Our Place and Power: Testimonios from Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers

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Our Place and Power: Testimonios from Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the women who use their influence to change the world for good, and to the women and girls who have influenced my world for good.

To Linda: My SHEro. My coach. My most treasured friend.

To Kaya, Lauren, Sarah, and Thalia: You can do and be anything! I cannot wait to see you grow to run this world.

To my mother who sacrificed everything so I could achieve my dreams.

This dissertation is also dedicated to the memory of my grandmothers: Francisca Garcia Leos and Maria Sanchez Agundiz. If I am a strong Latina it is because I carry your blood and am blessed by a lifetime of your prayers.

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures ................................................................................................................. iv

Abstract .............................................................................................................................. v

## Chapter One: Introduction .......................................................................................... 1
  Statement of the Problem and Background ................................................................. 1
  Significance of the Study ............................................................................................... 6
  Theoretical Framework ................................................................................................. 8
  Wonderments .................................................................................................................. 9
  Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions ............................................................... 10
  Description of Key Terms ............................................................................................... 11
  Student Affairs in Higher Education ............................................................................. 13
  Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO) ......................................................................... 14
  Chapter Summary ......................................................................................................... 15

## Chapter Two: Review of the Literature .................................................................... 17
  Latinx/a/o History in the United States ......................................................................... 17
  Latinx/a/o Leadership in Higher Education .................................................................. 20
  Critical Race Theory .................................................................................................... 22
  LatCrit ............................................................................................................................ 24
  LatCrit and Education .................................................................................................... 25
  Intersectionality ............................................................................................................ 27
  Women in the Workforce .............................................................................................. 28
  Women in Higher Education ......................................................................................... 31
  A New Lens for Women’s Leadership ............................................................................ 32
  Chapter Summary ......................................................................................................... 35

## Chapter Three: Methods ............................................................................................ 36
  Positionality ................................................................................................................... 37
    Where it all Began ........................................................................................................ 37
    Transformative Years ................................................................................................. 39
    Where it all comes together ......................................................................................... 40
  Qualitative Research .................................................................................................... 42
  Epistemology ................................................................................................................. 44
  Testimonios and Narrative Inquiry ................................................................................. 46
  Participant Selection ..................................................................................................... 49
  Data Collection Protocol ............................................................................................... 49
  Data Analysis ................................................................................................................ 53
  Procedures ...................................................................................................................... 57
  Trustworthiness ............................................................................................................ 58
References.........................................................................................................................147
Appendix A................................................................................................................................153
Appendix B................................................................................................................................155
Appendix C................................................................................................................................156
Appendix D................................................................................................................................157
Appendix E................................................................................................................................159
Appendix F................................................................................................................................161
Appendix G................................................................................................................................162
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Wonderments Aligned with Critical Juncture/Timeline Plotting Questions ..........55
Figure 2: Wonderments Aligned with Semi-Structure Interview Questions........................55
ABSTRACT

Latina leadership in higher education is more important ever. This study provides an empowering understanding of the experiences of Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) in higher education in the U.S. and their practices related to wielding the power and influence associated with their roles. Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000), Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1988), and Borderlands Theory (Anzaldua, 1987) served as a theoretical framework for this study and provides a basis for understanding the Latina experience from a critical perspective.

A testimonio research design was used to explore the following wonderments: (1) What meaning do Latina SSAOs ascribe to their positions as senior-level administrators? (2) How do race and gender influence how Latina SSAOs acquire and enact power in their roles? (3) What specific past and present catalysts do the student affairs officers perceive as most beneficial in positioning and supporting their work? Three Latina SSAOs participated in this study, which included participation in a 75-minute testimonio interview and timeline activity.

The outcome of the study reflects themes from the study, which reveal that gender and race influenced the experiences of these particular Latina SSAOs. The outcomes additionally suggest these women brought strengths and assets to their positions as a result of the positive power of their lived experiences. Furthermore, Latina SSAOs are influenced by present and past family dynamics, wield their power to help those around them, and move quickly through fears to get to yes.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Power exists. Somebody will have it. If you would exercise it ethically, why not you? I love power. I’m power-hungry because when I have power I can make things happen.

— Kim Campbell, first Female Prime Minister of Canada

Statement of the Problem and Background

There is power in numbers and influence in power. As the number of Latinx/a/os in education, commerce, graduate programs, and positions of power rise, so will Latina leaders emerge in every facet of the nation. In 2015, the White House released a brief, which outlined the state of Latinas in the United States, revealed the number of Latinas who achieved high school graduation had increased by 14% between 2003 and 2013. During the same time, Latinas also increased their associate’s degree attainment and bachelor’s degree attainment by 8% and 6%, respectively (Gandara, 2015). These increases align with the growth of the Latino population over the past 15 years. With 50.5 million Latinx/a/os in the United States, this population has grown to be the largest minority group in the country (U. S. Census Bureau, 2010).

In fact, 69% of Latinx/a/o graduates from the high school class of 2012 went on to enroll in college the following fall. Comparatively, 67% of White graduating high school seniors from 2012 enrolled in college the following fall (Fry & Taylor, 2013). However, the rising number of college-going Latinx/a/os has not increased the numbers of Latinx/a/os graduating with a four-year college degree, comparatively (Krogstad, 2016). According to a 2016 Pew Research Center report, fewer Latinx/a/o students graduate with a four-year degree either because they do not
persist at their universities or they have opted to attend a community college or two-year institution (Krogsdad, 2016).

Education has long been a method for Latinx/a/os to increase access to employment and to remove themselves and their families from a low socioeconomic status (Gloria, 1998). College achievement can lead Latinx/a/os to higher-paying jobs, which can then, in turn, allow for more positional power to positively influence the communities to which they belong. Therefore, I posit it is important to meet the needs of Latinx/a/os in higher education overall, and Latinas in particular. One way to do so is to position appropriate leadership in higher education, namely Latina administrators.

The ability to identify with campus leaders is central to college students’ experiences; therefore, it must be considered a critical issue to diversify influential staff positions when given the opportunity to do so. For example, with increased Latinx/a/o students in the University of California and California State University systems, Latinx/a/o faculty and staff increasingly serve as role models and mentors and aid in a more diverse environment, since a diverse population may develop out of increased faculty and staff of color (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013).

A 2017 Pew Research Center report indicated Latinx/a/os ages 25 and older, only 15% had obtained a bachelor’s degree or higher (Flores, Lopez, & Radford, 2017). This low percentage is significant when we consider Latinx/a/os entered college at a higher rate than their non-Hispanic White counterparts just five years earlier (Fry & Taylor, 2013). This is yet another factor, which correlates to the lack of Latinx/a/o administrators and faculty on college campuses in regards to Latinx/a/o student retention at institutions. Accordingly, it is fair to conclude, as the number of Latinx/a/os students on our campuses increases so should the number of Latinx/a/o
faculty and staff. Increased representation of professionals of color can make a difference in the success of students of color on campuses. In administration and especially faculty, the presence of Latinx/a/o professionals who have already moved through higher education may indicate to an impressionable student they too can succeed in academia (Gloria & Rodriguez, 200; Verdugo, 1995).

In 2003, Latinx/a/os held only 5.3% of executive positions at four-year public institutions (Leon & Nevares, 2007). Data provided by Leon and Nevares (2007) need to be disaggregated to better understand the actual status of Latinas in executive positions. However, despite the lack of gender breakdown within it, 5.3% of executive positions held by Latinx/a/os does not seem likely to keep up with the growing number of Latinx/a/o students in colleges and universities across the country. Notably, in the early 2000s, anecdotal information began to surface about White faculty and staff strains with Latinx/a/o students. This strain had to do with older faculty who considered Latinx/a/o students to be less prepared or intellectually capable as other students (Castellanos, & Jones, 2003). As the numbers of Latinx/a/os who enter U.S. colleges and universities rises, the numbers of Latinx/a/os in influential positions at all levels must also rise, particularly ones who are committed to serve as a voice for today’s diverse Latinx/a/o student population. Service to this population is maximized when faculty and staff understand the need for different teaching methodologies (Bitnew, 2015) and the skills necessary to apply applicable knowledge to the Latinx/a/o experience through appropriate curriculum (Umback & Wawrzynski, 2005). Additionally, meeting the needs of Latinx/a/o students is strongest when we acquire knowledge and take action towards meeting Latinx/a/o student needs in policy and strategies for success, through college or university student services, governing boards, and administration (Castellanos & Jones, 2003).
Furthermore, an increased number of Latinx/a/os in executive positions in higher education is a critically urgent need as we consider the rise of Latinx/a/os who will enter an institute of higher education. Portions of those executive positions include administrative roles, such as a Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO), at colleges and universities in the United States. It is unknown how Latinas might experience such positions of influence differently than their male counterparts. More specifically, there is still much to learn about how Latinas in higher-level positions such as the SSAO experience the power and influence associated with their jobs. Therefore, it is critical to hear and learn from current Latina SSAOs about how they navigate organizational structures in postsecondary educational administrative settings. To know the aforementioned may yield valuable insight for aspiring Latina SSAOs and help them anticipate what they might expect in similar roles.

According to a Pew Research Center report (Brown, 2014), the most significant barrier to women’s success in the workforce had nothing to do with intelligence or capability; rather, it was the double standards to which they were held to as they reached higher levels in organizations. This is referred to as a double bind: a systematic and organizational situation where individuals may face contradictory or conflicting expectations, whereby adherence with one area might result in failure in another area (Hornung, Lampert, & Glaser, 2016). For example, women are expected to demonstrate feminine traits at work, while displays of more masculine traits, such as assertiveness, may cause others to look down upon them. However, women who do not display characteristics which are more masculine may not progress in their careers, and they are seen as ill equipped for executive positions.

The path to leadership for many women is paved with similar stories of double binds, and it is no wonder why the perception of vertical segregation in the workplace and higher education
persists. For example, according to the American Council on Education (2016), women held 50% of all bachelor’s degrees earned since 1981, 50% of all master degrees earned since 1991, and approximately 50% of all doctoral degrees earned from 2006 to 2016. Still, women have only held 31% of full professorships at degree-granting, post-secondary institutions since 1991. Further, it seems the higher the rank in academia, fewer women are found in those positions, and even fewer identify as women of color, such as Latinas. As the American Council on Education (2016) stated, the higher the position the fewer women are represented, irrespective of the fact women have attained equal or higher educational levels than men have. For example, women held only 26% of university presidencies in 2011. Further, to manage power and influence in this role is a skill many who aspire to be in this role may need to learn from the experience of others.

In this study, I focus on the exploration of strengths, which allow Latina SSAOs to thrive in environments where they must navigate the influence and positional power of being the highest-ranking student affairs administrator in their university.

The compensation gap is also a disparity seen between men and women in the workplace. For the past 15 years, the pay gap between White men and women has been steady at approximately $20,000 per year (Bishel & McChesney, 2017). Additionally, a 2016 National Women Law Center study addressed the latest pay gap for women of color and indicated Latinas make 56 cents to each dollar earned by White, non-Hispanic men. The U.S. Census Bureau reported between 2014 and 2024 there will be a 30.3% increase in Hispanic women in the workforce in the United States. This finding makes this study more relevant to Latina leaders in higher education and universities who employ them, because institutions of higher education would benefit to understand the evolving workforce and why the presence of Latinas aids the success of Latinx/a/o students on campus.
Significance of the Study

There is a significant need for Latinas to be visible and present in higher education. By 2036 Latinx/a/os will compose nearly one-third of school-aged children (Fry & Lopez, 2012b). This statistic foreshadows an even larger influx of Latinx/a/os who may join institutions of higher learning in the next 50 years. Today’s increased college enrollment for women in general, and Latinas specifically, highlights a separate concern. Sandberg (2013) revealed the disparity of women in leadership positions around the country in comparison to men. While the statistics Sandberg (2013) shared were primarily for the business sector, much of the data stands true for higher education, as well. While many women enter the field of student affairs and/or join the academy, the number of women who reach high-ranking positions is not equal to men; moreover, the number of Latina leaders does not follow suit.

In a 2014 study conducted by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) on SSAOs, only 14.5% of respondents were Latinx/a/o. The overall breakdown of gender in the study was 51% male and 49% female. Respectively, the numbers of Latinas represented reflected the lack of Latina leadership at the SSAO level (NASPA, 2014). There is a heightened need to increase the number of Latina administrators in higher education. Findings from this study will be useful to aspiring Latina SSAOs.

In addition to the statistics on women in the higher education workforce, the notable topic of power coincides. The female gender is a marginalized identity; power and privilege has been wielded over them for many years and in different areas. The word power often brings about negative feelings, because many view power in others as the ability to corrupt, manipulate, or exploit. Boleman and Deal (2013) described various forms of power and attempted to shift perspectives from power as a coercive and negative concept to an empowered idea of how action
in organizations is mobilized. They recommended to think of power by way of influence and suggested various ways in which power is used as an instrument to move business or an agenda forward. Further, Michel Foucault studied power and knowledge as relational, which requires someone to learn how to wield it, locate where it is, and identify ways to make power work (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012).

Gloria Anzaldua (1987) acknowledges and affirms the power to accept oneself and find empowerment when pushed to the margins of society. Anzaldua (1987) also believed that to be emboldened in this physical and metaphysical space is the ultimate self-discovery where one can reframe internal meaning and power. Additionally, testimonios is the method used and is significant since testimonios are seen as a method to disrupt traditional methods of research, which create knowledge, and similarly empower storytellers in their truth.

Together with the Center for Talent Innovation, Sylvia Ann Hewlett (2015) conducted a study, which reported that some women have a distorted view of power. As a result, women may not pursue or apply for executive-level positions because they may be unaware such positions of power might create an opportunity for them to excel far beyond positions where no influence or power exists. Only 26% of women Hewlett (2015) surveyed, who had no influence or power in their positions, felt they could reach for meaning and purpose in their positions. Alternatively, 63% of women in positions of power felt they had the ability to find meaning in their roles, based on the influence they possessed. It is clear through the study, there is a misrepresentation of the benefits attaining power can have for a woman’s career and overall personal and professional satisfaction. The outcome of Hewlett’s (2015) study suggested the need to help women redefine their perception of power with the help of role models who can discuss the benefits of organizational leadership positions.
Thirty percent of women in the United States ages 21 to 34 desired a position of power within their respective fields, as opposed to 18% of women between the ages of 35 and 50 (Hewlett & Marshall, 2014). It appears when the desire for power dwindles with age, so does the pool of women in the mid-level on track to ascend to positions of power and influence. As more information is discovered about Latinas in the SSAO role, it is also important to consider the barriers these women face. Given this information, I conclude perceptions and insights about power dynamics and the political nature of these positions may deter interest in executive-level positions.

Latinas who have emerged as SSAOs have skills and experiences, which must be shared and analyzed in order to strengthen and increase the pipeline for aspiring Latina SSAOs. A strengthened pipeline for Latina SSAOs is equally as important as the skills attained to thrive once in the position. The outcome of the study broadens and informs both scholarship and practice about how Latinas in the SSAO role experience power and influence in their positions. As well, the outcome serves as both a source of inspiration and a resource of information for aspiring Latina SSAOs. Lastly, the study was conducted to demystify the journey to the SSAO position and the expectations to wield power and influence once the position is attained.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for this study focuses on Critical Race Theory (CRT), which identifies and describes racialized experiences in multiple settings, and Latinx/a/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), which identifies these experiences from a Latinx/a/o identity perspective. These theories discuss the need for the lived experiences of Latinas to be viewed in the context of their racial identity.
Further, I considered the implications for Latinas at the intersection of their identities as women and as Latinas (Solorzano & Delgado, 2001). Intersectionality is layered and complex and is a critical component of the conceptual framework of the study because it added more depth to understand the intersecting patterns of racism and sexism Latinas in the SSAO role experience as a result of their identities. Furthermore, LatCrit and Intersectionality invite the researcher to consider the impact of multiple marginalized identities.

Therefore, through the lens of LatCrit, influenced by CRT, and the basis of Intersectionality, I collected testimonios through in-depth personal interviews.

Wonderments

I identified and described the experiences of three SSAOs who serve at a college or university in the U.S. as they navigate the power and influence afforded to them in their position. Furthermore, I explored how Latina SSAOs experienced the use of their power and influence in relation to their gender and racial identity. The outcome of the study adds to the body of knowledge concerning how Latina SSAOs navigate the path to executive leadership, and how they experience their role on a day-to-day basis. Additionally, I sought to understand the way Latinas wield power afforded to them because of their positions. The outcomes of the study illuminate cultural and personal resilience found within the professional aspirations of Latinas in higher education. The following wonderments will guide the inquiry:

Wonderment One: What meaning do Latina SSAOs ascribe to their positions as senior-level administrators?

Wonderment Two: How do race and gender influence how Latina SSAOs acquire and enact power in their roles?
Wonderment Three: What specific past and present catalysts do the student affairs officers perceive as most beneficial in positioning and supporting their work?

Delimitations, Limitations, and Assumptions

Hermeneutic considerations are a limitation in this study (Patton, 2015). The opportunity for researcher bias escalates based on my experiences as a Latina in student affairs and my overall personal beliefs and knowledge. Additionally, my interpretation of the data may be different from how others might interpret the data based on my own lived experiences as a Latina in Student Affairs. Furthermore, my beliefs about the difficulty for female leaders to achieve success, unconditionally and without consequence, guides my thoughts and interpretations about ambitious women who choose to climb career ladders.

I sought out three to five participants from whom to collect testimonios. Given the narrow demographic and also limited geographic locations of where Latina SSAOs are positioned in the country, the probability of the individuals knowing each other was likely.

Assumptions in this study include the idea each participant will be 100% forthcoming with their experiences in their current position of power and influence based upon the need to show their “best” selves. Additionally, some may withhold information because of considerations in their current workplace. Often, positions of power are highly political, and sharing an experience may be a great risk to participants. Another limitation, which might exist is the memory distortion of participants as they retell their recollections of stories relevant to the research. Similarly, a participant may think it is painful to unearth their experiences and may not want to continue talking about it.
As a way to overcome the potential limitations, I included in the methods various procedures, which include peer debriefing, member checking, and the availability of follow-up questions for the in-depth interviews.

Description of Key Terms
Hispanic and Latino.

The Federal Office of Management and Budget officially coined the term Hispanic in 1980; however, this term was previously used in 1969 as a test prior to the 1970 and 1980 censuses as a form of categorization. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), the question regarding Hispanic Origin has been in place for each census since 1980. The 2010 U.S. Census used the term Hispanic to include those of “other Spanish origin, regardless of race” (p. 2). According to Comas-Diaz (2001), the term Hispanic refers, “collectively to all Spanish speakers” and ties “lineage or cultural heritage related to Spain” (p. 116).

Both the terms Hispanic and Latino have been used over time interchangeably to describe people from Spanish-speaking countries or individuals who originate from a Latin American country. However, Latino has been a preferred by many because Hispanic has a connotation connected to colonialism. Over the course of the past four U.S. Censuses, the terminology and possible response for Latinos or Hispanics in the United States has changed (Cohn, 2010). For example, a woman may be asked to answer yes or no to whether she is Spanish, Latino, or Hispanic. If yes, she would reply with a variety of specific nationalities she might originate from (Mexican, Cuban, Venezuelan, etc.). In the 2000 U.S. Census, the term Latino was added to include a variety of Hispanics who may not be Spanish speaking but are from a Latin American country (for example, Brazil). For the purpose of this study, the researcher referred to Latinos as
individuals of “Latin American origin or ancestry, including Portuguese and Brazilian” (Batista, Collado, & Perez II, 2018, p. XIX).

Latina and Latinx/a/o.

Wasserman and Wesley (2009) researched the power of language on the potential for sexist attitudes. They described ways some languages identify generic pronouns when the term needs to describe both male and female genders. In Spanish, the default generic pronoun to describe both male and female is to use the masculine term. This is inclusive of the conjugation of most nouns, which describe male and female or neutral gender.

Pertuz (2018) elaborated on the gendered Spanish language. The term Latina is used to refer to “female-identifying women” of Latino ancestry (p. 75). For the purpose of this study, I will use Latina to refer to female-identifying women who identify as being from “Latin American origin or ancestry, including Portuguese and Brazilian” (Batista et al., 2018, p. xix).

The term Latinx has been used most recently to describe individuals who do not fit within the gender binary of the terms Latino or Latina. The term originated in order to be inclusive of all individuals and to remove gender from the Spanish term, Latino/a (Padilla, 2016). Logue (2015) shared a Google trend: a hike in the term Latinx in November of 2015. In addition, the increase in the use of the term Latinx in academic literature began in 2013 (Logue, 2015). The goal of the term Latinx, according to Logue, is to remove any gender binaries from the original terms, Latina and Latino, which then includes those members of our society who identify as gender non-conforming.

The discussion about the term Latinx is a conversation still in progress among members of the community. I use the term Latinx/a/o, as has been introduced by Batista, Collado, and Perez II (2018), “to be more inclusive and to honor that self-identify is a personal choice” to
describe the community as a whole (p. xx). I also honor, acknowledge, and use cultural descriptors used by research participants, the literature, and existing research to discover more about the experiences of Latina SSAOs. Terms, which exist in research, include: Hispanic, Latin, Latino, Latina, Chicano, and Chicana.

Student Affairs in Higher Education

The field of student affairs has a unique beginning as a discipline and career path. Many of the early universities in the United States are modeled after British residential colleges (Hogan, 2016). In these universities, faculty took responsibility for the lives of the students outside of the classroom, which included personal aspects such as co-curricular, moral, athletic, and social activities (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). Traditional educators of the time served as close advisors and mentors or in loco parentis (in place of parents) (Dungy & Gordon, 2011).

In the mid-1700s, students, primarily men, began to have different demands of the university and sought activities out of their classrooms (Hogan, 2016). Students began to form various student organizations, which took them, physically, away from their colleges. As a result, their distance prompted officials to rethink the oversight of campus activities and living quarters; this began the demand for a different type of involvement in student life on behalf of faculty (Hogan, 2016). In the mid-1800s, faculty began to focus more specifically on academic pursuits, which lead institutions of higher education to hire administrators to run the day-to-day operations of the university (Hogan, 2016).

