establishing supportive relationships with students, including the racial and class-based segregation of opportunity and access that is present in an institutional hierarchy. While the previous theme addressed minimizing the distance between students and the faculty and staff who are gatekeepers to resources, this theme of interpersonal trust predicated on a shared identity establishes the pre-existing condition that a shared identity plays in the transmission, or activation, of social capital for Latinx students at Browning College. In other words, diversity

among faculty and staff matters in the success of, and integration into the campus community of, Latinx women at Browning.

Linda provided insight into the intentional decisions she made when mentoring Latinx students, paying special attention to the reputation effect that drew marginalized students to the few faculty and staff of color on campus.

> I actually think the most important aspect is conveying to students in a genuine way, particularly students who are likely to feel alienated by this kind of elite institutional educational setting. Convey to them that I care about them as people. It really is that simple. And, actually, the research on higher education that I've been reading, shows that students actually learn better and feel more invested if they believe that their teachers care about them as people. Literally connect with them. So, sometimes, it means just talking about what they miss about home, and what dishes their mother cooks, some connection, and especially for Latinx students, some connection to that home, and that community. And sharing that I, too, had that connection with my grandmother, or my mother, my family, and community. I think it just makes a huge difference. And then when you can connect it back to the classroom, as well, through investigating structures of oppression and power. That's a powerful link, because then students have a personal investment in understanding what their education means to them. So, the personal is political, in some sense.

Linda recognized the potential for isolation of Latinx students at Browning and deployed empathy and a shared political consciousness to counteract any alienation felt by students.

Jennifer, a Computer Science major, who became visibly emotional recalling previous episodes of academic difficulty and feelings of not belonging as a student of color, credited her

faculty of color, specifically Latinx faculty teaching in Chicanx/Latinx Studies, as anchors during difficult periods on campus.

> I've been to a lot of my Chicanx/Latinx Studies professors. At one point I was really struggling about what major I should be, Chicanx/Latinx Studies or Computer Science, and they were really great in helping me figure out what I should do. I feel they provided a lot of support to keep on going, and what it meant to be Latinx on the Browning campus. We're here for our education and nothing else. A great source of support.

Jennifer explained that it was her Latinx faculty who helped her and her Latinx peers "keep [their] education moving forward."

Several students, irrespective of their major discipline, echoed the importance of the presence of faculty and staff of color when describing the most significant relationships they had forged during their time at Browning College. Often, it was a faculty or staff member of color, or white woman who was a first-generation student herself, who students identified as a role model, or catalyst for their resilience or success. Sam, a second-year majoring in Sociology, who alluded to a segregated sisterhood among the student body at Browning College, shared the importance of a Latin American Studies professor with whom she shared an identity as a woman of color and first-generation student.

> She's been really helpful, and someone I've easily connected to. She's on sabbatical, so I'm sad, because who am I going to talk to now? The Spanish or Chicano/Latino Studies professors have been some of the professors I've gotten along with the most, because we already have a starting point over the shared language, or the shared identity that we can build off of. I think they're very aware of the struggles that Chicano/Latino students go

> through, so they make themselves very available, and they're very honest. They're always at Chicano/Latino student events, and always try to make themselves visible which is really helpful. I think a pattern is most of the faculty I get along with are people of color.

The idea of a "starting point" that they can "build off of" is especially meaningful for members of marginalized student populations who struggle to develop these critical, resourceful relationships within the context of hierarchical socio-structural environments (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). As highlighted in a previous example in Part I of this chapter by Sol, a STEM major, it is difficult for students to imagine themselves as successful, if they do not see themselves reflected in who they perceive to be the gatekeepers of that academic field.

Honesty and Transparency: "It's Hard to Know Who to Trust."

Building on the previous theme, honesty and transparency between faculty and students, or between staff and students emerged as an important theme. Latinx women described having to maneuver their way around the rocky terrain of perceived conflicts in loyalty. The stress of having to decipher who to trust, has a direct impact on their access to resources, information, and support services.

In the fallout of recent campus incidents, several students described the uncertainty of which staff or faculty could be trusted, or who had their best interest instead of the best interest of preserving the institutional reputation. Evelyn, a staff member in the Browning College Admissions Office, found that her ability to connect with students of color was complicated by her positionality as "someone else in the administration." This distance and suspicion took time to overcome and had a negative impact on Evelyn's ability to mentor Latinx students during this tumultuous time.

Luz, who was involved in campus organizing on behalf of students of color, articulated the sense that there had to be a foundation of trust and honesty before they could enter into good faith discussions about the alienation they felt on the Browning College campus. She drew the distinction between being able to rely on the staff members in the Dean of Students office who they had previously established, dependable relationships with, and the administration, who she perceived as self-interested.

> We felt like those deans were folks that we were comfortable with because they shared a lot of our identities and experiences. But also, this is something that we talked a lot about— but it was extremely difficult to build trust with the administration, at least on my end. It was a little bit twofold: I often didn't feel comfortable interacting with administration, because I think they work for Browning as an institution, which I think is different than— for example, even the deans who were in other positions that we already had relationships with, when they put on their more administrative role, then it was sort of like we were losing a little bit of the trust, because we felt like then they would always be working for Browning College as an institution, and not necessarily for the students. So, there were things that they would say that they couldn't do, or maybe couldn't act on our behalf on a lot of things. I can see this, but sort of things like they had jobs and roles to fulfill so on the administrative side, so that often conflicted with student needs, I feel. Which is interesting to think, as dean of students, or as other administrative roles, you should be here for the students always, but I don't think that was always the case.

She went on to emphasize the central role of "transparency and accountability" in building trust between students and staff and administration. Students were prevented from accessing support

networks and resources during times of crisis on campus because they did not feel that the institution is appropriately equipped to respond to the demands of underrepresented students.

For Yesenia, a BCSI alumna, and current second-year at Browning, the insight and access to Browning College institutional agents since high school, gave her a sense of having a direct line for insider information from trustworthy sources embedded throughout the institutional hierarchy. Even so, she described the painstaking care she took to determine who she could really trust.

> I feel like some students are hesitant to ask for help from staff or faculty because it's important to watch out for yourself, as well, because you never know someone's true intentions until you start really talking to them. I think that's also why I didn't connect with some of the professors, because I always felt like they put a wall between me and them, like, 'That's all I can give you.' When it came to my Spanish professor, she always tried to give me as much information as she could. She didn't really try to hold anything back. In some conversations she'd say, 'Okay we can't really talk about that.' That was okay with me, I'd rather hear that then silence—which a lot of other professors would give me.

Yesenia's interpretation of the barriers imposed by a lack of honesty and transparency resulted in an inability to establish meaningful connections with faculty and staff. These perceived conflicts in bureaucratic loyalty had consequences for the experiences of Latinx students at Browning College.

Summary and Conclusion

The findings in this chapter shed light on how the intersections of race and gender mediate the experiences of Latinx students at women's colleges. Specifically, the factors and

contexts that positively and negatively impact Latinx students; and the characteristics of empowering relationships between faculty and staff and Latinx students at Browning College. Participants' narratives illustrate the ways in which Latinx women's experiences often provide an important counternarrative to the existing literature on the impact of a women's college education. Institutional agents, in particular, their political consciousness, and willingness to step outside of their delineated roles to advocate for Latinx students, also had a significant impact on Latinx students' access to resources, support, and community.

Participants indicated that culturally-relevant curricular or academic experiences, student support and services, and relationships with staff and faculty of color, were all positively associated with their success and integration into the campus community. Alternately, feelings of racial alienation were exacerbated by inflexible faculty, administrative neglect, and academic or curricular experiences in which they felt "othered," or perceived a theoretical distance from their lived experiences.

In summary, the findings in this chapter portrayed the participants' ability to engage in a critical counternarrative that emerges from their lived experiences. By centering the perspective of Latinx women at a predominantly white institution, we can explore the individual, institutional, and sociocultural phenomena that foregrounds their educational trajectories.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This concluding chapter offers an overview of the dissertation, including significant findings on the study of Latinx women at a women's college, the specific factors and contexts that influence Latinx women's academic and social experiences, and their relationships with faculty and staff. First, I present a restatement of the problem and motivation for the study, in addition to the research questions that guided the project and shaped the research design and findings. Second, I review the study's significant findings, including a presentation of the findings in conversation with significant themes from the existing literature and theoretical framework. I will engage in an analysis of consistent and discrepant findings for the themes presented. Third, I provide a summary of the implications of the study's findings for theory and practice in higher education. Concluding remarks will serve to provide a narrative that complicates prevailing notions of sisterhood and empowerment that dominate the popular marketing and branding of women's colleges and shed a light on the importance of the role of institutional agents in the flow of resources and opportunities in the lives of Latinx women.

Restatement of the Problem

As women's colleges across the nation experience a recent surge in enrollment, the existing body of literature lauding the benefits and promoting their impact on outcomes is referenced to support their importance in the constellation of higher education institutions in the United States. As some women's colleges are growing increasingly diverse in the populations of students served, including women's colleges in California being designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (Mills College and Mt. St. Mary's University), it is vital not only to the survival of women's colleges, but also critical to the success of students of color who enroll at these institutions, to understand how race and ethnicity mediate their experiences. Diversity issues at

women's colleges remain an understudied topic—one with critical consequences for their legacy as innovators of access and inclusivity in higher education.

Extant literature has focused attention on the benefits that women are poised to reap by attending women's colleges. In studies comparing the experiences of student attending women's colleges with their peers at co-educational institutions, women's empowerment (Kim, 2002), higher satisfaction with their academic experiences (Smith, 1990), opportunities for women to participate in campus and community leadership (Kim, 2001), positive impacts on achievement and career aspirations (Tidball, 1986), and a warmer campus climate (Kim, 2002; Miller-Bernal, 2002) were all touted as benefits of attending these institutions. However, no in-depth qualitative studies have undertaken an examination of the differential experiences of women of color at women's colleges, specifically, how race mediates their access to social capital and benefits that make women's colleges stand out in their approach to women's teaching and learning.

This dissertation examines Latinx women's educational experiences and their access to social capital at a women's college. Specifically, the factors and contexts that contributed positively to, or restricted, their success. In examining the academic and social experiences of Latinx women at a predominantly white women's college, this study applied Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemological perspective to Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students, guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the specific factors and contexts that influence Latinx women's experiences at a women's college?

2. Do staff and faculty at a private, liberal arts women's college work to facilitate the transmission of social capital, and integration of Latinx students into the institutional community, and if so, how?

Methodology

This study employed a narrative qualitative method guided by applying Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemological perspective to Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students in order to allow for the inclusion of raced and gendered experiences to inform the discussion of the findings. The main sources of data were biographical background surveys, one-on-one interviews with 15 students and five faculty and staff members, and documents related to the institution's admission and diversity initiatives. The site selected for this study was Browning College, a predominantly white women's college located in the Western United States. The sample of participants included self-identifying Latinx women at Browning College in their sophomore, junior, and senior years, as well as faculty and staff from various academic departments, and campus administrative offices. The student participants in the sample self-reported total estimated household income, majors, and first-generation college status. As a result of my transparent effort at a deep connection with the study participants based on a shared educational and personal background, relevant and significant interactions arose, and rich narratives were formed.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study were presented in two sections that addressed the two research questions guiding the study. The first section of the findings chapter focused on the first research question and identified the factors and contexts that influenced the experiences of Latinx women

at women's colleges. The second section of the findings focused on the role of faculty and staff members at Browning College, and the pre-conditions that facilitated the transmission of social capital for Latinx students (research question two). The conclusions and significance of the findings are presented in this chapter.

Part I: Overview of Academic and Social Factors that Influence Latinx Women's Experiences at a Women's College

The first research question focused on identifying and describing the factors and contexts that influenced the academic and social experiences of Latinx women at a women's college. The first section of the findings chapter presented the narratives constructed by the participants, using a Chicana feminist epistemological perspective (Delgado Bernal, 1998). This raced- gendered theoretical lens was motivated by an effort to better understand the ways in which the experiences of Latinx women were mediated by race and gender. Specifically, whether Latinx women's experiences reinforced or challenged women's colleges' promises of sisterhood, empowerment, and historical mission of equity of opportunity. Additionally, this closer examination led to a better understanding of how institutional investment in initiatives serving first-generation students, curricular relevance to the lives of students of color, and how the retention of diverse faculty and staff contributed positively to the experiences of Latinx women.

Overall, the data yielded a more nuanced, and previously unreported intersectional approach to examining the experiences of Latinx women at women's colleges

Contexts and Factors that Positively Influenced Latinx Women's Experiences. The findings of the study presented in Chapter four identified several factors that positively impacted the experiences of Latinx students in the institutional context of a women's college. Using a raced-gendered theoretical lens, such as Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist

epistemological perspective, as a way to focus Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) social capital framework, enabled the identification of the most compelling factors that contributed to Latinx women's ability to access institutional resources, enabled academic success, and personal support. When putting the data in conversation with the aforementioned theoretical perspectives, the findings of this study both reinforce and diverge from existing literature on women's colleges.