By the late 1800s, approximately 30% of colleges actively admitted women (Chamberlain, 1988, as cited in Gangone, 2008), and there was an increased need for the position of a dean of women at college and universities of the time. Soon after, the dean of men position
developed, and consequently, the foundation for the traditional SSAO position emerged within a not-yet-defined field of student affairs and student personnel. In 1937, the American Council on Education released a report, which acknowledged student personnel/student affairs as a field and profession and recognized an institution’s responsibility to develop a student as a person, rather than solely focus on their intellectual training. This philosophy has shaped the field of student affairs, which set the stage for student affairs preparation programs; the first of which began at Columbia University’s Teacher’s College in the mid-1900s (Gangone, 2008). The establishment of the preparation program helped to identify 23 functions essential for the success of students on a college campus (American Council on Education, 1937).

Today, like in many other fields of work, student affairs continues to evolve and change along with generational perspectives, state and federal politics, global outlooks, and student needs. Leading the charge for student success and development at almost every institution is the SSAO.

Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO)

The SSAO position began as part of the need to develop structure around the development of students outside of the classroom. Faculty administrators became deans of women, and later, deans of men. Deans of women were, in fact, the initiators of the movement to professionalize and prepare individuals for SSAO roles. Deans of women at the time were encouraged to come up with ways to teach other women how to become dean of women. In 1913, a graduate student at Columbia’s Teacher’s College began a graduate preparation program for deans of women (Potter, 1926, as cited by Gangone, 2008).
The term Chief Student Affairs Officer was used by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) to encompass the many roles and titles SSAOs can hold. In 2018, NASPA chose to change the term “chief” to “senior” to acknowledge the history of the word chief in Native American communities. In a 2014 executive summary about SSAOs, NASPA revealed the three most common titles for SSAOs are Vice President, Dean, and Vice President and Dean (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014). As it relates to job responsibility and oversight, the research revealed at least 66% of the SSAOs reported oversight of the following areas in student services: campus activities, student conduct/behavioral case management, counseling services, orientation, student affairs assessment, career services, student conduct/academic integrity, wellness programs, disability support services, on-campus housing, recreational sports, and multicultural services (Wesaw & Sponsler, 2014).

For the purpose of this study, and to acknowledge the change of terminology in NASPA and the profession, SSAO is the highest-ranking student affairs officer on the campus. These professionals may have titles, which may differ from each other, but their roles encompass similar responsibilities.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I provided the rationale to increase and retain the number of Latina SSAOs within higher education. Enrollment of Latinx/a/os in higher education varies in prevalence across states, institution type, and even specific Latinx/a/o subpopulations. Similarly, graduation rates for Latinx/a/os varies among institution type, however, nationally, Latinx/a/os graduation rates remain below the national average (Batista et al., 2018, p. 6, 12-13). With the significant increase in Latina college student enrollment and bleak graduation numbers of
Latinx/a/os as a whole, I conclude that the lack of Latinx/a/o administrators and faculty is a factor in the graduation gap.

Latin faculty and staff play a significant role in diversifying our institutions and provide support to minority students on campuses. I used the current literature of women in the workforce and Latinx/a/os in higher education and provided significant insight into the experience of the Latina SSAOs and their practice as they use, wield, and understand the power they have in their executive role. The outcome of this study provides hiring authorities, White and male allies, and aspiring Latina SSAOs valuable information to put into practice. Finally, testimonios are commonly a space used to empower the storytellers and connect common experiential threads. These threads are similarly beneficial to me as a practitioner and researcher to understand my path and my responsibility as a Latina in this field.

In this study, I explored the experiences of three Latina SSAOs. The insight gained was hoped to give aspiring Latina SSAOs insight about what it takes to be in a position of power in the field of student affairs in higher education at a college or university in the United States. Therefore, Chapter Two provides an overview of the extant literature in regard to Latinx/a/os in the United States and in higher education, the history of women in the United States and in higher education, and how the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), LatCrit, and Intersectionality explains the experiences of Latinas in higher education in the SSAO role.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter I provide a review of the extant literature significant to the experiences of Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) who work in the field of student affairs in colleges and universities in the United States. I begin with an overview of the history of Latinx/a/o leadership in the United States and in higher education. Next, I outline critical race theories, which outline how the experiences of Latinas are shaped in the United States. Finally, I present the literature about women in the workforce within the United States and pay particular attention to women and Latinas in higher education and women’s thoughts on positional power.

Latinx/a/os History in the United States

In the 1800s, the United States of America (U.S) was positioned to be a great power in the Western Hemisphere. During this time, the U.S. began to take over large amounts of land, as well as establish itself to directly oversee Latinx/a/o populations such as Mexicans, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans (Suarez & Paez, 2002). At the same time, the presence of Latinx/a/o leadership and strength of community began to show its influence as early as 1806 when the first Spanish language newspaper appeared in New Orleans, Louisiana, (Korrol, 1996). Throughout the nineteenth century, Latinx/a/o identities began to develop differently from one side of the country to the other. This is in large part because of the political attributes, which shaped each Latinx/a/o group within the United States. In 1848, after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo successfully ceded a large portion of the Southwest Territory to the United States, Mexican American culture was already an integral part of the southwestern culture based on the sheer
number of Mexican natives in the area. Everything remained intact, culturally, except the people became a part of a different country.

Increased pockets of Latinx/a/o-based communities developed throughout the East Coast in the mid- to late-1800s. Areas such as the Bronx in New York City and Ybor City in Tampa, Florida became popular locations for Latinx/a/os to create community, develop commerce, and become builders in the American landscape (Suarez & Paez, 2002). Successful Cuban businesspersons, often already doing business in the United States, did not have much change to make after immigrating to the United States. Often the only change in their business was where they produced their products. The current Cuban American experience is different from many other Latinx/a/o groups. In the 1960s when many Cubans fled communist Cuba, they arrived in the United States to find an increase in social programs aimed to assist underprivileged minority populations. Both these programs, as well as the Cuban Refugee program, have shaped the leadership and success of the Cuban community in the United States (Suarez & Paez, 2002). As early as the mid-nineteenth century, Puerto Ricans and Dominicans also began to build pockets of communities in areas such as New York and Florida. There is no question, the history and experience of Latinx/a/os in the United States is extensive and unique.

The diverse history of Latinx/a/os in the United States makes identification with being Latinx/a/o complex. However, over time Latinx/a/o leadership in the United States has proved to make a difference to individual Latinx/a/os and communities at large. In the late 1800s, Vicente Ybor moved his cigar factory from South Florida to the Tampa Bay Florida area. The move to Tampa Bay helped to increase the population of eligible Cuban workers in the area, which created what is known to be the “first industrial city in Florida” (Ybor City Chamber of Commerce, 2017). Nearly 12,000 people moved to work in this new industrial city, which
included many Cubans, Italians, and Germans. This number is important because just 50 years earlier the population of the surrounding seven counties only accounted for approximately 800 people (Visit Tampa Bay, 2013). Ybor’s leadership receives credit for the foundation of the Latinx/a/o community in the Tampa Bay Florida area.

During the Chicano Rights Movement in the late 1960s in the U.S., powerful leadership emerged on behalf of Latinx/a/os wanting to see change. Dolores Huerta co-founded the United Farm Workers of America (UFW) in partnership with Cesar Chavez, another iconic activist of the Chicano Rights Movement. This Latina leader made critical contributions to the movement as Vice President for the UFW. In her early activist years, Huerta organized a Community Service Organization in Stockton, California to help local farm workers. As a teacher to school children she saw many arrive hungry and ill prepared for school, and as a result, Dolores became empowered to provide support and assistance to migrant workers and their families (National Women’s History Museum). Through this process, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta met, continued their work with farmworkers and established the UFW. Huerta has received multiple awards for her work with farmworkers in the United States, and she served as Vice President of UFW until 1999 (National Women’s History Museum, 2015).

One of the more famous boycott demonstrations is the Delano, California grape boycott. At the peak of the Delano grape boycott in the mid-1960s 13,000 Americans decided to support the movement (Tejada-Flores, 2004). Both Dolores Huerta and Cesar Chavez mobilized and directed this first boycott, which helped to demonstrate to grape producers that farm workers were not afraid to stand up for their human rights. Ultimately, this led to an important collective bargaining agreement with the UFW in 1970. This agreement was a critical step to secure safety and resources for all farmworkers. The display of leadership on behalf of Dolores Huerta and
Cesar Chavez was meaningful for the Mexican-American community because for the first time, collective action was making a larger change. Dolores Huerta made critical contributions to the farmworker hiring process, fought to reduce pesticide use, and led organized boycotts in the 1960s. Collectively, Huerta’s experiences add to the body of knowledge, which informs the history of strong Latina leadership in the United States.

Latinx/a/o Leadership in Higher Education

Strong Latinx/a/o leaders have also emerged in higher education. There are incredible examples of successful Latinx/a/os who serve as faculty, administrators, and presidents at institutions throughout the nation. However, in 2003, Latinx/a/os held only 3.7% of executive positions at four-year colleges and institutions (Leon & Nevares, 2007). In a 2014 study of 827 SSAOs only 57 self-identified as Hispanic or Latinx/o/a. Although there are numerous leaders within the Latinx/a/o community, there is still much work to be done to increase the number to accurately represent the growth of the Latinx/a/o population enrolling in colleges and universities (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013).

For example, in 2009 at California State University – Los Angeles, 48-65% of incoming students identified as Latinx/a/o, and only 14-19% of all faculty identified as Latinx/a/o (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). This representation shows the number of Latinx/a/o faculty is not increasing at the same rate of growth as Latinx/a/os enrolled in college and universities. Further, representation of Latinx/a/o faculty at the University of California system schools is similarly lacking (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013).

In 2001, 30 new presidents or chancellors were chosen between both the University of California and the California State University systems. Of the 30, only four were Latinx/a/o, and
those four were hired through the California State University system (Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). According to a Pew Research Center report (Flores et al., 2017), California continues to have the largest population of Latinx/a/os of any state, with 26.9% of Latinx/a/os in the United States calling California home. Across the nation, but in California’s public school system in particular, there is an urgent need to increase the number of Latinx/a/os faculty and executive administrators. It is similarly important to provide adequate training as preparation to assume higher administrative positions—including the university presidency.

Leon and Nevarez (2007) proposed to provide continuing education in the form of leadership institutes for Latinx/a/os in the United States and suggested, “improving these numbers is a matter of national urgency” (Leon & Nevarez, 2007, p. 362). Attendance at these institutes may increase the knowledge, mentorship, and sponsorship for Latinx/a/os needed to improve and strengthen the pipeline of Latinx/a/os in higher education into executive roles. Valverde (2008) wrote extensively about what it means to be a Latinx/a/o change agent in higher education. The shift in Latinx/a/o demographics in the United States requires a different approach. Valverde outlined specifics about higher education leaders who work towards change for Latinx/a/o students. For Latinx/a/o leaders, specifically, he suggested a longer tenure for professionals in order to make a difference for Latinx/a/o students. Valverde outlined Latinx/a/o university presidents have made vast differences at their institutions as a result of longer tenures in their positions. He further suggested many Latinx/a/os are heavily criticized in their role and often leave before being able to get many things accomplished for students. Latinx/a/o administrators and faculty are advised to be good leaders for all students because work for all students in higher education will inevitably make their institutions a place where Latinx/a/os students can also prevail (Valverde, 2008). Among the traits suggested for Latinx/a/o leadership
are “showing charisma and determination, applying high ethical standards, and serving as a role model (Valverde, 2008, p. 212).”

Latinx/a/o faculty and staff have a relatability factor with Latinx/a/o students in areas such as culture and language, which may be beneficial in and out of the classroom on a university campus (Nuñez, 2010). Dayton et al. (2004) stated that students of color might relate to faculty of color more because they perceive them to be more accessible. Similarly, Latinx/a/o students might perceive a Latinx/a/o faculty or staff member as being more approachable since they may believe they share similar experiences.

Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) generally have an increased number of Latinx/a/o faculty and administrators. HSIs are institutions defined as two-year or four-year institutions with at least 25% Hispanic enrollment (HACU, 2017). According to the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU, 2017), HSIs represent only 12% of institutions of higher education; however, they enroll nearly 68.8% of all Latinx/a/o students within the United States and Puerto Rico. In 2014, there were 435 HSIs in the United States and Puerto Rico, which enrolled approximately 1,836,870 Latinx/a/o undergraduate students (HACU, 2017). In 2012, 70.3% of Hispanic high school graduates were enrolled in college, which increases the need to have highly trained, and capable Latinx/a/o administrators and staff at colleges and universities across the nation.

Critical Race Theory

Critical to the formation of this argument is the acknowledgement of the reality of race relations within the United States as it relates to oppression and systematic disenfranchisement, which exists both in K-12 and post-secondary educational systems for Latinx/a/os and other
persons of color. Critical Race Theory (CRT) attends to the historic and present-day ways race impacts persons of color and perpetuates systems of oppression. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) articulated the CRT movement “is a collection of activists and scholars interested in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (p. 3). As it relates to this study, all aforementioned elements of race, racism, and power have the potential to be drivers in the experience of Latinas in positions of influence in higher education. How an individual learns to navigate these systems varies; however, CRT suggests there will always be an underlying element of race.

Thus, the framework for this study begins with CRT, which scholars have used to describe and understand racialized experiences in a multitude of settings. The history of critical race theory began in the 1970s in the post-Civil Rights era in the United States, when activists and scholars aimed to find more defined strategies to overcome continued racism. The five main tenets of CRT, as described by Delgado and Stefancic (2012), are:

(a) Critical Race theory is commonplace and is what people of color experience in the United States on a daily basis,

(b) Racism is difficult to combat because “white-over-color ascendancy” serves both the elite and working-class whites, where a tendency to eradicate only blatant racism is preferred over tackling deeply rooted systems of racial oppression (p. 8),

(c) Race and racism are defined as social constructs; not having roots to any scientific or biological groupings other than small portions of a groups’ superficial “genetic endowment”,
(d) At any moment the intersection of identities, including race, gender, sexuality, etc., can push or pull a human into different notions of conflict regarding racialization by dominant societies at different times,

(e) People of color have “presumed competence” when asked to speak about the topics of race and racism as it relates to their experience. (p. 11)

Through these tenets, critical race theorists make meaning of the racial realm, further making sense of policy, behaviors, and rules. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) shared the idea of the “empathic fallacy,” which assesses the idea of deep-rooted stereotypes and prejudices are difficult to break because of the messages, which have been perpetuated about various racial groups. The authors further explained the difficulty to overcome these thoughts based on the human tendency to stay insular within one’s own identity group, which result in like-minded thoughts and can prevent critical thought around personal biases. Overall, CRT gives us a framework from which to understand issues related to racial injustice within our communities.

As a way to understand our communities and disrupt oppressive systems, CRT suggests the idea of counter-storytelling. Counter-storytelling captures narratives of racialized experiences and reclaims them as a source of empowerment for the storyteller.

LatCrit

In the past 10 years, critical race theorists have fragmented into various groups, and give voice and meaning to a number of disenfranchised minority groups in the United States. Chicana and Chicano critical race theorists have used the five themes of CRT to examine and understand the educational experiences of women and men of color generally, and Chicana and Chicano students specifically (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Latinx/a/o CRT or LatCrit complements CRT
and focuses more intently on the experiences of Latinx/a/os. Latinx/a/o CRT helps to examine areas of race particular to Latinx/a/o people such as their language, culture, ethnicity, etc. (Villalpando, 2004). Because there are so many complexities to the identities of Latinx/a/os in the United States, LatCrit aims to provide a lens whereby the Latinx/a/o experience can be understood.

The assumptions from CRT also apply to LatCrit and become even more important when critical thought to Latinx/a/o students is applied. Bordas (2007) wrote about new approaches to leadership for the Latinx/a/o community and shared thoughts about “the psychology of oppression” (p. 107). The description followed the mindset of a Latinx/a/o person as it related to their belief of self. Bordas (2007) cited Paolo Freire to describe what happens to a mind, which believes damaging and oppressing messages about self. As the person internalizes those beliefs, their psyche becomes infected with thoughts such as: (a) “a lack of confidence in others of their race”; (b) “the exclusion of those who succeed as ‘not being like us’”; and (c) “the whitewashing of minority talent, in which people of color disregard their own culture and emulate White people in order to succeed” (p. 107). Through the lenses of existing systems of oppression, the Latinx/a/o human experience in the United States, and individual lived experiences, LatCrit aims to examine and discover the intricacies, which affect the lives of Latinx/a/os in the United States.

LatCrit and Education

Solorzano and Yosso (2010) defined CRT as it relates to the education of Chicanx/a/o and Latinx/a/o students in the United States. The term “Chicano” was embraced in the mid-1960s to describe Mexican Americans, but has roots dating back to 1911. Originally, from a portion of the Spanish translation of the word Mexican, “Xicano” originated as a way to
distinguish from a Mexican who had not been “Americanized” and a Mexican who had been (Nostrand, 1973). Guided by the tenets of CRT, Solorzano and Yosso outlined five themes, which form CRT in education.

(a) The centrality and intersectionality of race and racism. CRT as it relates to education begins with the realization that “race and racism” are pervasive across the system. Similarly, other forms of oppression in education such as gender and SES are important components that intersect with race concerns in education.

(b) The challenge to dominant ideology. In education CRT is up against a system that upholds a traditional and comfortable sense of “color blindness, race neutrality, and equal opportunity” (p. 41), which easily oversee how those traditional claims keep those with the most privilege in power in the United States.

(c) A commitment to social justice. Eliminating racism of any form is a goal of CRT, and when applying that sentiment to education it becomes a permanent and “continuous project” (p. 41). This commitment is never taken as a single issue as it coincides with also eliminating other intersecting oppressed identities.

(d) The centrality of experiential knowledge. CRT acknowledges the importance of the lived experience of persons of color. Therefore, the centrality and importance of taking into account how a Person of Color has experienced racism in education is a key component to understand the full picture.

(e) The interdisciplinary perspective. CRT uses an approach that considers historical and contemporary contexts to understand the impacts of race in education. (Solorzano & Yasso, 2010, pp. 40-41)
The centrality of the themes above aim to serve as a guide to think about education as it pertains to Chicanx/o/a students in the United States. As students navigate both the K-12 system and college degree attainment to the doctoral level, there is a subtle struggle of race and access, which precedes each student. Thus, LatCrit scholars critically analyze institutionally racist ideologies, which may continue to keep Latinx/a/o students in the margins. Further, LatCrit scholars point out and encourage specific and tangible ways to challenge the dominant narrative.

As it relates to Latinas in the SSAO role, it is possible the many intentional or unintentional forms of racism, sexism, and classism influence students along their educational paths and, therefore, has the potential to affect their professional paths. LatCrit considers the lived experiences of these women and opens the doors for educators to use those stories to change future narratives.

To honor the stories of participants and the spirit of LatCrit, testimonios of the participants were collected. Latina testimonios are described as oral histories and stories, and first theorized by the Latina Feminist Group (LFG) as a form of resistance against traditional methods of knowledge creation in research. Additionally, testimonios are seen as a form of liberation, since the outcome of testimonios, “…must include the intention of affirmation and empowerment (Reyes & Curry, 2012).”

Intersectionality

A critical component of the lived experiences of Latinas in the United States is to understand the crossroads of their identities of being women and Latinx/a/os. Latinas must consider their identities from multiple perspectives as they are positioned to have multiple oppressed identities. Kimberle Crenshaw, a pioneer in the study of intersectionality, reviewed the
legality of closed lawsuits for Black women in the workforce. Crenshaw (2015) found in a case against General Motors that Black women could not be hired over Black men or White women, which put Black women at a disadvantage not only because of their race but also because of their gender. These Black women found themselves at the margins, where their identities as Black women were not protected because the court could not see how the overlap or intersection of those identities had worked against them. From the courts and legal perspective, they could see Black people were hired, albeit only men, and they could see women were being hired, albeit only White women (Crenshaw, 2015).

As the cases were deciphered, Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality. This term brings to light the significance of identity in all forms and the importance of a framework whereby race, gender, socioeconomic status, and other poignant personal identities for women of color is taken into consideration in their totality. In her work, Crenshaw, “[considers] how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and [that] these experiences tend not to be represented” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 124). Finally, if gender, race, socioeconomic status, etc. are treated in a mutually exclusive manner there is the potential to erase the existence of women of color.

Women in the Workforce

It is impossible to talk about the evolution of Latinas in the United States and in the workforce without the acknowledgment of the general history of women in the workforce in the United States. Many women of color believe the mainstream journey for women’s rights and equality keeps women of color in the margins. I believe the fight for equality of all women is tied
to every woman’s liberation, and therefore, I share overall connections of this study to women in the workforce and higher education.

Over the past 150 years, women’s roles in the workforce within the United States have changed dramatically. The increased availability of jobs during the Industrial Revolution of the early 1800s gave women an opportunity to enter the workforce at greater numbers. In the early 1900s, 5.6% of women participated in the workforce (Webb, 2010). This number continued to rise throughout the Great Depression, after World War II, and beyond. When men in the armed forces returned stateside shortly after World War II, many of the women who had begun to work were relegated once again back to their domestic home roles. The emphasis on women being homemakers and men working outside of the home marks a 1950s traditional American family characteristic. The women’s liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s revealed a different American woman. Those who subscribed to this movement were activists fighting for equal rights. Many women entered into universities during this time and found ways to compete with their male counterparts.

The President’s Commission on the Status of Women was established during the Presidency of John F Kennedy, Jr. This commission, which was led by Eleanor Roosevelt, was in many ways the impetus for the fight for women’s equality. The commission released a significant report in 1963, American Woman, which identified many of the inequalities women were facing at the time (Freeman, 1973). As a result, all 50 states were mandated to organize similar commissions to determine findings at the state level (Freeman, 1973). Freeman outlined three of the significant ways the commissions laid a foundation for the future of the women’s liberation movement:
(1) “It brought together many knowledgeable, politically active women who otherwise would not have worked together around matters of direct concern to women;

(2) The investigations unearthed ample evidence of women’s unequal status, especially their legal and economic difficulties in the process convincing many previously uninterested women that something should be done;

(3) The reports created a climate of expectations that something would be done. (Freeman, 1973, pp. 797-798)

Between 1970 and 2004, the increase in women in the workforce was significant, with a jump from 47% to 73% of women, respectively (Office of Workforce Development, U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). So much has led to the development of women in the workforce such as the 19th Amendment in 1920, which gave women the right to vote, and the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, which mandated a minimum wage (Grossman, n. d.). Both gave women an opportunity to get the proverbial “seat at the table.” Other major legislation, which worked in favor of women’s equality was the Title VII Civil Rights act of 1964, which prohibits employer discrimination against employees on the basis of sex, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (Women’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). These important acts set the groundwork for what has become a great battle for women’s equality within the United States.