Participant narratives in this study capture how institutional investment in the form of college access programs, first-generation student academic and mentorship initiatives, and admission office efforts to enroll students of color, set a foundation for success early in Latinx women's careers at Browning College. Without exception, the 15 student participants in this study reported direct or indirect involvement or participation in one of the Browning College diversity programs outlined in this study. The data collected for this dissertation were consistent with previous studies' findings on the supportive institutional infrastructure that characterizes women's colleges, which includes meaningful interactions with staff and faculty mentors, and intentional programmatic interventions (Kinzie et al., 2007; Smith, 1995). Given that the data were analyzed using raced-gendered and social capital frameworks, I was able to demonstrate how my study diverges and extends from the existing literature and theoretical approaches that have framed the majority of existing research on women's colleges. Several studies, including Guy-Sheftall, 1999; Kinzie et al., 2007; Smith, 1995; acknowledge the need to address the differential experiences of students at women's colleges as mediated by race and ethnicity, but their theoretical paradigms do not center the experiences of students of color, or Latinx women. These limitations promote a colorblind approach to how women's colleges address the needs of a rising Latinx student presence on campus.

The First-Generation Future program, the Browning College Success Institute, and the Admitted Students Day event are all explicitly oriented toward the support of Latinx students, students of color, low-income, and first-generation students. When asked about their experience with the Admitted Students Day, several students including Maximillian emphasized the importance of the relationships they were able to establish prior to officially enrolling; and how she was able to continue to rely on these friendships and relationships with staff and faculty for resources and support throughout her Browning College career. The issue of race was explicitly brought up in her description of carving out a space for students of color even within a predominantly white institution.

Investment in programs and experiences that affirm Latinx student identities, while counteracting the sense of alienation of being at a predominantly white institution, reinforces a message of solidarity and support based on a shared identity that women's colleges have historically represented for white women.

This study also found that Browning College's institutional investment in its Latinx students' positive academic experiences was evident in its offering of a culturally relevant curriculum. Although proponents of women's colleges have asserted that these institutions promote supportive, challenging, and engaging learning environments (Kinzie et al., 2007; Langdon, 2001; Sharp, 1991), the existing research has not explicitly engaged with the effect of a culturally relevant curriculum on the academic experiences of students of colors. The Latinx women interviewed for this study indicated that they felt most compelled to participate and engage in the classroom when they could identify their own lived experiences in the material covered by the professor.

For example, Becky's experiences in her Politics classes, including her navigation of interacting with white students, or negotiating how much of her personal story it was safe to share in that academic space, were predicated on several important factors. She must determine whether the faculty member leading the class can be trusted to facilitate the discussion in a way that does not put the onus on students of color to educate their white peers; or whether her classmates are worth her intellectual and emotional investment. There is currently no in-depth qualitative research delving into the experiences of Latinx students, or other marginalized populations at women's colleges as they attempt to access the benefits of the intimate and rigorous learning environments identified in the existing literature (Astin, 1977; Smith et al., 1995).

Of the limited research on the impact of women's colleges, one of the prevailing findings is the potential of women's colleges to close the STEM gender achievement gap (Kinzie et al., 2007; Langdon, 2001). What my study points to is the inequality in these classrooms that persists beyond gender and reinforces the importance of engaging in women's colleges research that complicates current tropes by exploring an intersectional approach. Faculty members interviewed for the study, including Anna in Chapter four, reminded us of the importance of evolving to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population in curricular and pedagogical approaches to all subjects. She provided insight into the efforts made by Browning College to support its Latinx students and first-generation students in the STEM fields. While Latinx students struggle to close the gap in representation in STEM fields (Center for American Progress, 2013), culturally relevant support in the sciences can address these challenges. Although, according to Sol, there is much work left to be done in addressing the lack of representation of Latinx students and faculty in the sciences at Browning, the in-roads described

by Anna only serve to reinforce the importance of complicating the narrative promoted by women's college marketing materials when it comes to their commitment to women's success in STEM fields.

Previous literature has emphasized the importance of the role of the family on a student's motivation and encouragement during their college years (Ceja, 2004). Overall, consistent with previous studies' findings, participants indicated that family support was influential in their educational aspirations and trajectories at Browning College. This can be seen as Mary Ann struggles to capture the positive and negative consequences of the oversized role her family plays in her motivations, her sense of responsibility, and pressure she puts on herself to get "Pura A!"—"Straight As!" Latinx women also pointed to some dissonant moments in their relationships with their parents when they attempted to share about their Browning College experience—specifically, the cultural rift in attempting to relate their challenges in being a racial minority at a predominantly white women's college. Existing literature on the experiences of students at women's colleges is largely silent on the role that family plays in their education. Students in this study pointed to families playing a role in their choice of major, debates about machismo, queer identity, and gender more broadly; and anxiety about immigration status, especially in the aftermath of the 2016 presidential election. What became apparent as a novel finding in this study was students pointing to the role of family in their help-seeking or self-advocacy behaviors. Research frames relationships and connections with faculty, or other high-status non-kin institutional agents, as an important form of social capital, especially for students from underrepresented college populations (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). The literature is clear, Latinx students need the support of faculty in order to succeed academically. Interestingly, both students, faculty, and staff agreed that Latinx women struggled with seeking academic

support, including attending office hours, or not wanting to be perceived as a burden to others. Faculty members such as Linda pointed to the impact of differences in socioeconomic background and access to social capital as factors in the messages that families are able to inculcate. She explained what she perceived as the differential activation of social capital for students from more privileged families—where dinner table conversations gave students an advantage; and students from Latinx, or lower socioeconomic backgrounds who might have limited access to professionals in their everyday lives. There seemed to be an element of deference of authority figures and institutional hierarchy that faculty and staff had to break down in order to reach the most underserved students.

While not all Latinx students expressed difficulty with voluntarily attending office hours, or otherwise advocating on their own behalf for support; even those that did not indicate trepidation, recognized the struggles their Latinx peers experienced. The students in the study who did struggle, pointed to messages from their families as reasons for their reluctance to ask for help.

Evelyn, providing her perspective as a staff member, echoes Becky's interpretation of Latinx students' help-seeking behaviors.

> I think depending on the upbringing of Latinx students. With my parents, it was always, 'You work hard. The success that you gain is because of you and the work that you've put in.' Asking for help is a sign of weakness.

Without the microscope of the Chicana feminist epistemological perspective (Delgado Bernal, 1998), we risk losing very important nuance when applying social capital frameworks, even those like Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) that make race and socioeconomic background explicit. A raced-gendered perspective provides the key to help researchers interpret these

interactions, thereby preventing deficit-based conclusions that present the influence of Latinx families as adversarial to their children's success. Latinx families' messages about "not showing weakness," or not being a burden to "people in power," are relevant to a culturally sustainable approach to interventions that support students in their access to vital sources of social capital that increase their chances at persisting through their college years.