In the early 1980s, White women made approximately 60 cents to every dollar earned by a man doing the same job. By the 1990s, White women earned nearly 72 cents to every dollar (Women’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). Although the differences still show a large gap, the increase is a significant milestone in the journey towards women’s pay equality. For women of color in the United States, the pay gap remains lower than White women. In 1999,
nearly 44% of management jobs belonged to women; nevertheless, more men than women held the top positions within organizations.

This phenomenon is known as the “glass ceiling,” better described by Hutchins (2007): The term glass ceiling most commonly refers to the condition in which top-level management in businesses, especially corporations, is dominated by a demographic referred to as white heterosexual men. A “ceiling” is suggested because women are seen as limited in how far they can advance up organizational ranks. The ceiling is “glass” (transparent) because limitation is not immediately apparent. The glass ceiling is distinguished from formal barriers to advancement, such as education or experience. While the term is often used to refer to women’s access to upper management, it also refers to the general tendency for women to be underrepresented at higher levels of the occupational hierarchy. (p. 1)

The numbers continue to show women earn less money than men. In 2015, women earned 80 cents to every dollar earned by a man. The disparity in the corporate world is mirrored in higher education, where again women are disproportionately absent from the highest-ranked roles, with Latina women absent to an even greater degree.

Women in Higher Education

Throughout the 1960s, as women began to identify ways to increase their chances to succeed, many enrolled in institutions of higher education. Women’s rise in education level is a significant reason why women have gained increased levels of success. In 1970, approximately one in 10 women between the ages of 18 and 64 held a degree, whereas approximately three in 10 did in 2004 (Women’s Bureau, U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). In the faculty realm, the 2005-2006 National Center for Educational Statistics survey stated there were 575,973 women
faculty compared to 714,453 men faculty members. Conversely, in 2009 women held a higher number of professional staff positions than men, with 188,501 compared to 103,781 men (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2012). The number of women in administrative positions may create the illusion that there is a similar number of women in more influential positions such as SSAOs, but it is not the case.

A 2008 study of SSAOs across the nation showed women are more likely to take on titles such as director and dean of students, whereas men take on titles such as vice chancellor and vice president for student affairs (Tull & Freeman, 2008). The phenomena of women who rise to positions of influence at lower numbers than men necessitate a response to understand the barriers, which influence this phenomenon.

A New Lens for Women’s Leadership

Between June and August of 2014, the Center for Talent Innovation set out to survey men and women in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany about the roles of women in the workforce, as well as the expectations of women in the workforce. Through in-depth interviews and a survey of over 5,000 respondents, the researchers articulated a new lens, whereby the approach to leadership taken by women in the workforce can be viewed. Women in the workforce wanted these five things (Hewlett & Marshall, 2014):

1. Women want to flourish;
2. Women want to excel;
3. Women want to reach for meaning and purpose;
4. Women want to empower and be empowered; and
5. Women want to earn well.
Women identified health, wellbeing, and having autonomy as a part of flourishing in their roles. As the report indicates, women did not identify having less stress as being more desirable; however, they did want to have more autonomy to discern the direction to go in when faced with challenging situations (Hewlett & Marshall, 2014). Further, 58% of women in the United States would “turn down a promotion if they thought their health and wellbeing would suffer” (Hewlett & Marshall, 2014, p. 18). The research showed women wanted to excel in their professions: 79% of women in the United States between the age of 35 and 50 said they sought intellectual growth and challenge. To excel, women preferred to be challenged by large intellectual tasks. To overcome those challenges was a great point of pride for women in this study, as well as the ability to engage with people of other cultures and nationalities.

Additionally, women wanted their careers to make a difference in the world. Nearly 80% of women agreed having a large impact on society helped them find meaning and purpose in their roles (Hewlett & Marshall, 2014). Many female SSAOs may have a similar idea about why they joined the field of student affairs and education as a whole. Education is viewed as a leading cause important to women ages 35-50 in the United States, which surpasses other social concerns such as women’s issues, children’s welfare, and anti-poverty.

The researchers also reported women wanted to be empowered, and wanted to empower others. Women wanted to create and build high-functioning teams, which produce high-quality work. As a part of this, it is important to note the importance of mentorship and sponsorship to empowerment. Helms, Arfken, and Beller (2017) suggested mentoring can include information feedback and ongoing encouragement, and it can occur within any type of industry or organization. Mentorship provides an individual with a relationship where a mentee can learn informal rules of an organization or industry (Helms et al., 2017). Sponsorship, on the other
hand, has been classified as being different than mentorship. Sponsorship, as defined by Hewlett (2015), is intentional advocacy on someone’s behalf to benefit their careers. Therefore, a professional sponsor is critical for women’s success, given the disparities in numbers of women in positions of power and influence. As women seek to empower and feel empowered, mentorship and sponsorship are important components for both sides of the coin.

Lastly, women wanted to have the opportunity to earn well. Women respondents wanted financial security just as much as men did because financial security meant security for their families, education for children, and high-quality care for aging parents (Hewlett & Marshall, 2014).

Another point revealed in Hewlett and Marshall’s (2014) study is the propensity for women to be driven, intelligent, and willing to work to achieve their goals; however, they may have a convoluted view of power. For reasons not discussed in this study, as women age, their aversion to power increased as it related to a powerful work position. Thirty percent of women in the United States ages 21 to 34 desired a position of power within their fields, as opposed to 18% of women between the ages of 35 and 50. This decline may be caused by the need to be with family or other life circumstances, and it could be attributed to the vagueness of what it means to have power. To investigate this misalignment, a study was conducted on the expectations women in the workforce had of positional power versus the reality of positional power as experienced by women with powerful positions. Overwhelmingly, the women without positional power believed they would earn well and excel in their roles once given a position with power. However, those women in power proved they were more likely to achieve the five areas of women’s expectations simply by having a position of power.
Chapter Summary

The cross functions of the literature presented in this chapter help to paint a clearer picture of women in the workforce and how Latinas in student affairs make sense of their world. With the rich history of Latinx/a/os in the United States, Latinas stand on the “shoulders of giants” in terms of strength, tenacity, and vision. Similarly, their identity as women is strengthened and lifted not only because of strong Latinas who have come before them but also because of the many “sheroes” of all races and ethnicities that have fought intensely for women’s equality. What undergirds the growth and evolution of equality as a whole requires individuals to push through personal boundaries, expectations, and fears. This transformation is at the core of what pushes our society forward and enables adults to see past difficult experiences to make the best for others who come behind them.

This chapter highlighted the literature pertinent to the experiences of Latina SSAOs, and how they make sense of their experience, journey, and current professional positions. It is important to recognize the roots of Latinx/a/o leadership in America and higher education to understand the experiences of Latinx/a/o leaders in higher education today. This experience, coupled with the landscape for women in the United States, higher education, and the workplace is a relevant point of context.

The next chapter highlights the methods used to conduct the study, which used testimonios to understand more about the pathways to the SSAO position for Latinas in higher education and student affairs, and how Latinas experience power and influence in their roles as SSAOs.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

The literature presented in Chapter 2 provides a framework for the study. The purpose of this chapter is to outline the procedures for the inquiry. The purpose of this study is to collect testimonios from Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) at colleges and universities in the United States to understand their experiences, specifically how they make meaning of their influence, power, experience, and the overall pathway to their role.

I conducted a qualitative inquiry using to explore the roles, career path, pivotal experiences, and motivators for Latinas who have realized a SSAO position with a testimonio design as a method. This narrative through testimonio design explored the experiences of three Latina SSAOs as they communicated, through in-person testimonio interviews, their personal accounts of being Latinas in higher education.

Guba and Lincoln (1989) argue for a new naturalistic paradigm to approach research studies within social and behavioral inquiries, such as this study. One of the reasons Guba and Lincoln suggested a naturalistic paradigm over others is because this paradigm acknowledges the, “power of the human-as-instrument (p. 235)”. Further, a naturalistic paradigm takes into consideration patterns developed based on multiple factors, whereas the opposite paradigm suggested an immediate cause and effect relationship. A naturalistic paradigm differs from others because it is values bound, which puts the onus on the researcher to ensure the values, which undergird the study are similarly upheld in the methodology of the study (p.243). Therefore, guided by the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Intersectionality, this inquiry explores the stories of Latina SSAOs through a naturalistic
paradigm, using testimonios and CRT methodology to increase values congruency of the conceptual framework and methods of this study.

I wanted to provide aspiring Latina SSAOs the necessary information to pursue the SSAO role. Through the power of story through testimonios, I learned how these Latina SSAOs understand the influence they possess based upon their professional position. Additionally, I wanted to understand how the Latina SSAOs make meaning of their experiences, which helped them step into the SSAO role. Through testimonios I gained information required to answer the wonderments of this study, and simultaneously provided space for Latina SSAOs to reflect, retell, and make meaning of their experiences.

Positionality

I am a Latina student affairs professional with 13 years of experience in the field. My functional area of expertise is residential education and student housing, and I am interested in issues concerning women in higher education. I aspire to achieve a senior student affairs officer position in my career, and therefore, I have a personal interest not only to strengthen the pipeline for Latinas in the field of student affairs, but also to encourage those who aspire to become SSAOs.

Where it all began

I was born in Seguin, a small town in Central Texas, in 1980. In 2015, its population was 27,041 (Onboard Informatics, 2015). My parents met shortly after my mother immigrated to the United States from San Luis Potosi, Mexico in search for a better life for herself.

My mother’s transition to the United States was not easy. She did not know any English or have family nearby when she moved to Texas. After some time, she was lucky to find mentors
and friends who took her under their wing and showed her the ways of her new country. Slowly, she began to learn the English language and situated herself among her community with various jobs.

My brother and I grew up hearing the tales of my mother’s hometown - from the stories of her nine siblings to the legends of the “Cruz Verde,” which is what her small town in Mexico is still endearingly called. My mom did not grow up with many resources mainly because her father spent most of his time dreaming and drinking, leaving little money for the family. As a child, my mom was smart and curious. She often tells a story about her cousin Lena who struggled in school and who always asked my mom to do her homework in exchange for candy or money. Since my mom had little means, she would accept the offer each time. My mother told us her cousin never learned anything in school so she could never get a job as an adult. I do believe the story is true; I also think it was told emphatically so my brother and I would prioritize our homework.

As a naturalized citizen, my mother has a soft spot in her heart for immigrants who are working hard to succeed in the United States. She understands the struggle of life in a foreign place, and through her role, she has helped thousands of families in our community become citizens or residents of the United States. She has not forgotten and does not let me or my brother forget our story. She pushes us to be grateful and thoughtful about how we use our influence and where we focus our energy. Because of her influence with Latinx/a/os in the community, and the care she demonstrates towards them, my identity as a Latina was solidified over the years. My mother’s mission to help has led me to understand who I am, the privilege I hold in my citizenship, and the value of my education.
Transformative years

As a child, I never really understood why the stories of my family were important. I only knew those stories were about us. In my early high school years, I immersed myself in my own identity development. I became involved with the National Hispanic Institute, which began in 1979 as a way to leverage Latinx/a/o leadership at the high school level. Its goal is to prepare high-achieving Latinx/a/o high school students for college and beyond. NHI provides summer programs and taught us to think critically about our role as Latinx/a/os in the country (Nieto, 2002). Although I knew it before then, I began to understand differently how incredibly spectacular my heritage was and the unique responsibility to do something with my new knowledge. Prior to this point, I never thought much about United States Latinx/a/o politics. As a result, I began to learn more about the Chicano Rights Movement of the 1960s and became more aware of the importance of Latinx/a/o faces in politics, media, and education, and I began to learn more about how policies were affecting the Latinx/a/o population both domestically and abroad. My identity began to slowly turn from an insular understanding of my own experiences to a holistic view of the people who formed the larger Latinx/a/o community.

This all culminated in a decision to attend Florida International University (FIU) in Miami, Florida to obtain my bachelor’s degree. Everything I knew about being Latina was challenged by this great city with multiple Latinx/a/o identities at every turn. The “Tejano” (Texan) Spanish I spoke was not the Spanish of Miami; the Tex-Mex food I was accustomed to was far from the Cuban and Puerto Rican cuisine I found at every corner. During my time in Miami, I made incredible friends and learned about the family experiences of many people. I walked away from my college experience with best friends from Bolivian, Nicaraguan,
Dominican, Brazilian, and Cuban backgrounds. My life was transformed by knowing about the lives of other Latinx/a/os. I learned my Mexican American heritage is as unique and robust as the stories of other Latinx/a/os in the country. I began to see my responsibility for Latinx/a/os expand as I learned about various Latinx/a/o cultures, which shared my language but differed in lived experiences. I realized even as different as those stories may have been from my own, many of the Latinx/a/os I met similarly treasured family and understood living in the United States to be a privilege without comparison.

Where it all comes together.

Beyond my identity development, my career identity formed as a result of many significant student involvement activities at FIU. I learned where I found most joy was when I helped other students find their success at the university. I decided to stay at FIU to pursue a master’s degree in student affairs administration, and received a graduate assistantship working in Student Housing in FIU Residential Life, where I gained a critical skill set to launch my career in student affairs. I successfully completed two degrees from FIU in 2006 and have served as a student affairs professional for the past 11 years. Each step of the way, I have been able to draw a comparison between what I am doing and how I am doing it and lessons or characteristics of success I learned from my mom or other members of my family.

For 12 years, I have worked in the area of Housing and Residential Education, and I consider myself an educator. I sought opportunities to understand the current experiences of the Latinx/a/o college student. As a Community Director at the University of Arizona, I served as a mentor for students within the Arizona Assurance Scholars program, a financial aid program developed to assist low-income, college-bound students in Arizona. The Arizona Assurance Scholars program also offers free tuition for students whose annual household income falls
below a certain threshold (The University of Arizona, 2018). Many of those students identify as Latinx/a/o, and both of my mentees did as well. The two women whom I mentored yearned to learn more from me as they continued in their educational journey. My achievements gave them hope for a brighter future and the possibility of degree completion.

Similarly, as an Area Coordinator and Assistant Director for Residence Education at the University of Michigan, I served as the faculty advisor for La Celebración Latina, a celebratory event sponsored by the provost’s office and dedicated to the celebration of graduating Latinx/a/o students from the institution. The Latinx/a/o population of students, faculty, and staff was small at the University of Michigan; there, I learned about the enormous need to support, sponsor, and enhance the experience of Latinx/a/o students at a predominantly white institution. I also learned about the importance for students to see and interact with faculty, staff, and administrators who held similar Latinx/a/o identities.

As I learned from watching my mother navigate the influence she slowly gained, I too learned to capitalize on the influence I have and opportunities I am given to make a difference in the lives of others. As a strong feminist, I have dedicated a portion of my career to enhance the experiences of women in the higher education workforce. At the University of Michigan, I began a chapter of NASPA’s Women in Student Affairs group, which brought together women from student services across the university to discuss issues, which concerned women in the workplace. In the first year, we consistently had 40 to 60 women from across campus attend powerful sessions. Even after my departure in 2013, the Women in Student Affairs group continued, which is a clear sign of the need for women to be supported and engaged in community across those student affairs and student services units.
From July 2014 to July 2017, I served as chair for the Women in Housing Network for the Association of College and University Housing Officers – International (ACUHO-I). This network is committed to bringing women in the association together around topics important to women in our field. The women I interacted with yearned to learn from other women in advanced administrator positions such as the SSAO role. This role has been a significant professional experience for me, as it provided the opportunity for me to use the influence afforded to me to create sustainable and meaningful organizational change for women in student housing.

I feel honored to have had these experiences, not merely for the experience itself, but also because of how they have led me to think more critically about my role in the academy and in my field of student affairs. I learned I am not only interested and invested in a strengthened pipeline for Latina student affairs administrators, but I am similarly curious about the experience of Latina leaders currently holding the position of SSAO. I am interested in how the Latina SSAO experiences her position, her influence, and the positional power and influence, which comes along with their position.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research allows for a deeper exploration of the different phenomena of human comportment within all bounded contexts. Qualitative and reflective methods help researchers learn more about the human experience, and the realities of individual knowledge. While qualitative research has existed since the early 1900s, it was not until the early 1970s and 1980s that the research became recognized as a true theoretical paradigm for research (Flick, 2009). Qualitative research can help us understand how individuals make sense of their life settings.
Qualitative research, overall, studies the knowledge and practices of participants involved in a study (Flick, 2009). It is concerned with and gives value to the subjective viewpoints of participating individuals. Further, qualitative research is an approach helpful to explore the meaning making of individuals or groups within a specific social or human problem (Creswell, 2013). Thus, the qualitative researcher is inductive in nature, processing and making meaning of any data collected from a group or individual (Creswell, 2015).

Creswell (2015) suggested a qualitative approach may be useful when a researcher wishes to “empower participants to tell their stories” or “understand the [context] or settings in which participants in a study address a problem or issue” (p. 40). To understand the core of the experiences of the participants, I empowered them to share their stories through the lens of their professional setting in higher education and as Latina SSAOs.

As outlined by Creswell (2014), qualitative inquiry is helpful when a researcher does not know the different factors to test or the research has not been conducted before. The studies of Latina SSAOs are few and therefore a qualitative inquiry is used for this study. In this inquiry, I explored the gaps in the literature on Latina leadership to provide guidelines and support to future Latinas in leadership and those who are in positions of power and influence.

Since contextual conditions are critical components to the study, it was conducted through a constructivist lens. Crotty (1998) defined this concept to be interpreted as individual “meaning is not discovered but constructed” and where actual meaning is possible only when “consciousness engages with” the world and objects (p. 43). Given this definition, the context, experiences, and the meaning making of Latina SSAOs is best understood through the implementation of testimonios, which is meant to disrupt the traditional use of narrative inquiry. Albeit similar to narrative inquiry, testimonio act as a form of resistance to narrative inquiry.
based on the lens of interpretation. More specifically, critics of narrative inquiry noted particular issue with the power relationship related to the interpretation of narrative inquiry. The testimonio, thus, became the way to challenge existing standards of “voice, authenticity, interpretive authority, and representation” (Chase, 2005, p. 655), and turn the tables on who is able to unearth meaning of personal stories.

Therefore, to collect the aforementioned real-life experiences, I used the LatCrit informed methodology of testimonios centered in borderlands epistemology.

Epistemology

Epistemology defines where knowledge is constructed. Hofer (2001) posits specifically epistemological foundations are based on, “beliefs about the definition of knowledge, how knowledge is constructed, how knowledge is evaluated, where knowledge resides, and how knowing occurs” (Hofer, p. 355).

Generally, qualitative inquiry resides within a constructivist or social constructivist view. These views impart how individuals come to understand their world develops because of their immediate environment. Crotty (1998) identified that human beings may construct meanings about their world simply because of interactions with it. Commonly, people will devise those meanings based on their own social perspectives and outlooks. This study followed an ontological position, which is interchangeably described as constructivist, subjectivism, or interpretivism, and “asserts social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors” (Bryman, 2012).

Therefore, because of Latina SSAO experiences, the following epistemology is offered to provide a lens by which the reality of the participants’ experience can be understood. This study
focused on the experiences of Latina SSAOs through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT),
Latinx/a/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and Intersectionality. However, the spirit of
borderland theories was central to the hermeneutical process to discover personally constructed
meanings from the testimonios of Latina SSAOs.

Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist writer, considered her identities as a queer Chicana
feminist as she navigated the world, and documented her experiences. In her work, she
described her identity as a Mexican-American woman, and others who identify similarly, as
women who live on the frontera or within the borderlands. She described the borderlands as a
“dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined
place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. The prohibited and forbidden
are its inhabitants” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 3). This she viewed as a constructed line where Mexican-
American women shift in between identities.

She described the experience in the following poem:

Because I, a mestiza,

Continually walk out of one culture

And into another,

Because I am in all cultures at the same time,

alma entre dos mundos, tres, cuatro,

me Zumba la cabeza con lo contradictorio.

Estoy norteada por todas las voces que me hablan simultaneamente (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. 377)

In her work, Gloria Anzaldúa drew parallels to Latina experiences in the United States in
connection to geopolitical strain. As Latinas move through the world, it is likely their
experiences push them to feel a part of the same borderland Anzaldúa experienced.
This frontera can be further defined as a place where the multiple identities exist adjacent to another realized space, which Anzaldúa called a “meztiza identity”. This identity is a space where the individual must move between those identities and where they can acknowledge their “other-ness” (Anzaldúa, 1987). Additionally, there is a call to Mexican-American Women or Chicanas to embrace a new consciousness, which is specifically women-centered and involves the overarching concept of a new identity, which acknowledges difference, and demands change (Anzaldúa, 1987).

Borderlands theory as an epistemology is based in Latina feminist epistemologies and seeks to understand Latinas who live within multiple cultures and identities. In this study, I used the notion of storytelling to capture testimonios of Latina SSAOs to theorize about their experiences in their own personal and professional borderland.

Testimonios and Narrative Inquiry

As a methodology to empower Latinas, testimonios allows women to create their own knowledge and acknowledge they are the center of their lived experience. Therefore, testimonios are a form of narrative inquiry originated by the Latina Feminist Group (LFG), which fundamentally disrupts traditional ideologies of what, “counts as theory and who can engage in theorizing (LFG, p. x).” The 2001 series titled, Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios, introduced storytellers from various Latin American countries, which existed in the, “borderlands of a reconfigured Latin(a) America (LFG, p. x).”

Moreover, testimonios can be composed of what LFG defined as papelitos guardados, which literally translated means “guarded documents”. Philosophically, papelitos guardados signify stored feelings, memories, and stories often created out of times of conflict or difficulty,
which can be shared with others (LFG, p. 1). Within this paradigm, the process of telling these stories is seen as a way to begin the process of self-empowerment through recollection and retelling. A scholar in the areas of Critical Race Theory (CRT), Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), and the method of testimonios, Delgado Bernal (2012), describes testimonios as, “…an approach, which incorporates political, social, historical, and cultural histories that accompany one’s life experiences as a means to bring about change through consciousness-raising. [Stories] of marginalization [are] re-centered to elicit social change (p. 363).”

Testimonios are a way for individuals to write or tell what they know best and create meaning and potential political resistance to their lived experience. Clandinin & Connelly (1990) suggested narrative inquiry is similarly centered to create new meaning, and crafts significance for the storyteller(s). Additionally, narrative inquiry is beneficial when trying to capture stories, and also compare the story with the overall social construction of their lived experience up until that point.

Reissman (2008) suggests that a participant will use language to communicate meaning, and therefore similar to testimonio, the stories of the participants are key to unearth the power and meaning of the stories shared. The conflict between narrative inquiry and testimonio as a methodology lies within the critical constructs of interpretation. Testimonio is intended to put the interpretation in the words of the participants giving power to their voice while simultaneously point to systems of oppression leading to the experience (Chase, 2005). Additionally, many traditional methodologies, such as narrative inquiry, are rooted in colonization, which is problematic, in the critical sense, because this method allows for structures or persons with the most power and privilege to determine the validity of and what constitutes data. This inevitably removes the power from the words and stories of
underrepresented people (Scheurich & Young, 1997). As the researcher, I had to adjust for this within the analysis of this study which will be discussed further in chapter three. My experience and identity as a Latina may deter potential hegemonic and patriarchal interpretations. Therefore, I documented and mirrored the meanings of participants during interviews by asking clarifying questions of their learning, and during data analysis by using constant comparison analysis, which is based in reflection and comparing words to the related wonderments of the testimonios.

However, the foundation of narrative inquiry methodology points to experiences as a key component to understand Latina SSAOs in this study. Connelly and Clandinin and (1990) reiterate the focus on the notion of experiences. They believed, as the philosopher John Dewey did that, “experience is both personal and social” (p. 2). Furthermore, they focus on the concept of how any past experience is used as a conduit for future learning and posit the two are fundamentally tied. Testimonios as a methodology is similar in that there is a tie to future learning, however it is more deeply tied to past experiences, which inform future learning in the context of Latinas within systems of injustice (Huber, 2012).

Testimonios analyzed through the framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and LatCrit, can lead researchers to develop counter-stories or counter-narratives, which seek to redistribute the power of dominant culture and make room for meaning created by communities of color (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Solorzano and Yasso (2002), focus on experiential knowledge as fundamental to legitimize the experiences of persons of color, and suggest non-traditional methods of collection such as, “storytelling, family histories, and other fees, scenarios, parables, cuentos, testimonios, chronicles, and narratives (p. 26, Solorzano & Yosso, 2002).”
Participant Selection

I used network selection based on known Latinas who identify as the SSAO of their campus by using personal contacts and professional acquaintances (deMarrais, 2004). These personal contacts and professional acquaintances are higher education and student affairs administrators with networks, which span many years of experience. After six months of searching for participants willing to participate in the study, I solidified three SSAOs. Once identified, each of the participants received an email (See Appendix A) about the study with an invitation to participate. The criteria for selection included:

1. The participant identifies as Latina,
2. The participant is/or has been employed at a college or university as the SSAO,

and

3. The participant has been in their SSAO role for at least one year.

A large part of the reason for the study is the lack of Latina SSAOs in higher education. It was not impossible to access this study population; however, it required the use of networking and higher education social media resources to identify Latina SSAOs. Once participants were selected, they received an email, which outlined the timeline for the study and the sequence of proposed next steps (See Appendix G).

Data Collection Protocol

After the study was reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), they determined the study to be exempt. Consequently, I began the process of network selection to find participants for this study. As participants were identified the process for data collection began and aligned with the protocols listed below in this section.
Electronic Questionnaire. To collect data, I first emailed the participants an online questionnaire to collect participants’ demographic, educational, and background data. This helped me to identify differences later based on educational, or background information. The questionnaire included two questions about their experiences as SSAOs (See Appendix B and Figure 1).

I used the responses for questions in the electronic questionnaire and coded for themes using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model of thematic analysis. Since the questionnaire interview responses came directly from the participants, there was no need to send the questions back to the participants to ensure accuracy, because they have shared data in their own words. Once the participants completed the email questionnaire portion of the interview, I asked participants to engage in a Critical Junctures/Timeline activity. Participants signed up for a Zoom technology one-on-one, semi-structured interview with me.

Critical Junctures/Timeline Activity. Prior to the Zoom or in-person interview, I shared with each participant the timeline activity information to peruse or complete, and the interview questions (See Appendices D and E). As part of the interview, I asked each participant to plot certain critical junctures on the timeline worksheet (Appendix C).

Prior to the start of this activity, I asked if there was anything that needed to be plotted on the timeline, which fell chronologically before they began their career, or their SSAO role. After this, I guided the participants through a series of questions to help identify key points within the timeline and created the timeline together (Appendix C).

Once complete, I followed up with additional probing questions:

1. Can you point to one critical juncture that you believe has given you the strength of character or the mindset to succeed in your current role?
2. Which critical juncture was the most challenging but sharpened your skill level or resiliency the most?

3. What advice or suggestions do you have for women who wish to pursue a similar role?

During the critical junctures/timeline activity, I took detailed field notes to help understand the timeline clearly at a later time. All electronic or physical timelines for the critical junctures activity were gathered as part of the collection of data.

Semi-structured Interviews. After the critical junctures activity took place, participants utilized the remaining time for a semi-structured interview. According to Merriam (2009), semi-structured interviews are accompanied by a “list of questions and issues to be explored” (p. 90), not necessarily by a determined set of questions. As a result of this method, the researcher is able to adjust questions as themes or topics emerge throughout the interview.

Seidman (2013) discussed the importance of the lived experience and identified the only way to truly create a phenomena is to take time to reflect upon those lived experiences. Similarly, Seidman (2013) expressed the need for the researcher to guide participants through the interview and the words they use to respond. To do so, the researcher must be thorough and committed to consistent language as well as have an appreciation for language, and understand that it is only through “language [that we connect] to some of the basic fundamentals of interviewing research” (Seidman, 2013, p. 18). It is important for in-depth interviews to occur because it allows for a deep understanding of another person’s perspective, point of view, or experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

I was attentive and listened to the significant meaning the participants were applying to their lived experiences throughout the interview. This is a very important part of my role as a
researcher since the critical nature of this study is focused on allowing participants to define meaning or themselves. Therefore, predefined questions were asked during the in-depth interviews; however, these questions had the potential to change mid-research to fall in line with the research wonderments (Creswell, 2013). According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), three types of questions exist during in-depth interviews: main questions, probes, and follow-up questions (See Appendices E and Figure 2). Participants answered the main questions, which were predetermined. Probing questions allow the researcher to help the participant expound on their current topic. Follow-up questions serve to help the researcher clarify important information on behalf of the participant.

Interviews were recorded via Zoom technology and transcribed through a mobile application called RevRecorder. Patton (2015) suggested there are six types of interview questions to capture qualitative data more effectively. These types of questions are: Experience and Behavior, Opinion and values, Feeling, Knowledge, Sensory, and Background/demographic. To capture testimonios of Latina SSAOs it was best to use experience and behavior questions because these questions allowed the participants to, “elicit behaviors, experiences, and actions that would have been observable had the observer been present” (p. 444). However, questions about opinions and values, feelings, knowledge, sensory, and background/demographic were also asked given the need to capture full stories from the participants. Seidman (2006) suggested interviews allow for the preservation of all words, which are needed for analysis by the researcher. The interview questions can be found in Appendix C. Once all critical junctures/timeline activities and one-on-one interviews were completed, the data was transcribed and coded for themes.
Data Analysis

The power of my lens as a Latina student affairs administrator is expended to counter the oppressive nature of narrative inquiry methodology to further align with the goals and outcomes of a testimonio methodology. Conscious of this, I took extensive field notes during the interviews to reflect back on the meaning the participants attributed to their lived experiences. It was important for me to ask follow up questions and pay close attention so that through the use of constant comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), which aims to be an iterative process that compares and builds upon participant data through a reflective process. Clarke and Braun (2006, 2013) posit that data is not an emergent process and the researcher must be deeply involved in the iterative decision making process of analysis. My engagement was important in this process because of the critical nature of the study, the need to not bring about meaning that was not implied by the participants, and to connect the analysis back to the theoretical framework and wonderments of this study on Latina SSAOs.

Prior to analysis of the interviews, I recorded and transcribed the interviews with a mobile application service called RevRecorder. Seidman (2006) stated the researcher should not attempt to code or analyze data before all of the interviews have been conducted for the study. This stops any temptation for the researcher to guide the remainder of the interviews. Braun and Clarke (2006) identified a six-step process for thematic analysis and suggested Phase 1 as the familiarization of the data by the researcher. To do so, they recommended the researcher either transcribe their data or practice repeated reading in order to ensure the data is represented accurately. Therefore, I ensured all transcribed data was properly read before moving forward to the data analysis stage.
One critical piece to note with this study is the juxtaposition of a critical lens of the racialized experience of Latinas and a structured thematic analysis. For this reason, the narrative analysis was conducted in two separate manners to be true to the spirit of counter-story telling, which in this study consists of testimonios. Fundamentally, CRT postulates that constructed knowledge based on the experiences of people of color is valid and critical to understand, analyze, and teach about racialized experiences and oppression (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Therefore, as suggested to further legitimize the experiences of persons of color, a non-traditional method to collect information such as, “storytelling, family histories, and other fees, scenarios, parables, cuentos, testimonios, chronicles, and narratives” (p. 26, Solorzano & Yosso, 2002) was used.

Once all data were collected and transcribed, I began the process of coding. Because of the critical nature of the study I used an inductive and deductive approach to preliminary coding. A deductive approach was used to identify critical concepts of LatCrit, and Intersectionality, based on the research wonderments to create aligned a priori codes during initial coding. An inductive approach was used along with a ‘reflexive thematic analysis’ (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This approach allowed for in vivo themes and codes to be generated through an iterative decision making process.

To help with the inductive approach to coding, Braun and Clarke (2006) identified “generating initial codes” (p. 88) as Phase two of the process to proper thematic analysis. They suggest codes help the researcher to find organization in their data by grouping. This is a reflective process in which the researcher finds meanings and patterns among data and pulls them together to create categories in order to report on the findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Coding data is different from the development of themes from the data since themes are
| Wonderment 1: | What meaning do Latina SSAOs ascribe to their positions as senior-level administrators?

1. Please plot any mistakes you have made, which taught you lessons that allowed you to learn more about yourself as a professional.

| Wonderment 2: | How do race and gender influence how Latina SSAOs acquire and enact power in their roles?

1. Please plot a moment where you had to assert your authority to get something accomplished. What were your perceived consequences?
2. Please plot a moment where you had to break through a barrier by taking a significant risk.

| Wonderment 3: | What specific past and present catalysts do the student affairs officers perceive as most beneficial in positioning and supporting their work?

1. Please plot one (or two) experience(s), position(s), or time(s) in your life and/or career path that prepared you most for your current SSAO position what would that be?

**Figure 1: Wonderments Aligned with Critical Juncture/Timeline Plotting Questions**

| Wonderment 1: | What meaning do Latina SSAOs ascribe to their positions as senior-level administrators?

1. What do you believe is the most important component of your role as SSAO?
2. It is often lonely at the top, under which conditions or situations do you feel the most alone?

| Wonderment 2: | How do race and gender influence how Latina SSAOs acquire and enact power in their roles?

1. Talk about your experience being a Latina in a position of power in higher education, and what does it look like for you each day?
2. Many women experience the concept of a double bind; have you seen or experienced any examples of this?
3. Why do you believe there are so few Latina SSAOs across higher education in the United States?

| Wonderment 3: | What specific past and present catalysts do the student affairs officers perceive as most beneficial in positioning and supporting their work?

1. Do you believe you were prepared to take on the SSAO role?

**Figure 2: Wonderment Aligned Questions with Critical Juncture Timeline Activity**
intended to be wider in scope (Braun & Clarke, p. 88). I read the transcribed data with fervor and identified all codes, which appeared throughout the data set.

Dey (1993) posits it is important to categorize data by themes. He described how to group the data based on criteria determined by the researcher to be important themes. Once I was ready to find themes in the data, I used the codes which were identified, and combined them to form predominant themes. Braun and Clark’s (2006) Phase three incorporates the action of “searching for themes.” They suggested once a researcher starts to develop connections, they should use a thematic map to start to develop connections between various codes. The thematic process map allows the researcher to build bridges and connections between codes and build upon them to develop overall themes. Essentially, all codes must become either a theme or a sub-theme within a theme. This is how Braun and Clarke have offered a way for the researcher to organize and make sense of all of their data. I did this using a computer application called DeDoose.

Theme reviews (Braun & Clark, 2006) is Phase 4 of the process; it requires the researcher to review if the patterns suggested in the themes are coherent and consistent with what the data proposes. During this phase, it is also suggested to re-read the entire data set to ensure themes are accurate and every piece of data has been accounted for. I ensured the proper review of emergent themes and their relevance to the data set from which they were extracted.

Once a review of the themes was completed, then Phase 5, which is to define and name the themes, began to take shape. During this phase, the researcher must write a detailed analysis for each theme and begin to develop the story within the data, which relates to the research wonderments. Lastly, Phase 6 is the process to produce a report, which ultimately tells the story of the data the researcher has collected. As a result of these final steps, I concluded this dissertation study with Chapter 5 to review and make sense of the story that was shared.
Procedures

The information in this section states sequenced steps to follow to conduct the research from the development of research instruments to the data analysis.

1. Strategize. To plan for the research includes a process to (a) identify a problem through the extant research of Latinas in Higher Education. (b) develop wonderments to guide the study (c) review literature to determine gaps in the research and to undergird the study (d) determine sampling needs, and develop a pipeline for the sample (e) ensure all ethical research standards are followed.

2. Create Data Collection Instruments. The electronic questionnaire protocol, a critical junctures/timeline activity guide and guiding questions for the semi-structured one-on-one interview will be created (See Appendices B, C, D).

3. Collection of Data. To complete this area the researcher will (a) take measures to recruit and communicate with potential participants about the study and the intended timeline, (b) schedule in person or Zoom one-on-one interviews to walk through the critical junctures activity and ask semi-structured interview questions. (c) describe the field notes I will take and the fact that the in person or Zoom one-on-one time will either be recorded with a handheld recorder or through the Zoom recording function. (e) send out all electronic questionnaires and conduct all interviews for data.

4. Data Analysis. Conduct analysis of relevant information collected and follow the Data analysis protocol within Chapter 3.

5. Document Findings. To document and confirm findings it is important to (a) write an overall report, (b) revise as needed (d) prepare findings for Chapter 4.
Trustworthiness

Developing a research process, which is ethical, transparent and seeks out multiple perspectives is a way to determine trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lichtman, 2013). It may be important for readers and researchers alike to understand the stances associated with validating good qualitative research, including other parallel ways to evaluate research. In order to provide trustworthiness in this research study, I outlined a clear and transparent process by which the participants were selected, and the instruments developed. Further, I outlined the interview process and questions, as well as the way I planned to analyze data. Additionally, I was clear about my role as the researcher and the effects on the study. Four components to determine trustworthy research include the following: dependability, credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Dependability

Dependability is seen as equivalent to reliability for qualitative research. For research to be dependable it must acknowledge any changes, which could occur in the study. For the purpose of this study, I identified variables in participants’ mood, and technological concerns, as well as acknowledged the circumstances on the campuses of the SSAO during their interview. Additionally, I provided a detailed account and step-by-step process description to ensure the study could be understood clearly and duplicated as needed.

Credibility

Parallel to validity, credibility has to do with the researcher’s accurate congruence between their analyses of the data collection, and the participants’ intended meaning of their
lived experience. Because the congruence between participant and researcher analysis is critical to the study’s credibility, it is important to highlight any bias or hermeneutic considerations on behalf of the researcher for the study. As it relates to this particular study, I shared earlier in this chapter an in-depth depiction of my background and how it connects with this research study.

Transferability

As it relates to transferability (or generalizability or external validity) it is important for the researcher to note transferability is not determined by the original researcher but rather by others choosing to apply the knowledge to a different setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the context of this study, I provided “sufficient descriptive data” (p. 298) to make the study transferable to a different situation.

Confirmability

Confirmability in qualitative research evaluation philosophies is grounded in the “extent to which [the researcher has] captured what is really going on (in someone’s life, in someone’s mind, in a situation) (Willig 2008, p. 155).”

I utilized several peers and colleagues to evaluate the emergent themes to confirm those themes and eliminate potential for researcher bias. This is called Peer Debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1989) and is a strategy for trustworthiness. I shared with peer debriefers my possible areas for bias. This strategy required for the peer debriefers and I to discuss, early and often, the findings, interpretations, and conclusions at which I arrived. All peer debriefers signed an outside reviewer form (See Appendix H). To be mindful of the method of testimonios and the theoretical conceptual framework of this study, peer debriefers were limited to a) other Latinas with similar
lived experiences, or b) women of any racial background with high aptitude to understand the constructs of CRT or LatCrit.

True to the core of testimonios, the Latina Feminist Group (LFG) posited testimonios gave Latinas the ability to, “translate themselves for each other (LFG, 11).” I believe the aforementioned processes minimized the disruption of this central belief.

Ethical Concerns

During the process to develop the sample for the research, a letter was sent out to potential participants, which discussed the voluntary nature of participation, the right to privacy during the process, and the right to confidentiality before the study began, throughout the data collection, and during analysis and sharing (See Appendix A). To protect the confidentiality of participants I guarded all audit trail information in a safe and locked location. I also changed the names of the participants in the study to support anonymity. I obtained informed consent from each participant to be clear about the steps in the research process, even though the study was exempt through the Institutional Review Board.

Chapter Summary

A qualitative inquiry provided the type of rich data from Latina SSAOs about their career experiences, specifically as it relates to the pathway to their current role as the SSAO at their institution. The outcome of the study illustrates how the women have come to terms with the power and influence they possess in their roles through shared testimonios. The significance of this study is to provide Latinas who aspire to be SSAOs and other student affairs professionals interested in a strong pipeline of Latinas in the field of student affairs a foundation to undergird new initiatives to strengthen the experience of Latinas in the student affairs workforce. All
women in student affairs, whether they identify as Latina or not, have much to gain from the lived experiences of those who have reached what can be thought of as the pinnacle of the student affairs career experience. Further, as the methodology of testimonios suggests, my hope is for the outcome of the study to empower participants and readers to find strength and encouragement to own and navigate a SSAO executive space.

I have outlined in this chapter the method used for this qualitative study. Additionally, this chapter reviews the ways I ethically conducted a study, which is trustworthy in the field of qualitative research.

The women in this study shared testimonios through interviews, which included their stories of coming up through the student affairs ranks as Latinas, their experiences as Latina professionals in student affairs, their experience wielding the power and influence, which comes with being the highest-ranked SSAO position within their institution, and finally, their thoughts on the preparation they received for the SSAO role in particular. Through this study, I explored each of the participants’ stories and the experiences in their role through in-depth interviews and a timeline/critical junctures activity, which “culminate[s] in the essence of [their] experiences” (Creswell, 2013, p. 14). In Chapter 4, I share themes and findings through individual testimonios of the participants, to guide aspiring Latina SSAOs.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

This chapter narrates the experiences of three Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO) in the form of testimonios. Their story conveys the truths of their experiences in their roles, and allows them to share the struggles and successes of their careers and life. The participants share the experience of leading in the SSAO role, which for each have been tests of resilience and tenacity. As well, they each share the experiences with attaining and wielding influence and power in their roles. Each testimonio highlights how race and gender play a part in their journey, the foundational support, which undergirds their strength, and thoughts about Latinas in higher education leadership.

After each testimonio, the major themes from each testimonio are included, which appeared outside of the a priori codes, which exist as a result of the wonderments identified for this study. Next, the findings and analysis related to the wonderments are addressed. To protect confidentiality, some of the quotations have been altered. I conclude with a summary of the study’s findings. Each participant was given a pseudonym, and the names, locations, and the states or regions of the participants’ institutions were similarly changed in order to protect their identity.

Laura, Christine, and Katia shared their testimonio in alignment with the purpose of testimonio, which is to disrupt the traditional ways of gathering stories, and to elevate the critical components of race and gender associated with the experience of these three Latinas. Using testimonio as a methodology gives voice to these Latinas’ individual stories to light the path for other Latinas who aspire to a SSAO role. Laura, Christine, and Katia’s testimonios highlight the
importance of family, education, and relationship. The individual unique themes, which emerged within each of the participants’ testimonios remain exclusive to each participant. A cross comparison of themes among participants will not occur for this study. As described in Chapter 3, it is important to maintain the integrity of the participants’ story by allowing their story to serve as truth without blending it with the words and thoughts of the other participants. Their stories are uniquely their own.

Data Collection

After being exempt by the Institutional Review Board (IRB), I immediately sent email communication to members of the higher education and student affairs community. Through network selection, I found three participants for the study. Given the few Latinas in the SSAO role across the nation, and the demands on the women in the role, it took a significant amount of time to find the three participants.

The participants then agreed upon the protocol for the study, I scheduled a time for a ZOOM interview. Additionally, I sent out the resources needed for the study, inclusive of the electronic questionnaire, the timeline activity, and a copy of the interview questions for participants to review (See Appendices D and E). As part of the interview, I asked each participant to plot critical junctures on a timeline worksheet (Appendix C) ahead of time, or indicated they could complete the task on the ZOOM interview.