Contexts and Factors that Challenge Latinx Women's Experiences. Existing research on women's colleges has not examined the impact of these schools, or student experiences, in the context of a discourse on Whiteness. In other words, previous studies have left the intersection of race and gender as unexplored (Vaccaro, 2017). Latinx student alienation at a predominantly white women's college campus, and the challenges thereof, was a theme that colored several of the challenges faced by Latinx women at Browning College. Gaby lamented the lack of representation of non-privileged feminist perspectives in a class addressing the topic of resistance in a historical context

> I remember we said, 'cisterhood,' like as in a cis woman, that's what I feel like it's what a lot of Browning College is, feminism that focuses only on the experiences of those cis, white women.

Additionally, faculty members such as Anna expressed hope that the day would come when Browning College could fulfill its promise as an intersectional feminist institution. These examples point to the importance of recognizing the salience of race, and how it informs the experiences of Latinx women at women's colleges. In Chapter four, Luz brought to light how her experiences in predominantly white classroom settings at Browning exacerbated her feelings of impostorism. This supports research on the salience of the impostor phenomenon in the lives of students of color who struggle with reconciling their perceptions about their own academic

preparedness and performance and the highly individualistic, competitive nature of higher education (Guiffrida, 2006; Young, 2011) The findings of this study indicate that Latinx racial alienation leads to feelings of impostor syndrome, undercuts the College's empowerment rhetoric, and most importantly, prevents students from forming relationships with the broader campus community. Although few published studies delve into the differential experiences of Latinx students at women's colleges, extensive research has provided insights into the experiences of Latinx students at coeducational institutions (Castellanos & Gloria, 2007; Fry & Lopez, 2012; Sanchez, et al., 2015). Studies show that Latinx students face racism and chilly campus climates at predominantly white coeducational institutions (Cerezo & Chang, 2013; Gloria et al., 2005; González, 2003; Kiyama, 2015; Lopez, 2005). The findings from this dissertation help us understand how Latinx students navigate their college experiences and relationships with staff and faculty while attempting to walk the tightrope on the intersection of race and gender, and provide insights into the differential ways Latinx students experience the transmission of social capital and campus community due to the challenges they face.

Previous quantitative studies on women's colleges indicate that these institutions facilitate and encourage leadership activities for their students (Kim, 2001; Langdon, 2001; Whitt, 1994). Students interviewed for this study all indicated involvement in co-curricular activities, including work-study jobs, leadership in the Latinx student group, mentorship roles for the First-Generation Future program, resident advisors, or as classroom facilitators working for the Browning College Success Institute. Needless to say, the students interviewed for this study were active members of the Browning College community—extending far beyond their academic responsibilities. Although students identified the benefits of being involved in their access to supportive staff and faculty; their experiences also demonstrated the ways in which

current theoretical or epistemological perspectives fall short in capturing what I refer to as the campus involvement and student leadership paradox.

For example, in a finding discrepant to existing literature on women's colleges and their success in promoting women leaders (Oates & Williamson, 1978; Whitt, 1994); while student participants indicated that co-curricular involvement in identity-based campus organizations, work study jobs, leadership roles, and student activism made up a significant part of their experience at Browning College, those activities and activist identities also increased the emotional and physical demands that prevented them from being "just students." On face value, these experiences would seem to support the existing literature on women's colleges that points out their success in promoting overall satisfaction with college experiences, including leadership opportunities (Langdon, 2001). However, my conversations with Latinx women indicate that this finding is misleading when we examine the differential experiences of students of color. Reflecting on the responsibility that the Latinx and student of color community at Browning College feel to support and empower one another, Yesenia, a second-year student, discussed the pressure that Latinx students face to take on leadership roles to ensure that the needs of students of color are addressed by the College. Leadership, in addition to her responsibilities as a working student, end up difficult to juggle.

Several students interviewed expressed the desire to be "just students" sometimes. To be able to visit the multicultural resource center and turn on the television—to be social without having to be political. But oftentimes, this feels untenable for Latinx women in this study.

Part II: Overview of Characteristics of Empowering Relationships between Institutional Agents and Latinx Women

The second research question and corresponding findings focused on how faculty and staff at a women's college worked to facilitate the transmission of social capital and integration of Latinx students into the institutional community. The social capital framework described in Chapter two that provides the lens to examine these relationships, is based on the work of Stanton-Salazar (2010; 2011) whose framework on institutional agents is imbued with the language of critical consciousness, resistance, and anti-hierarchical relationships that facilitate the transmission of social capital to low-status minority youth. In an effort to answer the second research question, data was analyzed through the lens of Stanton-Salazar's identification of "empowerment agents," and their relationships with minority students. The staff and faculty members interviewed for this dissertation, along with other examples provided by students during our conversations, met the criteria outlined by Stanton-Salazar. Stanton-Salazar's (2011) criteria (as interpreted to apply to this study) included: (1) Their ability to recognize the "social structural forces" reflected within the institution that hinder the success of Latinx students at Browning; 2) "Critical awareness" about the need for Latinx students to receive tailored institutional support in order to be successful; 3) Advocating for all Latinx students regardless of generation status, socioeconomic status, or racial identity; 4) Their ideological commitment to providing Latinx students institutional support; and 5) Their willingness to be identified as an advocate for Latinx students among the broader Browning College community, (p. 1089).

According to Stanton Salazar's (2010; 2011) framework, the establishment of supportive relationships between students and institutional agents, such as teachers, counselors, or other adult mentors with access to key resources, is limited by factors that include racial and class segregation, institutional hierarchies that prevent teachers and students from forming trusting bonds, and the overall bureaucratic nature of schools that enforce restraints (p. 1087-1088).

The findings of this study highlight the following characteristics that laid the foundation for empowering relationships between Latinx students and institutional agents at Browning College: (1) The benefits that emerge from long term relationships between students and institutional agents—or, interpersonal trust gained over time; (2) The need to minimize the distance between faculty and students, and staff and students—or, breaking down of institutional hierarchies; (3) Building interpersonal trust predicated on a shared identity and political consciousness; and (4) The importance of honesty and transparency for Latinx students at a predominantly white institution.

Students indicated the importance of relationships with staff and faculty that spanned throughout their academic careers at Browning. The mutual investment of time and access to resources articulated by students in the study led to fostering what Stanton-Salazar refers to as "interpersonal trust" between students and institutional agents. This interpersonal trust opened doors for students in the form of research opportunities, or, as in the case of Yesenia, a years-long relationship with Bill, the director of the Browning College Success Institute, that led to a job offer and continued advocacy on her behalf. Interpersonal trust is a currency predicated on the investment of time.

Smith et al., (1995) found that women's college students, compared to their co-educational counterparts, report the perception that their colleges care more about them, but that what is missing from these studies is an emphasis on the differential experiences of women of color (p. 248).