Prior to starting the interview, the participant and I reviewed the timeline activity questions and plotted the critical junctures. While plotting important points for the timeline activity, I also took detailed field notes to understand the timeline clearly at a later time.
At the conclusion of the timeline activity, we transitioned into the semi-structured interview portion of our time together. Once we transitioned to the interview, I guided the participants through the determined set of questions. I was attentive and listened to how the participants shared their stories. When necessary I identified follow up questions to help bring clarity to the topic. As Seidman (2006) suggested, the recorded interviews allowed for the preservation of words needed for the final analysis.

The interviews were recorded with a telephone application called RevRecorder and were transcribed at the conclusion of the interview. There were not any unusual circumstances during the data collection process. Once transcribed, each individual transcription was uploaded into a coding technology called Dedoose to code for major themes.

Organization of Testimonios

The organization of the findings is important for the reader. For each participant there is a section dedicated specifically to their testimonio. This section has between two and three individual major themes, which culminates with a final section entitled: My Place and Power: Race, Gender, and Power.

The resulting two sections under each testimonio are dedicated to my interpretation as the researcher. The sections identify a thematic analysis of in vivo codes identified through the inductive coding process to view any outlier codes, which appear outside of the a priori codes. Finally, each participant section ends with an analysis related to the research wonderments as the fundamental a priori codes driven by the research wonderments.
Laura’s Testimonio

Laura is a SSAO who has served various campuses in similar roles. Throughout her career, she found success as a result of her laser focus on student success and the power of caring for others. Laura graduated from a medium-sized private school in the southeast and went on to finish a terminal professional degree, as well. She served as a Vice President of Student Affairs for several large public research universities and a small private elite institution. Her background is in a helping profession, and those ideals were central to her success as a Student Affairs professional.

Laura's life and career are of a determined and empowered first-generation Latina SSAO. Her intellect, ethic of care for students and staff, a visionary leadership style, and the encouraging life and words of her parents fuel her success. Her victories are her own, but the lessons and the impression she has provided are a gift to the world.

Laura is a beloved mother, wife, mentor, and leader. She fights for what is right and uses her influence to open the doors for students who may not otherwise have the opportunity to be in college. Her love for family and education drives her; her commitment to excellence sustains her, and her care for the human experience defines her. Laura is a one of a kind of leader whose inspiration knows no bounds.

I Am My Family: Past Catalyst for Success in Her Role

It was never a question Laura would pursue higher education. In particular, she attributes credit to her father's belief that education could get anyone far in life. Laura additionally attributes her family's influence as a catalyst for her success and support of her life's work. Laura stated:
The power of education was pretty much instilled in us, and the importance of it, in terms of how it opens doors and provides opportunities. It's just a very powerful vehicle to get from point A to point B or C...Then I had a lot of encouragement, particularly from my father, who believed ... He had two daughters and believed that we needed to go as far as we needed to go with our degrees. (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Laura’s mother was also a great source of inspiration, and her influence came at a time when women did not have the same opportunities as Latinas do today. Her mother’s story served as an additional catalyst for Laura’s drive to excel in her endeavors, and she described how her mother’s influence as pivotal:

My mother was the same, but she was in a different role. Unfortunately, as a woman, they were born in 1916, 1915, so we're talking about way, way, way back then. When she finished the eighth grade, they didn't allow her to finish school. I mean, to continue in school, and she wanted to. That was really hard for her. [she was a] very smart woman. While she was very encouraging, I think it was also hard for her. But my father was very, very clear that he wanted us to succeed and he believed that we could, pretty much said, 'Don't let anything get in the way.' I think that helped a lot. (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Laura described many other family values having to do with remembering her familial roots. She recalls her experience as a first-generation student and reflects empathy in her practices as a Student Affairs professional towards students with similar experiences. Laura spent a large portion of her career creating pathways for first-generation students to succeed in college, which is rooted in the advice of her family and, in particular, her father, whom Laura gained so much confidence. She says the following of his experience:
… he reminded us, pretty much on a daily basis, because he too was a leader in government, and just in many ways, [...] that it was really important never to forget, knowing where we come from, but also that you need to make sure that you're helping others that are following you., and that we need to also help others, open doors for them (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

The lessons Laura learned from her family are a part of the reason she chose her field of work and found her way to serve higher education. Throughout her career, she has always been the person who “gets it done” and, as a result, was highly sought after and greatly admired by local and national peers. A combination of her tenacity and strong value system gave her an entry point into Student Affairs roles. She sought to say yes to opportunities, which would allow her to do good for the students she served. Laura knew she could have influence in her role and talked about it openly,

That's how I ended up in education…Ultimately, I think, when I was asked to take on more administrative roles and left clinical roles, I really saw the advantages of that, and being able to have the ability to make changes with policies, protocols, procedures…that [opened] more doors for students and provide those opportunities. Every institution […] I've worked, that's something that I've been pretty focused on. That's where the power comes in, the how do you use your positive power and do it so that you help others get to where they want to go. I think that would be the biggest influence…(Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).
I am a Thoughtful Leader: Ascribing Meaning to her SSAO Role

Laura did not set out to be a Vice President for Student Affairs in her career, and she is often surprised she made the transition successfully. With every growing opportunity offered to her, Laura gained recognition for high competence among peers and university leadership. Laura continued to focus on helping her students and doing her job well, and was often surprised at the recognition she received. She recalls:

I'll be honest with you, I see all these people say, ‘I want to be vice president for student affairs.’ I'm like, ‘Huh?’ I was a director outside of student affairs, and I was fine doing that. I continuously got asked to do more. [...] Then all of a sudden, they promoted [me] to associate VP. Then something happened in the organization, and they asked me to be the acting vice president. (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Laura remembers being given only 24 hours to accept her first Vice Presidency. It is a timeframe, which would surprise even the strongest and most confident of professionals. She says about the experience:

I didn’t have much time to think about it. They just said, 'We need you to do this, and we'll give you overnight to think about it.' I was like, 'Overnight? What?' But I went ahead and took it. I was truly naïve, or I was pretty confident that no matter what, I would figure it out (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Laura often reflects on the decision to take this initial position. She feels more confident today than at that moment and knows her confidence has grown as a result. Her inner courage has guided her through her career. Laura saw each life challenge or opportunity as a path for
more learning, and accepted, over time, nobody can ever prepare for the challenges, which lie ahead. She explains it simply:

In many ways, even though I think I never saw it as a risk, but I think it was a risk to take on something that was unfamiliar to me. I mean, I wasn't raised in student affairs. […]

Although, there is quite a bit of overlap when it comes to student development and social justice. I mean, there’s a lot of underlying, foundational values that I think overlap both professions and looking at students’ potential, and trying to make sure we activate that so that they reach their dreams. So taking on a vice presidency when I really didn’t know all the areas. Of course, you never know all those areas. It’s a myth if you think somehow you’re supposed to know every single area that’s going to be reporting to you before you can become a vice president (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Laura was poised to succeed in the SSAO role because of her willingness to learn and grow with the positions she held. She discovered more about herself as a leader once in the role. Over time, Laura found a leadership and work style, which worked for her. Laura began to understand the magnitude of the good she could do in her role. She stated:

... I discovered more about who I was, and my potential was in terms of a leader. I discovered things that I was willing to do and advocate for. I also was very strategic in my thinking and discovered that as well, and how important that was in terms of setting up a vision, and a mission, and bringing everyone together under that umbrella… I really did unify the division. Then try to advocate for more resources, which was not easy. So I discovered my interpersonal skills, my ability to persuade, and my effectiveness really did help do some really good things for, not only the division but also for students, more
Learning new technical skills for different jobs was never a problem for Laura, who had always been a fast learner. Moreover, she was quick to learn and develop philosophical approaches, which led to cohesive organizational cultures and lasting impacts. What she never had to learn, because it is inherent to her character, was having compassion for others. Laura says she has always worked hard, but more importantly was, "empathetic and compassionate, and [had] a sincere care for not only students but for the staff (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).”

Laura takes great heart in the importance of caring for others. She believes it is critical to care about the human experience and to remember and stay mindful of the lives with whom she works. As a SSAO, Laura notices compassion for the experience of others may be the missing link to empower employees to be their best. She encourages others to be caring.

Be caring. I think that's one thing that sometimes we forget that we have to show that we care. I think oftentimes, leaders don't have time for that or they just rush through [the] present. I think it's really important to care for others and show interest in their life.

Fortunately… I listen pretty well. So I keep their stories pretty much in my mind and check in on them if their mother is not well or whatever, right? That goes a long way. When I hear somebody had a baby or somebody had [a] birthday…, I send them a note and wish them well. They have lives, right? We have to acknowledge the fact that [they're] not only there to work, but also they have lives that matter to them and I want them to get that they matter to me (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).
Laura considers doing the right thing in her role is essential to her position. As a leader who is committed to student success, she has found herself in positions where she had to navigate extreme politics to advocate for students. Her steadfast commitment to create environments where all students, especially underrepresented students, would feel safe is the driver for her fearlessness. While working in a conservative state, Laura recalls a moment, which put her leadership to the test in her SSAO role.

I remember one time I was trying to protect Muslim students from this pretty significant email that was sent out by some other students and employing that they were terrorists. They were frightened to death on campus, and so I had to make sure that they felt supported. I sent a note out about diversity and how important it is, and we need to support each other. All hell broke loose. All the conservatives in [the state] came after me (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Although the backlash grew to unprecedented levels, Laura was assured in her approach because “it was just wrong what the other students did [to the others] (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).” During this time, Laura was pressured by conservative politicians in the state to take back her words, which, of course, she did not do. Touted with emails, which may have broken most leaders, Laura stayed the course.

I was getting horrible emails. I finally got my Chief of Staff and I said, 'Unless somebody threatens my life, I'm not going to read them anymore.' Because they were sending [messages stating], 'Oh, you must have been celebrating when the [twin] towers were
blown up,’ … and [others] that [stated] I had somehow violated First Amendment Rights.

(Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

This event was a defining moment in Laura's career as it solidified her commitment to defend and protect the dignity of the students she served. This is, after all, part of the job. Laura is a leader in every sense of the word. Her ability to lead has reflected in the relationships she has built, in the letters and emails she receives from students who tell her she has changed their lives, and in the waves of change she confidently leads others through. For Laura, being a good leader is paramount to success in her role.

… I've tried to improve or just be a better leader, which means you set the course. You help people create that vision, and you rally everybody towards that same goal so that we can be together in unison to create something really marvelous for our students. I think that's really important. (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

After more than 20 years in the profession, Laura is aware of how she shows up as a leader and sees her leadership as central to a high functioning team. She also is aware that being surrounded by talented professionals who have their hearts and minds in the right places is another key component to the success of an organization. She knows she did not achieve what she has achieved alone.

I'm not much of a micromanager. And so, what I do is I say to them, 'This is what needs to happen. You have the talent.' If people veer off or there's a struggle, or they're finding it too challenging, then I'm certainly happy to support them in any way I can, but I try to let them do it in their own way as much as possible unless I think they're doing something
wrong or not in the best interest of students, but that doesn't happen very often. I try to be a good leader (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Shortly after taking on her first Vice Presidency, Laura discovered her true potential for leadership. She learned what she was capable of and what and how she would advocate for in her role. She shared:

I ...was very strategic in my thinking and discovered that as well, and how important that was in terms of setting up a vision, and a mission, and bringing everyone together under that umbrella, if you will with similar goals. I really did unify the division. Then try to advocate for more resources, which was not easy. So I discovered my interpersonal skills, my ability to persuade, and my effectiveness really did help do some really good things for, not only the division but also for students, more importantly (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Laura is humble to brag about her accomplishments but confident enough to share about the effort put forth on her behalf, which has made her proud to leave a legacy. She said confidently, “I believe that in every place I've been, I've left it hopefully in a better place (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019). Most people would agree that she did.

My Place and Power: Race, Gender, and Power

As a woman of color, Laura traversed challenging situations in her career. She has remained consistent and true to her values based on the foundation of support she recognizes as salient. Laura has not forgotten the power of the mentors who supported her along the way. She says about them:
...to be fair,…besides my family, I had a lot of wonderful colleagues, mentors, sponsors that also took that role on of encouraging me and making me take on more responsibility. Because if it had been up to me, I'm not so sure I would have pushed so hard, but I think I had people that believed in me throughout my career. The irony is that mostly [they] are men. They weren't women that pushed, and advocated, and sponsored me for new positions or on different roles. It started in my family, but I think to be fair, I've been very fortunate to have people that also encouraged me throughout my career (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Receiving support from male sponsors was a critical point in getting Laura to positions where she could enact power for positive outcomes. This support, however, was not merely given to her; it is clear she earned respect from those men who assisted to position her professionally. Laura expanded on her relationship with male power and privilege in the workplace by indicating that the men around the table never intimidate, nor does she consider them competition. Laura explains:

… I go back to my father. We had a really good relationship. I felt a lot of support from him, and I never viewed him as intimidating…Yes, you know you're the only one or one of two [women]. Some can be [intimidating], try to interrupt you, and some can listen, but oftentimes, I'll have to say, 'I need to finish my statement.' When … men try to interrupt. They usually back off…rarely am I intimated by the men (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).
Laura's confidence never waivers in spaces dominated by men. Her goal was not to compete against others but instead to do what is right for students. She explains below: Now, unless something happens… that's when I speak up and try to state my own argument. So I don't get very competitive with them, even though I think sometimes they are with each other. I just, I state my ground, and I say what I think is important… I don't find them as scary as some people do…(Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

The magnitude of Laura's professional life is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. Laura has paved the path for Latinas in Higher Education and understands the need for more women in general, and Latinas, specifically, to take on similar roles to hers. Laura said:

Well, there has to be a pipeline, and I know that NASPA's (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators) worked really hard in trying to develop young professionals to think about [pursuing vice presidency positions]. But that pipelining [is] really, really important especially with the changing demographics. I mean, more and more Latinas are going to college, and so we need that representation and role-modeling to come for this. We definitely have to have some program that is very intentionally developing our Latinas to seek these positions (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Respective to this effort, Laura role modeled national leadership by participating as faculty in institutes aimed to prepare women for the SSAO positions, and other institutes dedicated to the advancement of Latinx/a/o leadership in higher education. Importantly, she made it a point to make time for others through mentoring and role modeling. She acknowledged:
… a few [women] have reached out to me, and they want to be mentored by me, which I'm happy to do. I think we few that exist need to take on that role as well. It has to be a multi-prong approach. It can't just be one. NASPA plays a role. We play a role (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Laura believes in the power of supervision and the critical role it plays to further Latinas in the field of student affairs. It is a testament to her understanding of why it is essential to be aware of identities and the bigger picture through the supervision process. Supervisors play a role if they see someone that really is very good. They need to encourage them to get their doctorates and to pursue more experience and more opportunities and more responsibility. And so, it's just [a] matter of will, and make that a priority. I think that's also important (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Laura believes the pipeline of Latina Administrators can widen with the implementation of strategies like proper supervision, and dedicated professional development experiences from national organizations. She takes pride in knowing her presence serves as a representation for younger Latinas who aspire to the SSAO role.

I truly believe that as we move forward, more and more students are [of] Latina background. It would be really great if they could see people like us in these roles because I think it encourages them and it gives them hope and gets them ready to take on the mantle…(Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Laura believes it is similarly vital to have Latinas in positions of influence because, through the lens of her own cultural experience, she knows she has worked harder for students
like herself. Throughout Laura's career, she has remained true to the advice her father and mother provided and is committed to standing in her truth and using her power and influence to do good, and what is right for those she serves. Helping students, she says, “are the things that really bring true satisfaction. It reminds me why I do what I do and why I was meant to be in these positions (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).”

An example of this satisfaction came when she led an effort to begin a scholarship program for first-generation students in one of her SSAO positions. This experience was a pivotal moment in her career, as it allowed her influence to collide with a passion. With her intellect and support from others, she developed a sustainable program of which she is proud. She shares:

I started at [university removed] for first-generation students. [President] Bush had eliminated affirmative action and the president [of the university], which really believed in diversifying the student body, he said, ‘[Laura], we have to figure this out.’ At the time, I used to oversee financial aid, and so the director there and I figured a way to get more first-generation [students], which so many, high percent, were of color. We started a whole scholarship. To this day, it exists… it's really, really strong (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Ultimately, Laura's satisfaction comes from being a starch advocate for positive student experience for opening the door for all students. She lived, learned, and balanced oppressive systems to clear the path for others with less influence. Her heart remains true to helping to enhance students' lives, and the student experience.
It was just phenomenal to watch students, especially getting letters from them saying, 'This has changed the trajectory of not only my life, but my family to be able to come to [university], and get a degree from here, and be able to do so much with my life.' I still have some of those students visit me and call me or write to me. To me, that's probably the most satisfying. You know that you can have great influence as long as you do it the right way and with the right purpose. (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

**Researcher’s Interpretation of Laura’s Testimonial**

*Major Themes from Laura’s Testimonial*

Two significant themes emerged as a result of Laura’s testimonial analysis.

1. Community
2. Self Assurance

**Community**

Laura’s testimonial is grounded in stories of community. The community ranges from the community in family, community with her organizational teams, and in community with other campus administrators with whom she worked.

Community is an integral part of the Latinx/a/o culture because it traces back to family and the significant role family plays for the overarching Latinx/a/o community. When Laura discusses her status as a first-generation student, she does not make the statement for her alone. She described it in connection to everyone else in her family, including her siblings and her cousins. The statement was not made independently of the people she identified as family, and who had similar experiences to her. Her testimonial outlined a lifetime, remembering the values
of her family unit. She continues to live out a similar community with her own family, and in the connections, she maintained with her cousins and other family members. Family is a foundational part of who she is.

Similarly, Laura took those lessons of closeness and community to build strong teams as an administrator in Student Affairs. Laura places value on taking an interest in the lives of those who worked within her organization. Additionally, Laura needs to create an environment where the team knows their lives matter to her as a leader. Based on the family structure Laura describes in her testimonio, there are clear parallels that are reflected in how she cares for others in her professional work community.

Laura creates a familial closeness with students by providing the most excellent care and making changes for them, which assists them fundamentally and systematically. She intentionally creates teams, which serve as extended family units for one another and for the students they serve. Laura has high expectations for herself regarding the type of person she shows up to be for others. As a result, Laura hires people who are ethical, smart, caring, hard-working, and willing to push back on her ideas. She wants those around her who are willing to think of the experiences of students with marginalized identities, who would similarly care to make inclusive spaces for all.

Laura’s ability to work across divisional lines, and across the university to make things happen is a part of her focus on community. She focuses on building alliances so there is strong relationships at the core of exciting changes or innovations created for students.

…you have to make sure that you’re not working in a silo, so make sure you have strong relations with the provost, and certainly the VP for Business and Finance. When you become good partners with them, we make a lot of great things happen from building
residence halls to a brand new rec center to starting a program for first-generation students… […] I love that. I love when those things happen (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).

Community is the universal driver for the legacy Laura hopes to leave behind.

Self Assurance

Laura’s certain convictions are a theme, which appear time and time again in her testimonio. While some statements include thoughts of her fear of the unknown, the majority of the testimonio is a testament to Laura’s ability to be sure of who she is. As an administrator with a Latina background, she is well aware of what she is up against, but she is not afraid of those challenges. She has been steadfast in the values of her family, the foundation of her craft, and in her ability to find solutions to make every place better than how she found it.

During times of criticism, she listened to the voice within herself instead of what others were saying about her. She recalls during a difficult time telling her administrative assistant about hate email she was receiving, “Unless somebody threatens [her] life, I’m not going to read them anymore.” It is curious to think about this situation from a critical standpoint and wonder if she would have received the same treatment from rich, white, conservative men in the state if she would have identified similarly. Would the backlash have been different if they were not aware she was Latina?

She is in a league of her own and is confident in her own right to stand her ground on issues, which she believes in strongly. Her testimonio discussed her confidence to express herself freely around men in the boardroom. She says she was never someone to talk much in meetings. Sometimes when men would speak over her, she would kindly express to them it was her turn to
say what she needed to say. She is often one of the few women in the room, and almost always the only Latina. She found her voice in the margins but found a way to bring all of who she is to the table to help students.

Analysis Related to the Research Wonderments

What meaning do Latina SSAOs ascribe to their positions as senior-level administrators?

Laura believed her role was about using her influence to create environments where all students can learn and have access, and where professionals feel cared for and empowered to work hard for students. As well, Laura knows she is one of few Latinas across the country in the role, and therefore, finds it essential to role model excellence and to open the doors for other Latinx/a/os to the field of higher education.

Laura’s testimonio was complete with examples of her discussing ways in which she tries and has tried to make changes for students. From the scholarship program she created, to first-generation students, to taking significant risks to reassure students their identity was safe on her campus, to working hard to build new residence halls and other spaces for students, she is a stark believer in her role to move forward with ideas and changes for the benefit of students.

Laura believes in caring for the lives of her full-time staff is pinnacle to her success. She knows the kind workplace environment she creates starts from people understanding who she is, how she loves, and how much she cares. As a result, Laura spends time getting to know her team and remembers to acknowledge what is going on in their lives. She recognizes the strengths other people bring to the table, which complements her own experiences to make the team stronger. She seeks out people who were different from her to make sure the team looks at situations from every angle.
As well, Laura has a strong belief that the pipeline for Latinas in Higher Education should widen. She knows her role as one of the few Latina SSAOs holds a heavy responsibility to be visible, connect other Latinas to resources, and mentor others who want to be in a similar role. As a result, Laura is a visible contributor to mentoring institutes through national organizations for student affairs. She takes this part of her role seriously, and she continues to impact the lives of other Latinas today through her life, and her testimonio.

How do race and gender influence how Latina SSAOs acquire and enact power in their roles?

Laura’s family instilled values in her, which provided the confidence she needed to walk through the world as a powerful and determined Latina. Her drive for education pushed her to attain a terminal degree, which put her at tables where she could gain positions of power and to use influence positively. Laura was always aware her gender and her race might have put her at a disadvantage, but she did not walk through the world expecting challenges.

Conversely, the talents she possessed and the education she attained helped her push past some of the challenges, which often come with being a Latina in high administrative positions. Laura was never intimidated by her male counterparts, however, Laura is not void of mistreatment in board meetings. She reports previous experiences where men would speak over her, interrupt her, or ignore what she had to say. Laura is aware of the dynamics; however, she never let that keep her from getting the work done.

Laura describes the feedback she received from a supervisor, indicating she was “too nice.” However, Laura felt being “too nice” was not a bad trait to have.

I do believe in being kind to other people because I think it serves you a lot better than not being kind, but at the same time, if I need to be tough, and everyone knows about my
eyebrow. One eyebrow goes up; people know I’m very serious, and I will take action if I need to. I can do both, and I remember I used to think about that when he used to say, ‘You’re too nice. Sometimes you’re too nice.’ I would think about it. I thought, ‘That’s okay. That’s okay.’ Because that’s how you win relationships. Maybe you don’t always win the battle, but I think people respect you usually more, especially when you show that you can also be very strategic and effective in getting things done, […] Most people know that I get things done…(Laura, Personal Interview, Mary 29, 2019).

Relative to gender and race, perhaps this supervisor was providing support aimed to increase her influence in various meetings. However, what would have been the consequences if Laura had been less nice? In those spaces, Laura had to navigate building relationships, being tough, getting what she wanted, and also projecting confidence. Although Laura navigated the spaces with poise, the dynamic in the room was still present, irrespective of her fear of it. Laura had to calculate her influence and navigate her consequences in the way her white male supervisor never had to do.

Lastly, though Laura’s testimonio, it was clear she enacts power by leading with her heart and by using her influence to make changes for all students, which were equitable and just. She has the power to create and sustain policies and changes to help the entire student body, and first-generation and low-income students specifically. She made a promise to her family to help those coming behind her. No matter what the challenges were, and the perceived consequences of those challenges, she does not waiver on doing the right thing for students.
In reflection, Laura says she learned early on, “[…] words matter and actions matter. The more I got done, I think the more influential I became (Laura, Personal Interview, March 28, 2019).”

What specific past and present catalysts do the student affairs officers perceive as most beneficial in positioning and supporting their work?

Three themes go back to the wonderments in this research study for Laura. Her testimonio pointed back to family, mentors, sponsors, and values of education and work ethic.

Laura returns to talking about her family frequently in her testimonio. They are the foundation for her successful career, and the reason she has the confidence to stand up for what is right. Her parents gave her the confidence from a young age to seek an education, and they did not provide limitations to where her abilities could take her. She is confidence personified and gives hope and encouragement to others through her actions and gravitas. There is not a task too difficult or a challenge to convoluted for her to sift through. It is clear the support and the competence in her work come from someplace special; she has an internal flame fueled by love and a belief that no challenge is insurmountable. Based on her interview, this comes from her mother and father.

Laura made it a point in her testimonio to circle back to discuss the importance of mentors and sponsors, which helped her on the path. Those mentors and sponsors gave her more responsibilities and encouraged her to do more than she thought she was capable. Many of the sponsors and mentors were white men who helped her gain experience and promotions. Through the lens of Critical Race Theory, it is essential to note that power and privilege are always present. Privilege is a critical component of mentor and sponsor relationships with those of less
privileged identities. It is critical for those with more privilege to use their privilege to encourage, promote, and enhance the experience of those with less privilege. Many of Laura’s mentors and sponsors used their privilege as collateral to get her through the door because they knew she would be, “observant enough to notice the open doors, and brave enough to walk through them. (Linda Kasper, Personal Communication, April 2019)“

Finally, Laura considers herself a hard worker and someone who does not give up a fight to finish a project or take short cuts for students. She is a determined practitioner willing to do what it takes for students to succeed and learn in environments free of bias and difficulties. Laura wants to eliminate distractions, which cause students not to finish their college education. She considers herself to have a strong work ethic and hired others who had the same ideals about working hard for students. She felt a calling to her work, and therefore never feels it is fair to give up on students.

Laura believes in the power of education and what it could do to transform current and future generations. She saw what education did for her family, and found abounding joy to see students and families at graduation ceremonies celebrating their collective success. Laura does not take her role lightly, and she believes in what she can do in an educational setting to create policies, scholarship, and programs aimed to support the most vulnerable populations. As an educator, Laura never fails to encourage students to follow their dreams and to find all support possible to strengthen them through difficult times. She remains firm in the philosophy that “the one thing nobody can take away from you is your education.”

Christine’s Testimonio

Christine serves as a SSAO at a large public university in the United States. She has served this university for over 25 years and is a staunch advocate for student access to higher
education. In her current role, Christine has the opportunity to provide oversight for many traditional and non–traditional student affairs areas. With shifting priorities in higher education, a Vice Presidency with diversified portfolios grows more common. Christine earned her bachelor’s degree at a large public institution in the southwest, her master degree at a small private on the West Coast, and her doctorate at a medium-sized public school in the southwest. Christine is a proud mother, wife, and professional who attributes her success to the support of her family and her competitive spirit. She is a force to be reckoned with, and someone whose goals are focused on doing the right things so all students have access to a life-changing college education.

My Family Lifts Me Up: Past Catalyst for Success in Her Role

Christine’s ability to live out her life’s passion in higher education is rooted in a family upbringing she defines as central to her success. She credits her mom’s commitment to see her succeed as the reason why she has achieved so much in her career.

I watched my mom struggle a lot when my dad left; she had no education; she had never worked; she had me at 17 and then had my two sisters. She never wanted us to have to go through that either, where we had to struggle to figure out, where do I start and what do I do (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)?

This vision of her mother's struggle and hope for her children remains one of Christine's motivations. She knows what her mother gave up for her to have the life she has. Christine remembers showing up as a freshman to her university and feeling like she did not belong. She is
from a small town and did not do well academically initially. When she thought about not returning, her mother would not hear it. Christine states:

   I begged and begged my mom to let me leave and not to stay here for my sophomore year. And either to go back home to community college there or to go to [another community college]. I lost my scholarship, that was gone because my grades were not great. She would not hear of it. There was no way. She had me when she was 17; she didn't go to school; she always regretted not having an education. It was definitely one of those moments where thank goodness, I look back,…she really pushed me to stick to it (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Christine's close support from her family has not wavered as she has progressed through her career. She has a supportive husband who rejoices in her career success. This supportive dynamic has been helpful in her career, and is a point Christine discusses,

   When [I was] offered that interim Assistant Vice President Job, I almost turned it down. My husband was like, 'You're crazy. This is an amazing opportunity.' I didn't believe I could do it. I [thought] I don't know enough about financial aid, I don't know enough about [other] things. And he was like, 'They obviously see that you can do this (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

   Compared to other family dynamics, Christine recognizes it is unique. "Usually the roles are reversed, where he was the one [seeking to enhance career aspirations], I was in the mornings with the kiddos, then he got them to practice, and he made dinner every night because I travel a lot."
Christine partially attributes obtaining her doctorate to this successful home dynamic. She notes the following about the experience:

He (Her Husband) was going to start working on his doctorate, and I was going to start working on mine, and then we realized that probably both of us shouldn't do it at the same time. And he was like, "This can help you much more in your career than it's going to help me." This backing provided Christine with the confidence to move forward and finish her degree. Through it all, her heart and her gratitude focused on her family.

“…And for them to be there at my graduation and to see that,…and even for my mom, I think it was a huge thing in their life that made it an even bigger thing in my own life
(Christine, Personal Communication, August 22, 2019)

My Fortified Experience: Past Catalyst for Success in Her Role

Christine’s 25-year career started differently than others’ because she knew what she wanted to do when she grew up. Christine's goal was to work in higher education and admissions specifically. She was determined to get the experience needed and had the following experience to get there:

I went through a process four times to become an admissions counselor. I would always be the second person who wouldn't get the offer. I became more determined. I really wanted to do this work because I believed I could make an impact. So I kept trying and trying (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)

Eventually, her tenacity paid off when she received the call she had wanted all along:

…about six months later, I got a call from the associate director of admissions saying,
'The person we hired isn't working out. Will you come and be interim program
coordinator for orientation?" And I thought about it a little bit, but I decided to take the chance and do it (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Thus, began her 25-year career in higher education. Christine felt in this opportunity, she would have one chance to make a name for herself. "I knew I had to work really hard, and I had to prove myself and show that I was meant to do this work…I had to really step in and do the last orientations of the summer for August on my own, and make a name for myself and just figure things out. I think that was a truly pivotal moment, because …I think I had some great opportunity that really changed my trajectory possibly because I got to work with colleges and reps…"

This time solidified her expertise and set her on a path to success in her current role. She states:

When she got back, she saw that somebody else can do this besides [her] and these people respect Christine. I think that really helped me to have the confidence to do that next level and apply for the next level of things, and to be in that role where I felt like I deserved it…(Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)

Moving forward, her experience and hard work opened more doors for her to move up in the organization. Including another call back to admissions after some time away. Christine is grateful to discuss her opportunities overtime, such as this one:

… I just took that opportunity to go back to admissions. It was something that I knew I miss[ed] so much. I wanted to make an impact differently, and I wanted to be able to make decisions differently (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).
Christine remained in the organization, working hard, learning her roles, and gaining promotion after promotion. Her dream was to be the director of admissions, and when the opportunity presented itself, it was a broader portfolio than she had ever imagined. "I was scared to death, but I decided I would take the challenge."

Another opportunity presented itself just before the completion of her doctorate. She was an interim Assistant Vice President (AVP) at the time and had yet to finish her doctoral dissertation. She was offered the AVP position with the condition she would finish her degree by a specific time. In true Christine style, she succeeded and says this about the experience:

And so I literally was starting a new job, trying to figure all this out, and doing my [interviews], I'm picking all of my data. It worked, I did it! I finished at least a semester earlier than I would have (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Christine never backs down from a challenge, competes only with herself, and succeeds as a result. Her journey is rooted in finding a path with the most opportunity to lean into her life's work and dig deep into her experiences. She admits,

…every year is a little different, and I feel like that's what makes me actually better at my job. I don't feel like I'm never prepared… I feel like I'm always learning, and I'm always taking on a new understanding of things, and trying to learn myself so that I can inform and do my job better(Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).
My Voice at the Table: Ascribing Meaning to her SSAO Role

For Christine, her doctorate is a personal accomplishment she never expected to attain. She knew it would, undoubtedly, give her the respect she needed to be heard in her peer group and with upper administration. The doctorate is an important part of her professional growth and she shares insight on her experience:

I did not ever want to get my doctorate, I didn't think I would ever do that. And especially do it at the time when I had two little kids at home. It wasn't an interest of mine. But I felt like as I continued to grow in the role, and work with the deans and be a dean on dean's council, I felt like in order for me to have the level of respect that I thought I should have as a member of that group, as a dean, that I really needed to have that level of education behind me. And so I went for it, even though it was something I never thought I wanted to do. I'm so grateful I did it now, but it was not my plan whatsoever (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Once the doctorate was accomplished, Christine was immediately treated differently and respected more as a result, and she said the following about this change:

… I was very surprised at the level of interest people took in me and my work and how I responded to things after I completed… I question that often. Because I was the same person with the same level of experience, but it did change the way I was treated by the President here, our provost at the time…(Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).
This change was difficult for Christine to accept since she felt she was the same person with the same experience around the table, pre-doctorate. However, it was clear; her doctorate changed the game.

Christine personally connects to the work she is doing in her role. She sees her role as a life mission and passion, and less as a typical job. She sees a strong connection to what she does and the success students can achieve as a result of acceptance and graduation from her institution. Christine is aware of the impact she has on students and expresses it here:

I really want to make an impact on college going-culture and help students access higher education... There are students that are always going to have opportunities to go [to college], and then there's students that it's going to be a lot more challenging for them to find their way here. That's one of the things that just keeps me driven and going is that I get to work with a team that's doing a lot of that work…But being able to do that work just makes such a huge difference, I think. And I want to continue to do that and help people to move into that next level of their life, where I know that they can prosper (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Christine has found comfort in her voice at the table based on her role today. She is unapologetic about her mission to increase access to higher education for students and does not shy away from sharing with others. She believes she has a perspective helpful to benefit underprivileged students. She sees it this way:

I think that that understanding is just not there. It's not that everyone stayed for college, and it's not that students know that college is even an option. So I feel like I'm up against that a lot, and that I need to, even though it sounds like a broken record sometimes, have
that voice to be able to share those things with different people, because it's just not understood. Every day, I feel like there's things like that that come about that I really need to stand up for the underdog, in some way, shape or form, and help to make things happen. I don't think that people think about it. That's my day, that's what I do every day, I try to make sure I'm doing that… I have special interest in making sure that I'm getting that message across (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

As well, Christine has embraced the responsibility she has to be an influence for equity around student access and the student experience. Christine is cognizant of the privilege she has as an administrator to create systems that can overcome problematic unconscious or conscious bias that can impact the experience of students of color. This is how she sees it:

I think because of who I am and where I come from and the work that I love to do, like I talked about the access piece, and I think it really helps me to have a different lens on things. Often times, people think that they know what the answer should be based on their own experiences. But because I work with so many people who do not come from the same background, and often times, there's just a lot of privilege that's understood by a lot of the senior leaders that we have here. I feel like that it's very important to have that voice and to share that not everyone comes from that same background (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).
My Place and Power: Race, Gender, and Power

Identity is a fascinating construct and one, which binds us to the core of who we are, and gives us the power to form the basis of our communities. Christine's conviction of her identity and who she is ethnically and culturally has to do with her upbringing. Christine shares:

I grew up very close with my mom's family…, where I grew up, you were either Mexican and Catholic, or you were white and Mormon. That was just the way it was organized. My mom married a white man, and so it was a very interesting divided culture in town. I grew up really having my relationships and family organizational structures and all that, and my mom's side of the family brought us up to really believe in our [Mexican] culture and what we do and family, and just who we are…In some respects, it's a struggle sometimes, where it's like, no, I strongly believe I am a Latina woman. I might not always appear that way, skin color wise…(Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Christine’s internal battle regarding her appearance has not held her back; conversely, it has enhanced her desire to be a positive catalyst for the Latinx/a/o community. Christine shares about the growth of her identity over time:

Throughout the time, I really felt like it was important for me as a Latina woman to be able to share my experiences or to pull that out in different things. I'm always trying to, I don't know, maybe even overcompensate sometimes, by not letting it getting past that that's an important piece of who I am (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).
Christine finds it important to be at the table as an expert on her campus when it comes to Latinx/a/o relations on the campus. She believes there is power in representation and shares an example:

…for example, I got called upstairs to go to a meeting. The President was meeting with a group…that started the Hispanic alumni here. They’re all in their 70s, they’re the sweetest people. They were asking the President hard questions about what we’re doing for Hispanic recruitment and how are we going to stay an HIS. And [the President] was like, ‘Let me call [Christine] (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Based on recent activity, Christine posits there is a heightened awareness about diversity around women’s issues at her institution. The administration has made conscious efforts to recognize and bring women to the table. She was happy to see this change:

…at the last President's… meeting, there [were] four speakers, we were all women, and we were actually all Latina. And so it was pretty amazing that for that meeting, I was talking enrollment, [others were] talking about our actions and protocols for border patrol … We had someone talk about HSI… It was really pretty awesome when you think about it. And then we've never seen that before. We wouldn't have even been asked. They would have likely asked someone else to just talk about what's happening in this portfolio… It was pretty cool, and I definitely started to see more of that with women in leadership roles, that particularly, Latina women that are having more elevated roles here (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).
Christine’s experience with often being the only Latina in a room, or one of few women, is the basis for her surprise of the aforementioned. The absence of the scenario where women are present and center is reminiscent of Christine’s recent experiences in board meetings in which she felt unheard and unseen. She describes the experience by saying:

… it was a couple of meetings ago… something that I had raised my hand and said, somebody it was a white guy that said, I swear, the same thing. And then you start questioning yourself and the whole imposter syndrome, and all these [thoughts] start to come about. Maybe I did say it right or maybe I need to be more assertive in the way that I say it. But you know you said the same thing (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Christine had a previous experience, which made her feel she could not assert herself or share her opinions. She believed if she did speak up there may be some retribution or fear others would think she was not a team player. Christine makes note about the experience:

And the way that things were described or manipulated, that I thought were really … unethical and I wouldn't do that, but if I mentioned even that those kinds of things were occurring, then it was like, well you just don't really want that division to move to this area …but that had nothing to do with it…but I wouldn't make something up or say that it was unethical if it wasn't…And it's like, no, those are wrong things. … I definitely know what you're talking about and I feel like that is something that will be experienced pretty often in settings where we are one of the few (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).
Christine navigated gender and race politics long before she knew to put meaning to the behavior, which was happening around her and to her. Her experiences highlight something experienced far too often by women:

When I would get upset, or I would say something or even turn my head away and not necessarily look at that person while they were talking, which he would do to me all the time, then I was the one that was called in and asked questions about why it was blatant that I was being disrespectful while he was talking. And I was like, 'He does that to me all the time. He either talks over me, or he's just doing an email' (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

She finds solace and support with other women in her field, outside of her institution. She has noticed many African American women are in similar positions as hers, and she confides in them frequently. She connects with them over her experiences and about being a woman of color in a male-dominated faction of student affairs and higher education. Christine takes note of how few Latina colleagues she has with whom to share similar concerns. She expresses,

On the Latina side, it's hard for me to, I of course don't know the answer but I think that there's a lot of my friends who, we were all in here, and a lot of them, they really wanted to step out of their careers for a little bit of time to do the raising of their kids and family. They took a step back...(Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Irrespective of their career fields, Christine's female and Latina friends are only now beginning to rise in the ranks after stopping out momentarily to focus on their family. Christine attributes the trend somewhat to cultural family values in the Latinx/a/o community.
I see a lot of my friends that were the same age…and they're just starting right now to say, I want to go to the principal level, or I want to go to this next level at my company, because they took a lot of time off and now they're getting back into it as their kids have grown. And knowing our backgrounds and the importance of family, and some of the family pressures that happen even with a lot of our parents who did stay home with us, they think that that should be the way that it is and you feel that pressure. I don't know, but specifically for Latinas and just me and my friends, I would say that they're still on the rise. Some of us have been able to get to that place because we didn't step out at any point in time specifically, but really took years off until the kids went back to school (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Christine has progressed further in her career trajectory than some of her friends based on her experiences and support she has received from her spouse. She has earned a powerful and influential position, which allows her to do remarkable things for students at her institution and in her state. In her role, she has been able to push forward ideas, which never made it to the table in years past. Christine reflects on the growth in her influence over time:

…I would share the information [previously], the things that I thought needed to happen, but I didn't really have that same level of [influence]… I got to make lots of decisions and have authority in different things, but it was not at quite the level that I really wanted to make a difference. One of the things that I had been putting forward for about ten years is that I really wanted a Pell program so that all of our residents who are Pell eligible don't pay tuition. I really believe that that's an important thing for [her current institution] to do for our Pell eligible residents (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).
Christine knew her level of authority and influence would change once she was the SSAO for her area. Since stepping into the role, Christine has used her influence to push forward initiatives, which were once on hold based on previous priorities. This new leverage of influence and power was an important reflection for Christine, which she noted:

I've been thinking about that and talking about that trying to put that forward with individuals that I would be in contact with, but not necessarily get the leverage that it needed to kind of move up to the highest level. Now, I still have the same title, so none of that has changed, but I have a whole different level of authority and responsibility since [my boss] has retired. I don't mean to disparage [her] at all because she was a mom to me almost, with my kids, and when the stress was happening. And we still are very close. So I don't mean anything about the way we work together, that worked fine. But my level of authority is very different now. And I love that, I appreciate that (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

This accomplishment is a testament to the types of important changes that can come when power and influence are in the hands of smart, thoughtful, and experienced Latinas. Christine stated the following about moving forward the student initiative:

That was a huge place where I got to assert my authority, share that I had been talking about this for a while. 'I have the resources to back it up, we need to do this!' And it got approved, and I'm so excited. It's one of my top things of my career that I really wanted to do before I retire, so I'm really happy (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)!
Christine's determination and will to succeed in her career has been the outcome of an open mind, a compelling vision for her future, and the resolve to make things happen. She has had a lifetime of saying yes, trusting her intuition, and building trust around her as a result.

Christine explained:

That's one of the things that I really push on the team as well, is to lead to yes. And it may not be yes exactly what you asked for, but let's try to figure out what we can do kind of thing... And I think part of that has to do with being a woman too. I try to think about that a little differently as I've gotten older... I still like to say yes (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

Researcher’s Interpretation of Christine’s Testimonio

Major Themes from Christine’s Testimonio

Two significant themes came up as a result of Christine’s testimonio analysis.

1. The Power of Yes

2. Gender Roles Reconsidered

The Power of Yes

Christine’s testimonio outlined opportunities in her career, which she was not always certain would work out.

As outlined in her testimonio, Christine recalls applying for orientation roles where her candidacy was passed over. She had a desire to get back into orientation and therefore was tenacious in her attempts to get hired into a position. After one of her many failed searches, she had the opportunity to be hired on in a temporary role. Though risky, Christine took the role; she knew it was her one opportunity to make a name for herself. Christine tells about the incredible turning point the aforementioned role was in her career. Christine's ability to say yes to the
unknown, believe in her abilities, and make the best of the situation, earned her the opportunity to stay in the role at the end of the interim period.

A few years later, after some years of experience, Christine’s supervisor left the institution to take another job. At the time, Christine dreamed of being the director of university admissions, and when the conversation occurred to potentially promote her responsibilities to include admissions, she knew she would say yes! Much to her surprise, Christine was offered to take over more of the enrollment management portfolio than she had ever imagined. She was overcome with imposter syndrome and had to take some time before answering. Christine says, "[she] was scared to death, but [she] said yes to the challenge."

Later in her career, she was offered an Interim Assistant Vice President (AVP) position under a condition to finish her doctorate by the end of the semester. In true Christine fashion, she rallied around her goal, received her credentials in the expected timeframe, and stepped into a permanent AVP position shortly after.

Christine continues to say yes to opportunities she knows will make a tremendous impact on students. She realizes now, at any given time, her portfolio can change and feels more comfortable saying yes to new and evolving opportunities much sooner. Her confidence has grown knowing she has lived into her career progression well each and every time. Christine's success has had much to do with her ability to say yes to opportunities as they come her way, and she had this to say about it:

I definitely say ‘yes’ a lot. Because I do believe we can do it all or make it all happen, I tend to say ‘yes’ often […] That's one of the things that I really push on the team as well, is to lead to yes. And it may not be… exactly what you asked for, but let's try to figure
out what we can do... I preach that in addition to saying [yes too often…(Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).