Another significant element in considering how the data addressed the second research question is learning about how staff and faculty worked to minimize the distance between themselves and their students in order to break down existing institutional hierarchies to transmit

social capital and resources. In a study that also employed Stanton-Salazar's framework in a discussion of institutional agents at a Hispanic-Serving Institution, Garcia & Ramirez (2018) found that institutional agents could maneuver within the institutional hierarchy to access social capital and therefore empower low-status students (p. 360). Similarly, this dissertation demonstrates the efforts of faculty and staff to break down the hierarchies, and therefore empower Latinx students with resources in the form of opportunities for extra credit, flexibility when students were faced with personal or academic hardship, advocacy for learning accommodations, and extending opportunities for undergraduate research. In one such example, Linda explains some of the actions she has taken to break down these "normative" and "patriarchal" barriers in the service of advocating for Latinx women, and other students of color. Students recognize these efforts and therefore are more likely to trust and build relationships with these professors and staff members. Students such as Celia recall feeling intimidated by the idea of interacting with college professors when she was facing the transition from high school to college. Instead, what she found was faculty and staff who, while in positions of power, were not interested in maintaining a hierarchical distance between themselves and their students. The realization that she could feel comfortable made her likely to "reach out more."

Finally, the importance of building interpersonal trust predicated on a shared identity emerged as an important theme in the context of the role of staff and faculty in facilitating the transmission of social capital. Previous studies have pointed to the importance of the role of faculty members and other academic support personnel in the academic trajectories of students, particularly those from marginalized communities (Stebleton & Aleixo, 2015). The importance of addressing the shortcomings of existing theoretical approaches to women's college research is that we miss this intersectional dimension, in particular how the individual interacts with the

institutional, and particularly how Latinx women's gendered and raced experiences inform their approach to building the interpersonal trust that catalyzes the help-seeking behaviors in the first place. Students like Jennifer, a STEM major who became visibly emotional recalling academic difficulties and hardship, pointed to the importance of her Chicanx/Latinx professors in grounding her and providing support. Or Linda, who generously makes a point to share details about her own personal background to attempt to make herself a visible ally on campus. Students irrespective of major or discipline, pointed to significant relationships with faculty and staff of color, who acted as bridges to resources and counteracted the alienation they felt on a predominantly white campus.

By making the intersection of race and gender explicit in our theoretical approaches to women's college research, we can counteract the erasure of experiences of students of color.

Implications for Theory

This study was guided by applying Delgado Bernal's (1998) Chicana feminist epistemological perspective to Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) social capital framework for the study of institutional agents and their role in the empowerment of low-status students. Social capital frameworks have been used in education research to address several factors in the success or challenges of students in higher education. Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) framework makes the political consciousness of institutional agents explicit in order to make the distinction between those who act as gatekeepers versus those who act as, what he calls, "empowerment agents," bridges, and facilitators for minority students to access resources within hierarchical institutional contexts. The work of Delgado Bernal (1998) in advancing a Chicana feminist epistemological approach to research recommends that educators to center the experiences of Latinx students in order challenge the deficit framing that has sometimes been used to understand their college experiences.

In this study, the theoretical frameworks were used to provide an analytical lens for a more nuanced understanding of how the personal, familial, and institutional factors identified by Latinx women functioned to influence their experiences at a predominantly white women's college. The goal was to address an unexplored facet of the existing research on women's colleges, and to better understand how Latinx students interpreted the women's college milieu and its assorted benefits and challenges. As women's colleges become increasingly diverse, it becomes imperative to examine how these schools can adapt to meet the needs of all students. Eurocentric epistemologies and methodologies, and the vast majority of the extant literature on student outcomes and experiences at women's colleges whitewash the experiences of Latinx students, first-generation college students, and students from lower-income backgrounds—all students who are increasingly applying and enrolling at women's colleges.

The results from this study have implications for the use of a Chicana feminist epistemological perspective within social capital frameworks. Under most circumstances, social capital theory tends to highlight the conditions for social capital exchanges, including the participants of these exchanges having a shared identity, similar values and norms, and mutual trust (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). The assumption being that women's colleges, with their emphasis on a shared identity based on gender, student-faculty interaction or small class sizes, and women-centered teaching and learning environments, would be mean an abundance of opportunities for the transmission of social capital. Yet, Latinx women in this study such as Luz, Mary Ann, and Cierra, and Jennifer all shared about the challenges presented by feelings of alienation due to their marginalized status on campus. By not addressing the intersections of race and gender, existing Eurocentric theoretical paradigms risk capturing why and how students of

color struggle to form meaningful, trusting relationships with faculty and staff, or otherwise tap into the sources of social capital at college.

The way current research on women's colleges has approached their subjects perpetuates the erasure of how race mediates Latinx student experiences. As Pérez Huber (2009) explains, "dominant ideologies of meritocracy, individualism, and colorblindness can mask the struggles of Students of Color" (p. 640) in the field of higher education research. Therefore, the use of a critical race feminist epistemology in approaching this dissertation disrupts the framing we have come to take for granted in the existing research and literature related to women's colleges. Latinx student experiences shared in this study draw attention to the ways in which Latinx students struggled to reap the same benefits that women's colleges tout for their white, or high socioeconomic status students. Choosing to use a Chicana feminist epistemological perspective has implications for the outcomes measured in the research. For example, Astin (1977) concluded that women at women's colleges, when compared to their peers at coeducational institutions, reported being more satisfied with student-faculty relationships, curricular offerings, and positive relationships with peers. According to the participants in my sample, their gender and race intersect to inform each of those outcomes. The experiences they shared reveal the challenges they face as a racial minority group on campus to find culturally relevant academic experiences, carefully seek out mentorship from faculty and staff of color, all while relying on Latinx and student of color peers, or the support of their family, to persist to graduation.

Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) social capital framework's focus on the role of institutional agents is helpful in adding nuance to our understanding of the role that faculty and staff play in the lives of Latinx students, especially when institutional support seems to break down, or is not equally accessible for students of color, first-generation, or students from lower

socio-economic backgrounds. In the fallout of times of crisis on campus, students describe uncertainty related to knowing who to place trust in. Generally, faculty of color, and in particular, women faculty of color, were identified as trustworthy—providing advice, support, and encouraging students to "keep [their] education moving forward."

By centering the lived experiences of Latinx women, and applying an explicitly feminist and race-conscious social capital approach to women's college outcomes, this dissertation allowed me to focus on the narratives of this underrepresented student population and point to the disconnect of existing theoretical frameworks. This study can serve as an example of how to apply counter-hegemonic and intersectional ways of knowing to the stories of students of color, especially at predominantly white institutions.

Implications for Practice

Women's colleges were conceived as higher education institutions where women could access educational experiences and training that had been previously denied to them. For over 180 years, women's colleges have been pioneers in promoting gender equity for women pursuing STEM fields, such as computer science; promoting the visibility of women leaders in the administration and boards of trustees; and leveraging their network of college-educated, accomplished women to attract the next generation of women's college graduates. And, while the 20th century proved to be challenging for their viability as single-sex institutions, the last decade has seen an increase in applications, and with it, an increase in the presence of students of color, first-generation students, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and non-traditional aged students.

In order to adapt to an increasingly diverse student population, women's colleges' administrators, faculty, and student affairs professionals must address the needs that are specific

to the personal and familial contexts of students of color. For the Latinx women in this study, although they may have shared stories about feeling alienated against the backdrop of messages of sisterhood (something they often interpreted as the limitations white feminism), they nonetheless expressed the desire to dig their heels in and work harder to build community, seek out supportive institutional agents, and work with people of color in the broader community to connect theory to practice. They challenged their peers to make their feminism intersectional and challenged the institution to recognize the differential experiences of students of color on a predominantly white college campus. In addition to the theoretical implications addressed in the discussion, the findings of this study have important implications for higher education practice. Researchers, administrators, faculty, and student affairs professionals must recognize that, when it comes to women's colleges, a shared identity does not necessarily mean inclusion of all students. Diversity on women's college campuses must be taken on as a serious institutional priority.

Based on the findings of my study, I offer the following recommendations that can be implemented by administrators, faculty, and staff at women's colleges who are interested in disrupting and redefining what it means to be a women's college committed to the academic and co-curricular success of its broadening demographic.

Institutional Investment in Programs for Latinx Students

Institutionalizing support in the form of budget, staff, and community buy-in for programs such as the First-Generation Future program, and the Browning College Success Initiative, have significant long-term implications for the success of Latinx students on campus. Several students described forming relationships with faculty and staff members affiliated with these programs even before they stepped foot on campus as enrolled students. As discussed in

Chapter four and supported by Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) social capital framework, interpersonal trust, mutual dependence, and the investment of time are all pre-conditions for the transmission of social capital. Interestingly, in the case of the First-Generation Future Program, even students who did not self-identify as first-generation students, were able to reap the benefits of participating in the program, and the proximity it offered to academic support services and relationships with staff and faculty. Programs aimed at providing institutional support in the form of community with other students of color, workshops, mentorship, and connections with faculty, are a vital resource for Latinx students who reported struggling with culture shock, imposter syndrome related to academics, and the fear of reaching out for help from people in power. The findings of this study suggest that students gravitate to faculty and staff who possess what Stanton-Salazar refers to as a "critical consciousness," such as in the example of Yesenia who felt empowered after a conversation with a professor who affirmed her bilingualism, biculturalism, and body positivity as strengths that she could draw on to help her be resilient in the face of adversity on campus. Therefore, I contend that the faculty and staff of these programs should reflect this consciousness, as it does appear to impact a students' ability to access institutional resources.

Promote a Culturally Relevant Curriculum

When asked to describe classroom settings in which they felt most comfortable contributing, and felt the most engaged, Latinx women participants, regardless of major, explained that classes relevant to their Latinx/Chicanx identity, or those based on the study of feminism, gender, and sexuality, allowed them to articulate important parts of their identity and experiences. These opportunities in turn allowed them to forge a deeper connection to the course material and feel truly invested in their education. The topics covered in these classes, including

counter-hegemonic theoretical frameworks that made race, gender, and the relation to power explicit, empower students to connect their academic lives with their co-curricular activism on campus. The names of faculty that came up again and again as supportive institutional agents tended to come from the fields of Chicanx/Latinx Studies, Latin American Studies, and Political Science. Existing research supports the assertion that Latinx students' ability to explore diversity and identity issues through a cultural relevant curriculum positively influences satisfaction with college experiences (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005; Nuñez, 2009). Bearing this in mind, institutions may consider not only bolstering culturally relevant offerings in fields we traditionally expect race, gender, and class to be examined, but also in STEM classrooms, where Latinx women in this study indicated feeling alienated due to the lack of faculty diversity, and inability to discuss issues relevant to race, class, or gender in the sciences. For example, in addition to programming aimed at supporting women in STEM, women's colleges should consider making students of color and first-generation students in the sciences the focus of some of these co-curricular workshops. Students such as Maximillian, Sol, and Andi all agreed that the lack of representation in the science department's curriculum and co-curriculum made it difficult to connect with faculty and engage in their classes. Programs or workshops that outreach to students of color by recognizing their bilingualism or biculturalism as an asset, could make the difference in a student's success and persistence in STEM. In addition, the women in this study pointed to the importance of peer relationships with Latinx students and other students of color. Women's colleges could tap into this sense of collectivism by organizing a peer to peer mentorship program that connects first year students with those in their third and fourth years; or by facilitating a student of color or first-generation mentorship program with local graduate students in STEM.

Retention of Faculty and Staff of Color

Latinx students interviewed for this study mentioned the uncertainty they faced when faculty and staff of color who they relied on for support and advocacy left campus for jobs at other institutions. Students attributed this turnover to the institution's inability to attract and retain women of color to tenure track faculty jobs or staff in strategic positions throughout the College's landscape. Based on Stanton-Salazar's (2010; 2011) identification of the characteristics that define an institutional agent who acts to empower low-status students, my data pointed to certain pre-conditions that activated the transmission of social capital between students and faculty, or students and staff. For the purpose of this section, two pre-conditions seem especially salient in making the case for attracting and retaining faculty and staff of color. First, the benefits that emerge from long-term relationships between students and institutional agents (interpersonal trust gained over time); and second, that the transmission of social capital was facilitated by the interpersonal trust cultivated on the premise of a shared identity and political consciousness.

In Chapter four, Cierra referenced the lack of therapists in the student counseling office who could relate to the experiences of Latinx students in order to provide support, especially during times of campus turmoil or crisis. Based on the findings of this study, administrators could incorporate personal development and training programs based on the characteristics of empowering relationships between students and staff in order to elevate the importance of culturally responsive interactions and interpersonal trust. By prioritizing the retention of staff who have built these trust-rich relationships, students will reap the benefits of long-term supportive advising and mentorship.

Sol, a graduating senior majoring in STEM, explained that it was hard for students of color to picture themselves as succeeding in fields with little to no representation of faculty of

color. In the words of Marian Wright Edelman, Founder of the Children's Defense Fund and a graduate Spelman College, "You can't be what you can't see." Representation and visibility matter. Therefore, having access to supportive, trustworthy, politically conscious staff and faculty who are willing to break ranks with their colleagues and the college bureaucracy to minimize the distance in the institutional hierarchy, and leverage their resources (i.e. "finesse the system") is critical to facilitation and transmission of resources, or social capital, to Latinx students. The recruitment, but more importantly, the retention of faculty and staff of color has been shown to be impacted by negative work environment, campus climate, and issues of racial diversity (Martinez & Welton, 2017; Steele, 2018). The staff and faculty I spoke to as a part of this study were generally very positive about feeling supported in their advocacy for Latinx students. Bill and Evelyn, both staff members, seemed to agree that they appreciated the independence and agency that time afforded them. It seems that building trust with a supervisor gives staff more ability to be creative in their efforts to support students.