For Christine, the power of her collective yeses has given her opportunities, which undoubtedly continue to pay off. This theme highlights the power of possibility through Christine's willingness.

**Gender Roles Reconsidered**

Christine is proud to discuss the type of support she has received throughout her career from her husband. His goals as an educator create the space for Christine to climb her career ladder and made the doctoral sacrifice easier. And so he's content and happy, which is awesome because it also allowed me to progress in my job. Usually, the roles are reversed, where he was the one. I was in the mornings with the kiddos that he got them to practice, and he made dinner every night because I travel a lot. (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)

Christine recognizes many women do not have the level of support at home she has had. Therefore, she has taken on opportunities, which have helped her career and benefited her family. She states about her family dynamics and husband:

…usually those roles reverse in a lot of traditional families. For him to be a Latino man who is strong enough with who he is to say, you do this. (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)

Also, her spouse has been the support to push her to take on roles she might have initially felt fearful of accepting. Her competition gives her the drive to make things happen, and he has
frequently been the cheerleader in the background saying, "This is a great opportunity (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)!

Analysis Related to the Research Wonderments

What meaning do Latina SSAOs ascribe to their positions as senior-level administrators?

Christine sees her role and advocacy as central to increase college access to students in her state and cares deeply about their success once they arrive at the university. She discovered a passion early on for admissions, and through that passion has understood her ability to influence access into higher education broadly. In her work, seeing students get admitted to, flourish in, and graduate from, the university remains her why. She expressed, “I want to continue to do that and help people to move into that next level of their life, where I know that they can prosper. (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)” She posits that the bottom line of her job is:

…to bring in [their freshman] class and make sure that [they are] bringing in a class that is a diverse class, because [they] always talk about the importance of learning from one another. [They] try to reiterate those messages over and over and help people to see that it's important to [them] as leaders, and the more that [they] can talk about that … the more that it tends to transcend (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)

As a result, she sees her role is central to recruit, hire, and lead a team that will live out the values of the institution, and who will carry out the mission of the division. The motto for the team she works with is, "one team, one goal," which is a pivotal component to how she motivates her team to stay focused on the core mission. She also believes it is her role to build a
team whose collective care for students advances student success. This means the hiring of professionals who are willing to carry the torch for divisional goals is vital. Christine says this about the topic:

…through the hiring process, those are the type of people you're trying to bring in or people that have diverse backgrounds and lived experience so that they bring that richness to the team in the first place. (Christine, Personal Interview, July 22, 2019)

Christine’s responsibilities as an SSAO require she have staff on-board who encompass these characteristics. She sees their role as crucial to the health of the bigger picture of their division. Although she sometimes gets bogged down with the other side of the details, which is the reality, that Christine is operating a large business. She does not perceive her work as a business to be negative, because as she describes it, "if you don't bring in the [freshman] class, you can't pay the bills on the campus. You can't pay the faculty…"

When the enormity of her role settles in, she remains focused on the love she has for the role. Christine feels privileged to do the work she does. Helping students achieve access to higher education keeps her centered on the most challenging days.

I am honored to have such a role. I never believed I would be at this level. I was scared to reach this level (imposter syndrome still gets me!), but I appreciate this role so much. I know I worked hard to get here and I give my all every single day. (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)
How do race and gender influence how Latina SSAOs acquire and enact power in their roles?

Christine identifies profoundly with her Latina identity. She is a proud Latina professional and believes her identities are central to her value system, and how hard she is willing to work to get ahead. Christine has acquired power by achieving her doctorate and climbing the career ladder to the Vice Presidency. Christine enacts power through the lens of student success and is aware of the struggles she has faced differently than her white male counterparts.

Christine developed her strong identity as a Latina because of her family connections. She identifies strongly with generations of her Mexican-American lineage. She is keenly aware of how it shows up in the workplace; however, she rarely allows it to hold her back.

Almost every day, mainly in meetings with senior leaders. As a Latina woman leading … at a major public research one institution, I feel the pressure, and I think it is intensified as a woman. I feel my racial identity is helpful and respected. (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)

Christine's identities connect with many of the students who enter her university, and therefore she has a strong sense of responsibility to those students, and all students. At the intersections of her identities, Christine has faced inequities at various points in her career. However, she has seen some benefits of her identities related to her geographic location and her supportive supervisors.

...Being at an institution… in [an area with a high number of Latinos], my background tends to be a benefit in many situations. I am asked for my thoughts and advice on situations related to Hispanic/Latinx students. This can be a blessing and a curse as you are expected to know all the answers. (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)
For Christine, having the privilege to identify with Latinx/a/o students has helped her in her career. As mentioned in her testimonio, when the President of the institution has had questions about Latinx/a/o students, she is the go-to person. This type of power can be helpful to capture the ear and attention of individuals at the institution whose influence can benefit Latinx/a/o students.

However, being one of the few Latinas at the executive level has not always been easy. In reflection, Christine attributes her gender to temporary setbacks in meetings having to do with communication. In her testimonio, Christine discusses interactions with men speaking over her, saying the same thing she said previously, and disrespecting her while speaks. If Christine would respond to the behavior, she would often get reprimanded. In situations like this, it is hard to enact power, be heard, stand up for students, or move ideas forward, which include strong partnerships. Christine found ways to focus on what was in her control then. In the end, she gained empathy around the battle all individuals were going through and learned she could only change herself.

She was likely able to move past this because she felt comfort and trust within her supervisory line. Having worked with strong women in her career, she felt some comfort in that reality. The inequities ameliorated in the boardroom, and she continued to excel in her career; however, it was not apparent until recently of the fact her pay had not followed suit.

I have been fortunate to work in an environment of many women over the years. I thought this was a benefit until I realized my salary had not increased at the same rate as some men's salaries at my institution. In addition, our sister institution's VP [for a similar portfolio] makes a huge amount more than I do. I can't help but believe this has to do with my gender (Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019).
Gender politics have played a role in the challenges she has faced when enacting power. However, Christine is resolute in achieving her goals and frequently pushes past those setbacks without thinking twice.

What specific past and present catalysts do the student affairs officers perceive as most beneficial in positioning and supporting their work?

Christine points to many circumstances, which have helped the advancement of her career. What she continues to come back to is being a life long learner, her family dynamics, and receiving her doctorate.

Christine shares what makes her good at her job is she never stops learning and sees learning as central to success in her role. She thinks it is essential to, "[take] on new understanding of things, and [try] to learn [herself], so that [she] can inform and do [her] job better." The preparation for the unknown is something she points to as a catalyst to excel in her role. She keeps a learning-centered mindset because she finds her portfolio changes quite frequently. She admits she will never know it all or prepare for everything, which may come her way. Christine believes she, "really [needs] to feel like [she's] always learning to make it worth it.”

Another critical point refers back to the present and past catalyst, which positioned her for her career is having the family dynamics she has. She is proud of her husband for the career he has chosen, and for being a steadfast supporter of their family and her professional career aspirations. Admittedly, Christine is aware this dynamic has positioned her to succeed because of how they have dismantled gender roles in the constructs of their family. She recognizes her
career progressed differently than her peer groups'. As is traditionally expected from women in the Latinx/a/o culture or women in general, their career pause was to care for children and households,

….But I see a lot of my friends that were the same age..., and they're just starting right now to say, 'I want to go to the principal level, or I want to go to this next level at my company,' because they took a lot of time off and now they're getting back into it as their kids have grown. And knowing our backgrounds and the importance of family and some of the family pressures..., I don't know, but specifically for Latinas and just me and my friends, I would say that they're still on the rise. Some of us have been able to get to that place because we didn't step out at any point in time specifically...(Christine, Personal Interview, August 22, 2019)

Finally, Christine gives credit to the achievement of her doctorate as an essential point in the advancement of her influence and career. Christine's confidence in her work led to a previous belief she did not need to achieve a doctorate. However, in reflection, she is aware that without it, she would not be where she is today. After receiving this credential, she was promoted and felt her voice was heard in spaces differently.

Katia's Testimonio

Katia's long-tenured career in higher education allowed her to serve in many capacities. She serves as Vice President for Student Affairs (VPSA) at a large community college in the United States. Throughout her career, she has focused on serving underserved student populations through the provision of access programs in higher education. Katia received her
undergraduate degree from a medium-sized private school in the Western part of the United States.

Katia is a faithful servant of the profession for the past 35 years in higher education. Over the years, she has earned enormous professional opportunities as a result of her hard work and tenacity. Katia is driven by a deep desire to help others, and to be the kind of leader, which brings everyone to the table. She cares deeply about the experience of students on her campus. Katia is not afraid to speak out in the best interest of her students. She is a proud wife, traveler, and support system for so many.

**Shaping My Professional Brand: Past Catalyst for Success in Her Role**

Foundational aspects of Katia’s early professional life shaped her career. She credits her initial work as a practitioner to her first job in student affairs in an equal opportunity office as an excellent foundational learning place. She said, "…[I] see myself as a practitioner. And that was foundational knowledge and practitioner knowledge that I took with me, throughout my career”. Through this role, Katia finally felt she could give back to her community for everything she had gained as an undergraduate. Her purpose began to shape itself more clearly during this time, as she began to see herself in the students she served. She explained:

"It was the greatest experience ever and that's when it was an 'aha' and I could give back to higher education, and all the services and programs that really retained me and help me to persevere in higher ed as an undergraduate first-generation college student. (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019)

Katia looks back and knows she was positioned well for her most recent positions because her roles have always been so dynamic. She describes them fondly:
I worked at that institution for eight years, and it was an extraordinary experience a lot of opportunities to work as a Student Affairs professional, as a practitioner to administrative work, teaching, Freshman year experience, work in academic affairs, I always seem to have these positions… that really positioned me well to work across divisional lines. Reporting to academic affairs and student affairs (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Another turning point for Katia’s career was geographical career relocation to be closer to her spouse. The shift allowed Katia to leave a four-year university system to work in a two-year community college system. She reflects on this time by stating:

…another critical point was actually leaving the four year and pursuing an administrative position in the community college system. The higher education enterprise is so broad and so comprehensive, and so global. Having worked at the four-year selected public institution, I think, positioned me really well to be a Vice President, because I was working with four-year colleges, and transferring students to the four-year competitive institutions. So I can speak comprehensively and broadly about, you know, both two and four year…that was critical time…(Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Shortly after her move to this institution, Katia received a promotion, which expanded her portfolio and gave her the breadth of experience she found useful later in her career.

[another] critical point [was] being promoted and taking on more functional areas on a day to day. So broadening my portfolio, some critical pieces of that amazing job…

[which] prepared me, I believe, for [the] VP role was to [oversee] conduct administration, because I dual reported to both [academic] cabinet and Student Services, cabinet. (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).
This diversity of experience was a clear launching pad for Katia into a career of which she is proud.

Katia’s involvement in national organizations has provided her the support and encouragement she has needed throughout her career, as well. Being heavily involved meant building strong coalitions across the country to count on in good times and in bad. Katia calls on her support system from the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) to get her through tough life transitions and to celebrate victories. She says about NASPA:

In NASPA, I've stayed active throughout my career, I've cultivated relationships across the country and continued with my own professional development," Katia says it is lonely at the top, but there are methods to overcome it. "I also believe there's always counterparts and colleagues from outside of our system, whom we can use as sounding boards and trust. And my NASPA folks have always played that role (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

**I Am Not My Challenges: Present Catalyst for Success in Her Role**

One recent difficult time was when she separated from her former institution shortly after a new president assumed power. Although it was difficult, Katia sees this as a situation, which positioned her well to transition to her next phase in life. Katia shares:

I accepted a severance and I left [the institution]. It was a challenging experience, but I felt really proud of my 35 years, and I knew it would be an uphill battle. I felt like I was a threat, and I kind of knew this was coming on…And I actually prayed for some breakthrough. And that's sort of how my life works, too. That's the best thing that ever happened for me (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).
Katia knew her work over 22 years at an institution spoke for itself; however, she understood she was at the will of the president. She is confident of the legacy she left behind and sustained by the satisfaction of the work she did to help students and staff in her roles. She had built a solid financial foundation, which allowed her to retire when others might not have been able to. Katia shared:

I had started investing early as I didn't know as a first-generation college student; I just put money away. And that's the greatest gift [advice] I can leave someone, because …we're all on annual contracts. And I think we all have this magical thinking, 'It'll never happen to me," (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019)

My Legacy Intact: Ascribing Meaning to Her SSAO Role

Despite the challenges Katia has faced later in her career, Katia knows her legacy is intact. In her career, she produced excellent work, hired terrific professionals, and created a culture of accountability and excellence around her. She is still motivated to do great work in Student Affairs to help staff and students alike achieve greatness.

I have continued interest in working with student affairs teams to inspire them, to coach them, mentor them, lead from the center, to help them be the best they can be in serving students… helping to be a great champion for Student Affairs around resources, human, financial, program development, innovation, assessment, data-informed decision making, and to really support their trajectory of their career, depending on where they choose to go (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).
Katia is aware her role as an SSAO is to support the division, and back the institutional and presidential goals. She is committed to being a leader strong enough to guide any team appropriately. She shares her understanding:

[I help the] division keep their eye on the prize and always having students success and student-centered decisions be at the forefront of their work. [I will] continue to be a great role model, to have some fun, to help [staff] with a work-life balance, and to be really proud of the work they're doing as student affairs professionals. And…to always keep inclusive excellence at the forefront … and try to help them understand really what that means from a comprehensive perspective (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Over time, Katia has developed a value system around what and how she believes she should show up to do the work she was hired to do. Katia's wisdom reflects she will never achieve a position where she does not see a need to spend time with students. Katia says the following about her leadership style:

I think what's really critical for a SSAO is to recognize that there is so much to learn, and humble ourselves, …I used to go to financial aid director, the Dean of enrollment, or Dean of Advising, and my approach has always been [to ask] 'can you give me a tutorial, or let me share … how I'm going to describe it in the Board of Trustees meeting and let me know if there are some gaps?'… that's the greatest way for our Deans and our direct reports to grow when they're teaching a VP and a VP is humble enough to [ask] (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).
Katia recognizes the expertise is in the room, and not always with her:

…the beauty of the profession is, we can never learn it all. But...I think it's important that we know enough to promote it, speak to it, and you'll be a champion for it as from a practitioner administrative perspective, but to recognize I have the experts in the positions where the expert should lie. That's why they're directors and deans! (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Katia puts trust in the experts on her team, but never abdicates her responsibility to lead with courage, curiosity, and a learning-centric mindset. She views her management style as more of a coach:

I always saw myself as more of a coach…than a supervisor. I am pretty visible…I was not one who was … behind closed doors with…the door shut…I let people know that that I… lead and manage through walking around. I like to describe myself as leading from the center…And I say that by way of saying, 'Don't get nervous if I walk…to the financial aid office and start chatting it up with advisors, I'm just engaging, I'm not there to spook.' And so I feel really good about just saying that because people get nervous (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

As a long-time SSAO, Katia is aware of the power her role carries, by merely being in the role. It comes with the job for others to be slightly intimidated by the influence and oversight associated with the full scope of responsibility. She has learned a hands-on approach is a good tactic; however, it comes with challenges, which are inherent to expectations others have of how leaders should lead. She is reflective of her lessons however, and shares:
I need to pay more attention to that… because I started as a practitioner, I was always on the floor. But being a VP is intimidating to people …there aren't a lot of vice presidents who are really active, …and some of them hide behind. 'Oh, when you get so busy, you don't have time for students.' And you know what, I don't know that I completely buy it (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Katia is committed to showing support and knowing what is happening at every level of the organization. It makes her efficient, knowledgeable, and had been critical in her success. Having been this kind of leader for so long has allowed her to see the benefits of this type of leadership. Katia shares:

… I do schedule time so that I can go to an orientation meeting on occasion, or go to the first meeting of student government for the year, or housing is doing a [cutting] of the ribbon. I put that stuff on my schedule, even if I'm there for 15 minutes or 20 minutes and have a cup of coffee. Because visibility of a VP…is really important, it speaks volumes to students. And my thing is if I don't know students, and if I don't know frontline people, how does that inform me on innovative practice or change or program development? (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Katia's wisdom about digging deep into the trenches to understand the work entirely is conventional and commonplace in her perspective. She does not see any other way to be a successful transformational and servant leader. She holds a strong belief in her responsibility as a leader and shared this thought:
How do I represent a Student Affairs Division if I don't know the people, their passion, and know students, and at the end of the day if I’m [frustrated], I'll just go to student government, I'll go to student leadership, the center to engage with students, because it always reminds me of why we are in the business that we are in. Students deserve the best (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

**My Place and Power: Race, Gender, and Power**

As a first-generation, Lesbian, Latina in power, Katia feels her identities are a salient part about the way she functions in the workplace. For example, Katia felt she interacted with men differently in previous roles because of her identities. She stated:

I think being I'm not the typical heterosexual Latina, that you know … I really didn’t need to succumb to the male administrator. I had a great relationship with all of them. But I didn't fit that profile. You know, I didn’t need to be subservient. I [didn’t] need to kiss up to survive (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Katia is honest about what it means to be a woman of color at an institution of higher education. She took some liberties after being a long-standing administrator to test boundaries when necessary, and when it was the right thing to do. She shares how:

I used my voice. And I believe that as much as we pride ourselves in institutions of higher learning, they are academic elite institutions. And sometimes they're not ready for women. I'll just use myself as a woman of color. Women speaking up in the enterprise, and particularly, women of color… I'm not sure the institutions know how to manage Latinas, because we're so few, right? There's so few of us. And I think the typical
perception is that we are soft spoken, we're a little more subservient, we're not as fiery (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Katia knows the few numbers of Latinas in student affairs is complex and layered as to the reasons why this is. She knows going into higher education is not a profession many Latinx/a/o students know about before attending college. Katia believes:

…as we pursue our undergraduates, and those of us like you, and like me, we kind of fall upon [student affairs] because we either meet somebody or are active as undergraduates and go - This is actually a profession, I didn't even know this existed (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Katia believes Latinx/a/o students may go into other more lucrative fields because of the financial rewards associated with other career paths. She expressed students may, “branch out into business, public relations, finance, stem... [because] the financial benefits or rewards are not great in higher education leadership (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

She has also considered that after students go into other fields, not many students remain to go into the field of student affairs. Those students are then often split between working in student affairs and working in academic affairs, which is another important place where representation matters, and she admits, "…the competition just gets tougher and tougher and tougher".

Katia calls herself (and others women and Latinas like her in VP roles) a “trailblazer,” and a "soldier" who survived the long and grueling path to make it to the position of influence
she attained. She believes, wholeheartedly, it takes a special person not to be intimidated by the strength of Latinas in the workforce. She says,

it takes really, really confident, courageous, and knowledgeable, dynamic leaders to hire Vice Presidents of Student Affairs who are Latinas….when people are confident in their own right, they recognize the contributions that Latinos can make in higher education. Right, you got to be a pretty confident, white person to recognize that or a confident person of color (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Katia has experienced other persons of color have not always been her most prominent champions. She explains this might be because she had not worked with many. Katia explains:

… most often, it was a white administrator, who promoted me into my positions because there weren't a lot of us. I didn't have a lot of Latinas whom I have the opportunity to work with, you know, and, and I think we also have very high standards and expectations, and we hold ourselves accountable for that. And sometimes, that can come off as being a little bit intimidating, and yet strong, confident leaders, appreciate that (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Those who understand her confidence, appreciate Katia's candidness. She fights for things, which do not make fundamental sense related to equity, and common sense. Katia knows her voice around leadership tables catalyzes change.

I don't feel like I made any mistakes. And the reason why I say that is because what I never wanted to do was leave a room and compromise my integrity. I never wanted to
walk out of a room and think I want to maintain this privilege, so I'm not going to say anything, I'm not going to speak up (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Katia never held back from standing up for what she felt was the right thing. As a professional dedicated to equity, integrity, and alignment of institutional values in the workplace, she spoke up about important issues. Katia did not stray away from any issue if it was the right thing to do. She shares an example:

I’ll use an example. My Dean’s [were] titled Associate Deans, where all the [other] Deans in the district, and in the system, and the state were Deans [not Associate Deans], and they’re looking at my college as a best practice institution, and yet my Deans are Associate Deans, when we prided ourselves on being the most diverse, innovative, inclusive institution in the state? Well, that’s a contradiction for me! So I can say to the HR director… I don’t know how you can actually live with yourself as an HR director up (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Katia has earned respect because of her ability to communicate truths frankly. She never leaves any doubt about her stance on any concern. In fact, others wonder what is wrong with her when she is quiet in a meeting. Furthermore, Katia’s good work always speaks volumes and clears the path for candid conversations, which ultimately leads to positive change. She describes how she views her work:

…I was the administrator on the cutting edge, who was probably over the last two decades, the greatest promoter of diversity and inclusion…when I first started at the college, there were five faculty of color, and I was the first person of color on the
executive team. …and my voice at the end with what I described, shortly after I left all those associate Deans were promoted to Deans… I still feel like I accomplished … one of my greatest goals, because I had worked on that for a long, long time (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019)!

**Researcher’s Interpretation of Katia’s Testimonio**

**Major Themes from Katia’s Testimonio**

Two significant themes came up as a result of Katia's testimonio analysis.

1. **Personal Wellness**
2. **Leading Bravely**

**Personal Wellness**

Throughout Katia’s testimonio, she frequently noted how she leaned on the strength of her healthy social, financial, and community wellness when things were not going well.

Katia speaks of her wife as a strong support system for her, and she is the reason why Katia the move to her current location many years ago. Before being together in the same location, they were working through a long-distance relationship. Moving to be closer together allowed for Katia's to have a stronger daily support system as she progressed in her career. Katia jokes about the conversations around the dinner table with two helping professionals talking about their day. It was clear this relationship is paramount to Katia's success, as she believes her spouse is her biggest champion.

Katia and her spouse frequently travel together and enjoy the mental and physical rest traveling together brings to them. During Katia's brief retirement, they spent much time together,
traveling and enjoying each other's company. Katia also still spends time with her parents, who are similarly a large part of the love she gives and receives in her life.