A Sustainable Model of Student Involvement

Co-curricular involvement and opportunities for leadership are regularly touted as benefits of attending women's colleges (Kim, 2001; Langdon, 2001; Miller-Bernal, 1993). While Latinx women in my study did report taking advantage of these opportunities, there are signs that point to the differential burden on students of color on campus compared to their white peers.

Latinx women in the study reported feeling overwhelmed by what they perceived to be unpaid emotional labor, and the demands on their time beyond just their responsibilities in the classroom. As captured by Luz in Chapter four, Latinx students are caught in what I refer to as the "leadership paradox." She ends by pointing out the hardships students of color must endure to graduate.

Latinx women don't just get to take on just the student role, because we have to do so many other things just to survive on campus, to make it to those four years and beyond.

Higher education professionals should be conscious of the demands that Latinx students, first-generation students, and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds face before they even fulfill their role as students. Teresa, a second-year student from out of state, is regularly called back home to attend to family responsibilities, in addition to being responsible for the financial obligations of paying for college. Even so, she stays involved with co-curricular activities, a campus job, and the academic demands of a STEM major. It is important that colleges build the capacity of their faculty and staff to be empathetic and flexible when working with students of color at predominantly white institutions, and to recognize how the intersections of race and gender inform their experiences and demands that they face. Finally, institutions should explore what Cierra refers to as "alternative models of leadership" that emphasize "non male, non-white leadership styles" focused more on collective, non-hierarchical models. This way, Latinx and other students of color can feel represented in women's colleges' efforts to foster their capacity for leadership.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Despite some intriguing findings and implications for practice, there are a number of limitations to this study. With regard to the way in which the study was designed, the recruitment of Latinx students for participation proved to be difficult. The 2018 academic year was a fraught time for students of color at Browning College. Latinx students expressed suspicion about participating in a study that would delve into their experiences.

Additionally, while the study provided rich and deeply descriptive narratives from students, staff, and faculty that served to appropriately answer the research questions, it was

limited by the lack of a longitudinal component—checking in with students over several time points over a one or two-year time period, or breaking up the topics we covered in one interview over several interviews. Focus groups could have also been helpful in the triangulation of data and getting feedback from participants on the themes that had emerged from their one-on-one interviews.

Finally, the small sample size of the study did not allow for deeper examination of diversity of experiences among Latinx students based on nationality, racial identification, or age. The risk of drawing narrow conclusions due to this lack of within-group diversity in the sample limited my study (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). Although the study sample was small, I was still able to secure diversity of majors, self-reported household family income, first-generation in college status, and class years.

This study attempted to better understand the factors and contexts that influenced the experiences of Latinx women, their relationships with institutional agents, and their access to social capital. Future research that examines the experiences of students of color at women's colleges could use a similar raced-gendered epistemological framework to engage all students of color (especially Black women who are greatly underrepresented) or expand the research design to include several women's colleges. For example, future research could explore the experiences of students at a predominantly white women's college and those at a Hispanic Serving Institution.

Conclusion

Research has suggested that women's colleges facilitate academic involvement (Smith, 1990; Whitt, 1994), participation in leadership activities (Langdon, 2001), and emphasize the role of supportive women role models (Miller-Bernal, 2002). And as they welcome previously

underrepresented student populations to their campuses, calls for diversity and inclusion will become more prominent. Women's colleges have a historical mandate to continue to be spaces where the promises of equity of educational opportunity can be more than just empty rhetoric.

The goal of this dissertation was to contribute to the discourse around the future of women's colleges, specifically, their capacity to adapt to increasing percentages of Latinx, first-generation, and historically underrepresented students in higher education. Using a narrative qualitative method, one-on-one interviews with 15 self-identifying Latinx student participants, and five faculty and staff participants, and background biographical surveys, revealed several themes across the two research questions. These include, the importance of a supportive community of Latinx students and students of color; institutional investment in programs geared at serving first-generation students and other underserved college populations; the academic benefits of a culturally relevant curriculum; and the importance of a consistent presence of faculty and staff who could either empathize with their lived experiences, or who were committed to culturally responsive interactions. The findings of this study suggest that predominantly white women's colleges, with their dominant narratives of feminism and sisterhood, can be alienating to Latinx women who do not see themselves reflected in the white feminism they confront.

As long as women's colleges take the lead in institutionalizing policies that recognize the differential experiences of their students of color—being proactive instead of reactive during times of crisis, the narrative will shift from concerns about adaptability and viability, to their ability to lead the way on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

APPENDIX A

BACKGROUND SURVEY

1. Class year:
2. Currently, what is your best estimate of your household's total income? (Put an X next to your best estimate):
    a. Less than $24,999 b. $25,000-49,999
    b. $50,000-74,999
    c. $75,000-99,999
    d. $100,000-124,999
    e. $125,000-149,000
    f. $150,000-199,000
    g. More than $200,000
3. Are you receiving any financial aid? Put an X next to your response: YES NO
    a. If YES, are you receiving any grants/fellowships? (e.g. Pell Grant, Cal Grant, University Scholarships or Private foundation fellowships?): YES NO
4. Did your parents go to college (Put an X next to your response):
    a. Yes, Both Parents Went to College
    b. Yes, One Parent Went to College
    c. No, Neither Parent Went to College

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

5. Zip code in which you currently reside:
6. City where you grew up:
7. High school graduated from:

8. Gender: (Put an X next to your response): Female Male Transgender

9. How do you racially/ethnically self-identify:

10. Were you born in the United States?: YES NO

11. If NO, where were you born?

12. How old were you when you came to the US?

13. Were your parents born in the United States?: (Put an X next to your response):

    a. Yes, Both

    b. Yes, One

    c. No, Neither

14. Are you currently working? (Put an X next to your response): YES NO

15. If YES, circle one: Full-Time Part-Time

16. Major:

17. Last term GPA (fall, or spring):

18. Cumulative GPA:

19. Did you apply to any other women's colleges during the college application process?

    YES NO

    a. If YES, what other women's colleges did you apply to?:

_____

20. Career goals/plans (e.g. pre-med, law school, etc.):

_____

21. Current age:

APPENDIX B

STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Pre-college experiences

1. If you could start by telling me a little bit about yourself, including details about your own educational background, and how you came to Browning College?
2. What made you interested in applying to Browning College? Had you always been interested in applying to a women's college?
3. What, if any, expectations did you have about attending a women's college?
4. Did you attend recruitment or admitted student events prior to enrolling? What kind of messages was Browning College sending to prospective students?
5. What role, if any, do you feel teachers, and other school agents, play in getting you to enroll at Browning College?

Transition to college

6. Take me back to your first year at Browning College. What was the transition from high school to Browning like for you? What were some of the people or experiences that made the transition easier? More challenging?
7. What role does your family play in your current college experience?
8. Do you live on campus? What has that experience been like for you? Is it your first time living away from home?
9. What year and major are you? Are you satisfied with your academic experiences so far? Why or why not?

10. How have your expectations of a women's college changed? Did the change in expectations impact your academic performance, or how you related to other students, staff, or faculty?
11. Have you ever experienced academic difficulty at Browning College (needed tutoring, been on academic probation, needed to repeat a course)? If not, what do you think has kept you motivated to succeed at Browning? If yes, did you feel like Browning provided resources or staff/faculty to improve your achievement levels?

Latinx experiences

12. Have you made friends with students from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds at Browning College?
13. In your experience, what is Browning College doing to foster the success of Latinx students? For example, specific programs, or classroom initiatives?
14. Are there barriers to Latinx student success at Browning? If so, what are the most significant barriers?
15. Have you had the opportunity to articulate your experiences related to your Latinx identity and background in the classroom?
16. What differences, if any, exist in how Latinx students are integrated into the campus community?
17. Have you noticed a difference in the integration of Latinx students based on their socioeconomic status, generational status, or family backgrounds?
18. Since you've been here, have there been any institutional shifts in priorities that have impacted your experience as a Latinx student?

19. Has the current political climate or recent campus events influenced the types of experiences or interactions you have had on campus? If so, in what ways?

Interaction with faculty and staff

20. What are the most significant campus relationships you have had with faculty and staff at Browning College? Would you feel, or have you felt, comfortable reaching out to these people for advice or help?
21. Describe your experiences in building connections with staff and faculty at Browning? What does that community look like to you?
22. Please describe any significant extra-curricular experiences at Browning College.
23. Can you tell me about any significant classroom experiences you've had at Browning College? In which classes and spaces have you felt compelled to speak and participate actively?
24. How likely are you to go into a professor's office hours at Browning?
25. Has a staff or faculty member at Browning College advocated on your behalf in any matter at Browning College? If so, when and how?
26. What do you think has engaged you the most at Browning College?
27. Has a staff or faculty member at Browning College ever provided advising related to your professional or post-graduate goals?
28. Has a staff or faculty member at Browning College written letters or recommendations, helped with resumes, or connected you with resources related to jobs, internships, or graduate school. If so, could you please describe these experiences?

Life goals

29. What were some of your life goals when you first started college? What are those goals now? Who has influenced or shaped those goals, beside yourself?
30. What impact do you think attending Browning will have on your life? How different do you think attending a co-educational college would have been? A majority Latinx, or student of color, institution?

Closing: conversations about race and gender/Latinx students in context of women's colleges

STAFF AND FACULTY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Intro and Women's colleges:

1. If you could start by telling me a little bit about yourself, including details about your own educational background, and how you came to work at Browning College?
2. What is your official title, and how long have you worked at Browning College?
3. Had you always been interested in working at a women's college?
4. Do you think your experience as a staff member at Browning College influenced your views on the impact of gender and higher education?
5. In your words, how would you describe the mission of Browning College?
6. In your work as an admission counselor: does your office have conversations about how Browning College compares to the broader field of women's colleges?
7. Have the curricular objectives, priorities, and academic programs of Browning College changed since you've been here? If so, in what ways have they changed?
8. Have there been any institutional shifts in priorities or strategic plan that have significantly impacted your approach to mentorship of Latinx students?
9. Have you observed any changes in the student population in terms of race and socioeconomic class over the time you have worked at Browning College? Specifically for Latinx students?
10. In your words, why does a Latinx student choose to attend Browning College instead of a similarly competitive institution?
11. In what ways, if any, has Browning College adapted to an increasingly diverse student population? In what ways, if any, have you, as a staff person adapted?
12. Do you think your role allows you to build engagement with Latinx students?

13. In your role, what are the most significant resources you offer Latinx students at Browning College?
14. Have there been any significant changes in how Browning College is interacting with the community at large?
15. In your opinion, has there been a shift in how the College is marketing itself to prospective students?
16. What do you think are some benefits of a Latinx student choosing a women's college? Browning College, specifically?

Latinx students:

17. How does Browning College's approach the outreach and enrollment of Latinx students? Have you noticed any changes in this approach since you've worked here? If so, can you describe those changes?
18. In your experience as a staff member at Browning College, have you observed any differences in how Latinx students experience the transition from high school to college?
19. Can you tell me about your experiences working with Latinx identifying students?
20. What differences, if any, have you observed between Latinx students and other high-achieving women at Browning? How do they compare?
21. Do you consider yourself a mentor to Latinx students? What characteristics of your job/position facilitate mentorship relationships with Latinx students?
22. In your experience, what is Browning doing to foster the success of Latinx students? For example, specific programs, or classroom initiatives?
23. Do you serve on any committees or organizations outside of your official job title/role? Do you have any significant contact with Latinx students in that role?

24. Has a Latinx student ever visited you for help with personal matters that have impacted their academics at Browning? If so, can you describe some significant examples of times you have advised a student on personal matters.
25. Have you had the opportunity to provide professional advice to students? Help with recommendation letters, resumes?
26. In your role, have you ever connected Latinx students with other staff members on campus for advising, mentorship, or for assistance?
27. In your experience, how would you describe the factors that have led to Latinx students succeeding at Browning College?
28. Are there barriers to Latinx student success at Browning? If so, what are the most significant barriers?
29. Do you have the opportunity to interact with Latinx students outside of the classroom? If so, in what ways or capacities?
30. What differences, if any, exist in how Latinx students are integrated into the campus community?
31. Have you noticed a difference in the integration of Latinx students based on their socioeconomic status, generational status, or family backgrounds?
32. Has the current political climate or recent campus events influenced the types of interactions you have had with Latinx students? If so, in what ways?
33. Have you had the opportunity to meet the families of your Latinx students? Can you describe any significant experience with Latinx families?
34. Does the institution encourage your support of Latinx students? Are there institutional factors that have limited or restricted the type of support you are able to provide?

35. How much time are you able to dedicate to fostering relationships with Latinx students?
36. Have you ever had to advocate on behalf of Latinx students? What was that experience like?
37. What impact has working with Latinx students at Browning College had on your own professional development?
38. Closing: conversations about race and gender/Latinx students in context of women's colleges.

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