During her brief employment break, she felt pride around the fact she was able to retire because of the smart financial decisions made early in her career. Being a first-generation student, she did not know much about investments but put money away regardless. Katia states Senior Student Affairs officers are well compensated; however, everyone is still at the will of the president and the ever-evolving goals of the individual states and institutions. Because of Katia's smart financial planning; she is fortunate to continue working because she loves the work versus because of a financial need.

Lastly, Katia spoke about her NASPA Community and her peers and colleagues from within her home city and state. Katia's NASPA community is a long-standing support system, which has pushed her through many difficult times. She uses many of her friends and colleagues from NASPA as sounding boards, and those friends serve as a circle of support of which she depends. During difficult times, Katia says her NASPA family frequently rallies to support her. Katia has a tight bond with NASPA because of her long-standing involvement.

**Leading Bravely**

Katia aimed to be a brave leader as an SSAO. She is an astute professional with the skills to notice gaps in the organization, and promote equity and inclusion at every level. Being a Latina with an opinion, a keen eye, and multiple years of experience served as a great benefit to students and the institution. Throughout her career, she was given the latitude to make changes and push policies forward to help students. As well, as she advanced in her career, she began to notice ways she could advocate for students and protect her professional teams.
At the end of her tenure at her last institution, Katia's units were known to be excellent at their work and creators of best practices in the state and the nation. Katia knew the scope and quality of her work could speak for itself, and she never held back from speaking out. When Katia saw an inequity or something she did not agree with, ethically, she never strayed away from the conflict. When she disagreed with peers and colleagues, she never took it personally because, to her, and it was a part of the job to make things better for staff and students.

Those who worked with Katia knew she would leave no stone unturned and ask the hard questions everybody was thinking but nobody vocalized. Katia says in her testimonio that higher education still may not know what to do with Latinas, because the stereotype of the typical Latina rarely exists in the workplace. Katia has high expectations and is never quiet or timid in meetings to express her opinions. As her testimonio suggests, she never wanted to compromise her integrity at work. Katia states:

I don't ever want to walk out of this room and say, why didn't I speak out? Right?

Because as people of color in higher ed or in any administrative professional position, I think we always We often have that imposter syndrome. Do I deserve this? Did I earn this? Most of us are working around white male colleagues, most often, white, straight male colleagues, You know, the diversity as we move up becomes less and less. And With that being said, I did my best to be diplomatic. And I worked really, really hard… sometimes too hard. I mean I wish I could have just said things the way [I wanted], but always, [said] 'let me approach this as best I can from an educator's lens. Let me help them understand what Student Affairs really is about…' […] that gets exhausting after a while, but I did that (Katia, Personal Interview. July 19, 2019).

As Katia walked bravely through her challenges, she made space for others to be brave as well.
Analysis Related to the Research Wonderments

What meaning do Latina SSAOs ascribe to their positions as senior-level administrators?

Katia sees her role as a chance to protect her team, be a coach to others, and to speak up for what is right. She says being in the Senior Student Affairs Officer position is lonely, but she still loved the role.

Katia recognized in order for her staff to be effective, it was essential to protect them from any troubles or politics, which occur within the organization. She expressed:

… you have to protect your peeps. So I wasn't going to disclose all the skeletons and the challenges. And I learned from some of the people who I felt like were not effective […] over the course of my career. And an example would be when [others] would come back to campus after being at the executive team meeting, and complain about the executive team. I never was going to do that. I mean, … it's not my goal. And I used to also say, 'I signed up for this'…if I can't stay positive and do my best to inspire and stay healthy, then I should move out of the seat, because they're coveted positions. And there are people who would move into the position in five minutes. So I always felt like I kind of knew that it was going to get a little bit lonelier at the top…(Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

Katia believes it is her responsibility to be more than a supervisor to her team, and serve as a coach, which inspires and stays positive. In previous roles, Katia spent much time getting to know her staff teams at every level of the organization. She feels it is her responsibility to have those individual teams have access to her. Katia believes keeping her team close makes her more
effective as a leader. She believes there is much to learn about policies made at the vice president level, which affect individuals on the front lines.

Katia frequently depends on staff at all levels of her team to help her understand the ins and outs of the organization. Connecting with employees has been key to Katia so she could describe their work to boards of trustees and other executive team members. Only through her encouraging style, and individualistic approach was she able to build a strong and trusting enough relationship with members of the team to make her better at her job.

Additionally, it was part of Katia's nature to care for students and staff, which lead her to care genuinely about speaking up for what is right. Her value system, rooted in integrity, did not allow her to let many situations pass without providing sufficient feedback. After a while her advocacy was expected and she prided herself in this:

…there were meetings where I actually tested it out. “I’m going to go to the meeting today and just listen. I'm gonna try a new skill set and don’t feel like I have to be a full participant […] , and this is like an [executive] staff level. I’ll just let it play out.” I can almost guarantee you that somebody in that meeting will come up after and go, “Are you feeling okay? Is everything okay? if I don't speak out, Right? […]. And so most often I spoke up… (Katia, Personal Communication, July 19, 2019).

Katia recognized she became braver in her ability to use her voice in the workplace later in her career. She expresses:

I can say at my age now, that in the later years of my career I was a little more fiery...And I was so driven to speak my truth, because I was in my later years, witnessing hypocrisy, and people who have prided themselves as white administrators dismantling white
privilege… watching these institutional inequities at play. Well, I spoke up about that, and I was of course was diplomatic… looking back, I used my voice. It was a courageous voice. […] we know when we feel it intuitively when there’s contradictions [around us] (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

How do race and gender influence how Latina SSAOs acquire and enact power in their roles?

Katia’s determination, coupled with her desire to do ethical work for students, drives her tenacity in the workplace. Her identities encompass how she must navigate her world, and they are central to the way she forms expectations of herself, and of course, how others view her. As a Latina first-generation student who identifies within the LGBTQ community, she has always been mindful of how she is perceived. She stated:

I've identified with being Mexican-American (Latina) and female since I was an early adolescent. Also, identifying as lesbian/gay since I was a teenager - the intersections shaped me and my leadership style personally, culturally, and professionally (Katia, Personal Communication, June 28, 2019)

In her testimonio, Katia briefly discusses that in many workplaces they are unable to "figure out" what do with Latinas because many Latinas in power do not fit the perception. For Katia, her identity as a Latina encouraged her to be additionally mindful of her behaviors and work ethic. Katia's race and gender played a part in how she achieves influence because of the energy she has had to put into shaping her professional experience. Katia shares:

The perception of others may have been that I felt like I knew it all, or I was overbearing… I never, ever wanted if there were any incompetencies noted, to tie back to
my being a Latina, to my being a woman… my LGBTQ identity. So I was always prepared… for a meeting, I was always on time for meetings […] I was… dressed, I have my own thing around professional dress, […] But I would often say to people, you know, you’re a role model, I wasn't a big fan of people wearing jeans in the workplace … because I think we teach people how to treat us […] You know I think rules were different… for other people. It’s probably a trip I put on myself, but I don't have any regrets. I feel like we [Latinas] always have to… be as prepared as we can. (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019)

As a member of the executive team whose goal was to provide inclusivity at all levels of her organization, she had high expectations of the team members with whom she worked. In her testimonio, she mentions a few times in which there were individuals whose privilege kept them from meeting the needs of the university, and her expectations as colleagues. On one occasion, her executive team sought to debrief a serious conversation with faculty about diversity and inclusion. In the debrief activity, a colleague upset with the conversation refused to participate. She retells:

…I, of course, shared my thoughts [and when] they get to my counterpart [a] white male VP for Academic Affairs, [and ask him] what are your thoughts? [He says] ‘I'll pass’. And my initial response was, 'we pass when we are in first grade,' vice presidents don't have a choice to pass when we're having a challenging conversation… So those are the kinds of experiences that I had. At that time, I wanted to say 'first graders pass,' But I didn't… But that's the kind of madness… that's privilege at its finest (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).
For someone like Katia, who cares deeply about inclusion, she was discouraged by her peer’s behavior.

Katia described the times when her influence and power were used to help students. The most influential component of this theme has to do with the power and influence Katia exudes in the most challenging times. Her preparation allowed her to create the next phase of her career even in the toughest of circumstances. The depth of relationships she had built through local and national networks gave her the inertia to continue forward. Katia built up her power with her ability to move bravely through all situations with which she was confronted. Through it all she loves her career path and describes it fondly:

… all that being said, I think being a Latina, being a person of color, being lesbian, being a passionate Student Affairs administrator [and] practitioner, I again feel like my personal … identities and my attributes positioned me so well for a career that couldn’t have been a better fit for me. You know, I love my career. I love doing work like this. I love seeing aspiring Latinas across the country moving forward. (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019)

Katia is proud of her accomplishments and her years working in student affairs. She became accustomed to being one of few Latinas her throughout her career. Katia has leveraged the experience to ensure she appropriately role models for other Latinas who aspire to Vice Presidency roles. She expresses:

I’m very proud to have risen to the SSAO position and was very fortunate having been promoted to this position over a 22 year period […]. Throughout my life, there have been
very few Latinas in experiences (school, sports, etc.), so being one of the only Latina administrators or few SSAO's is not unfamiliar territory for me. Though I will say, those of us who are in positions of leadership in higher education have an immediate cultural connection and share a sense of pride and heartfelt connection (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019).

What specific past and present catalysts do the student affairs officers perceive as most beneficial in positioning and supporting their work?

Katia attributes her success to a few critical catalysts. In her testimonio, she identifies what has made her successful is a depth and breadth of experience leading up to her SSAO role. She expresses being positioned well to work with partners in every area of the university, which taught her to reach across campus to learn about the university broadly. Katia credits her first position in higher education as foundational for her. During this time, she worked with an Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) at a university within her state system. This role paved the path for a career of service to underrepresented students and equity building within her roles. Moreover, this role with EOP, was foundational for her because, through this role, she gained skills, which taught her to be a great practitioner. Because of this role she always, “sees [herself] as a practitioner, and that was foundational knowledge, and practitioner knowledge that [she] took with [her] throughout [her] career.” She learned through this role what it meant to dig into a role and learn each and every aspect of it and how it fits into the bigger picture of student affairs and student services.

Another pivotal moment was when she made a move out of the four-year university system, which opened a pathway for leadership within the two-year community college system.
This transition was critical because it positioned her knowledge of four-year institutions to the forefront. This new administrative position was key to her career.

…the higher education enterprise is so broad and so comprehensive, so global, having worked at the four-year selective public institutions, I think, positioned me really well to be a VP, because I was working with four-year colleges, and transferring students to the four-year competitive institutions. So I can speak comprehensively and broadly about, you know two and four year. So that was an incredible time when I moved into…the community colleges. (Katia, Personal Interview, July 19, 2019)

Katia acknowledges being promoted to Associate Dean was another important milestone in her career. This promotion broadened the scope of her knowledge and experience, which further prepared her for the SSAO role.

… when I became Associate Dean, […] was a really, really critical point, … taking on more functional areas on a day to day…broadening my portfolio, some critical pieces of that amazing job… were what prepared me for the VP role…(Katia, Personal Interview, July 2019)

Katia’s critical career junctures serve as points of both gratitude and learning. As an educator and lifelong learner, and despite her one-time retirement, Katia does not appear to be near the end of her impact on student affairs.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented testimonios of three Latina Senior Students Affairs Officers. The experience, life, and story shared within these testimonios shine light into the lives of some
of the brightest stars in higher education today. Although each participant had individual stories to tell, their lives and story are telling of careers built upon a selfless desire to exist in a field to build others up and create access to a more prosperous life.

The participants in this research study rendered their testimonio as a platform to elevate their individual and collective experiences as Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers. Their identities were the grounds for rich, fruitful, and long-lasting legacies as higher education professionals. Not one participant shared a story without struggles or doubts. They continue their service to higher education because they feel the value and love around the career they have chosen. They each garnered strength from their inner values shaped by culture, family, lineage, and the support afforded to them along the way. Their family inheritance became their character, their discipline, and their deeply rooted care for others.

Each participant's testimonio offers a variance of lessons learned, and themes about their experience. These themes may apply broadly to other Latinas seeking similar SSAO roles. The cultural knowledge of the women in this study is more than just an asset (Latina Feminist Group, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000). Their experience and knowledge are a gift and an inheritance from which all Latinas in Student Affairs can gain strength.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) and explore how they experience power and influence in their roles. Testimonio as a methodology allows for participants to tell their lived experiences as they interpret the story (Delgado Bernal, 2012). Central to the study, as well, is the intersection of race and gender on the experiences of Latinas in the SSAO role. Therefore, the study is analyzed through the lens of Critical Race Theory (CRT), and the racial experiences of the participants are assumed. The research centered on the following Wonderments:

Wonderment One: What meaning do Latina SSAOs ascribe to their positions as senior-level administrators?

Wonderment Two: How do race and gender influence how Latina SSAOs acquire and enact power in their roles?

Wonderment Three: What specific past and present catalysts do the student affairs officers perceive as most beneficial in positioning and supporting their work?

This chapter includes an interpretation of the findings as well as limitations to the study. Importantly, the chapter additionally includes implications for theory and research and practice. This chapter concludes with recommendations for further research based on the findings within the testimonios presented in Chapter 4.
Statement of the Problem

The study of Latinas in a Senior Student Affairs Officer position is a critical study based on the fewer numbers of Latinas who have risen to the position. Moreover, only 4% of college or university presidents are Latinx/a/o and only 30% of are women. The gap between the representation of Latinx/a/o leaders in higher education and the increased number of Latinx/a/o students entering into higher education is concerning.

As well, fewer Latinx/a/o administrators serve more Latinx/a/o students than ever. According to a 2016 study of college enrollment, the American Council on Education ACE indicates 70.6% of Hispanic High School graduates are enrolled in college or university the October following their graduate. The percentage of students of color enrolling in higher education after graduation increased by fifteen percent from the mid-1990s to 2016. This increase credits the increase in Latinx/a/o undergraduates who entered higher education.

We continue to see the importance of visual representation for students of color, and specifically Latina Students. Therefore, the in-depth look at the testimonios and experiences of Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers is a crucial step to identify and increase knowledge about their experience for Latinas seeking to enter into similar roles.

Interpretation of the Findings

Three women from three separate institutions across different regions of the continental United States contributed to this study. The women participated in one video conference interview, which lasted between 75 and 90 minutes. This interview was inclusive of two portions. The first portion was a timeline and critical junctures activity, in which the participants
were instructed to fill out a timeline activity to identify critical junctures in their lives and careers. After going through this activity together, the interview continued with additional semi-structured questions. In some cases probing questions were utilized to gain clarity. The questions centered on the experience of power and influence Latinas in the Student Affairs Vice Presidency role and their overall path to the role.

The testimonios were coded for major themes in order to respond to the research wonderments in Chapter 4. Although I will not be comparing the experiences of the women in the study, the significant findings overall are documented below.

**Major Finding One: Latina SSAOs Wield Power to Help Others**

In each of the testimonios, the participants shared great pride in their heritage and in the responsibilities they felt to serve their communities. They each understood the complexities of Latinx/a/o students, specifically Latinas in higher education, and the need for Latinas to role model the way to success for those students. Laura said, “more and more Latinas are going to college, and so we need that representation and role-modeling to come for this,” and Christine shared a similar pride and felt it, “really felt like it was important for [her] as a Latina woman to be able to share [her] experiences…”

The ability to mentor others, or for Latinx/a/o students to see themselves represented in the administrators remained a consistent theme. As Santos & Acevedo-Gil (2013) suggested, there is a correlation between the success of students of color and the correlating staff members of color. It was clear through the testimonios the participants felt the same way about their role on the campus and in how they made decisions for students who attend their institution. Latina SSAOs described their powerful connection to help all students, and Latinx/a/o students specifically, is possible because of their roles. The implicit expertise they possess gives the
ability to push for changes with superiors, peers, and with their teams. Latinas gave examples, which emphasized the importance of Latinas in the SSAO role. Specifically, Latinas were able to make substantial changes for students as a whole and Latinx/a/o students, specifically, in their role.

As the participants described their relationship with students, there was an overwhelming sense of pride that came from graduated students returning to the campus to give gratitude for how the participants cared for them. Moreover, that care was frequently as a result of a systematic initiative, program, or scholarship, which fundamentally changed the way the students could exist on the campus. For the participants of the study, those moments of gratitude collided with pride in the way they helped students as a result of the influence their position affords.

Latina SSAOs’ expertise provided power when used at the right time and in the right ways. Expertise power is the power that comes from the perceived knowledge a person has in any particular role or with a particular topic. Latina SSAOs in the role were generally given the autonomy to make decisions for students while being the role. The lens Latina SSAOs brought to the table was broad in expertise, and still allows a focused care, which covers pockets of students holistically.

The implicit expertise they possess gives the ability to push for changes with superiors, peers, and with their teams. Latinas gave examples, which emphasized the importance of Latinas in the SSAO role. Specifically, Latinas were able to make significant changes for students as a whole and Latinx/a/o students, specifically, in their role.
Major Finding Two: Latinas Move Through Fear and Get to Yes

All three participants described instances in which the use of their power and influence was used to benefit others. However, when given opportunities for those positions, which afforded the influence, they describe initial fear to take on the role. One participant agreed she did not understand why she had been asked to take on the role, given that others around her were more qualified. Another describes taking a week to respond because she was unsure if she would succeed in the role. What they each describe is imposter syndrome, a psychological state, which can prevent individuals from accepting a similar perception of themselves as others may see.

However, the overwhelming finding from SSAOs in this study was the ability to cut through fear relatively quickly and accept positions that would allow for them to achieve great things for their families, and students at their institutions. It appeared, as well, the more they said yes, the easier it was the next time to do the same. This finding came through the testimonios as the participants discussed fear and trepidation through the initial offer of a significant administrative position. Once accepting a role with larger and more significant responsibilities, SSAOs gained confidence for the subsequent promotions they have earned.

On a similar note, Latina SSAOs gave multiple examples of saying yes to opportunities. They were open to participate in initiatives to help students, to be good partners across their campuses with other departments, and to accept responsibilities and oversight as opportunities arise. They viewed their role as collaborators and partners with others as a key component for success. Latina SSAOs further understood the need to work closely with administrators across the institution irrespective of reporting lines. One participant describes bringing ideas for change to the board of trustees; another to the president, and another describes the interaction with state politicians. Those relationships are an example of the world of the SSAO, and the depth of the
connections Latina SSAOs must have. As well, Latina SSAOs must navigate the political landscape under which they make decisions. Getting to a yes for Latinas in the study meant they would make it happen as long as it was the right thing to do.

Latinas list the factor of risk-taking as an essential component of making a change for students. When asked about influence used to help students, or political risks it took to do the right thing for students, Latina SSAOs did not feel any fear or trepidation around pushing to do the right thing. Whether changing a policy, initiating a new program, or merely standing up against attitudes that are harmful to students, Latina SSAOs all felt confident their influence would guide the right kind of support for the students they serve.

**Major Finding Three: Current and Past Family Influencers**

Latina SSAOs shared a breadth of experiences related to the influence of family in their lives and careers. Latina SSAOs share the value and importance of family structures and upbringing as a critical focus factor for their success. Their families put a focus on education and helping others as a key principle for living, and the SSAOs share, making life and work decisions based on those instilled values. Moreover, internal values due to the importance of family are a driving factor for the SSAOs as the continued drive to success is fueled by the need to do justice to the sacrifices made by family members.

Latinas shared a common value to live up to their parent's and families' expectations of them. As well, Latinas shared the value for the need to give back to their communities, and to help others that come behind them. Latinas identified stories rooted in resilience, kindness, and remembrance of personal and familial values. One participant tied her experience coming from a small town and her adjustment to her college experience as an impetus for helping increase the
college-going reality for students of her state. Another gave credit to her father when describing a change she made that would help first-generation students. Another gives credit for her career preparation to her upbringing in catholic school. All look backward to their family to make decisions, move forward, and to guide the heart of their work.

Latinas discussed the importance of their current familial structure as a path to get ahead. Their current support structure manifests in the form of freedom to achieve their desired career outcomes and provides space to grow within the organizations to which they belong. Latinas value the broadened choices they have had based on the support they received. This freedom is seen in this study as supportive partners for them to talk with, partners whose self-confidence provided the unique space for Latinas to excel, and partners whose similarly busy career could provide a deeper understanding of the life of an SSAO.

Limitations of the Study

Hermaneutic considerations (Patton, 2015) continue to be a factor since as a Latina Student Affairs Administrator. I bring my experiences as a Latina as the researcher to the table. My interpretation of the data may be different from others who may not share my identity. The geographic and demographic limitation of this study is a limitation. Since there are not many Latina SSAOs in the U.S., I sought to find three to five participants and was able to find three solid SSAOs willing to participate. Given the rarity of Latinas in this role, it was important for me to write the findings and testimonios in a way that would keep their anonymity. The limitation would be the probability of knowledge into who the participants are.

Additionally, a limitation is the belief of each participant to be 100% forthcoming with their experiences based upon the need to show their “best” selves. Participants may withhold
information because of considerations in their current workplace, or not wanting to risk their roles through sharing personal experiences. Another limitation is memory distortion of participants as they retold their stories relevant to this research study. The distortion could be out of and inability to remember, or also the idea that to remember a difficult situation may be painful to unearth and share with strangers.

To overcome these limitations, I included member checking, and the availability to provide follow up information by the participants.

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

The implications for Theory and Research tie back to the concepts of Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) and research of women in the workforce. The lived experience of the women identified in this study further opens the doors for educators to understand the narratives of Latinas in the academy and those in the SSAO role.

Throughout the study and the analysis, the literature and theory about Latinas in higher education stand supported. Continued focus on Latinx/a/o student success and increasing Latinas' inclination for success in Higher Education, specifically Student Affairs, is essential. Latinas in the study are admittedly aware of the lack of diversity amongst their peers in higher education. They feel a similar loss in knowing they are one of few Latinas who embrace and make a difference for students in their essential role across higher education. The need to increase Latinas in higher education remains noted.

The need to focus on increased numbers of Latinx/a/o administrators points to increased Latinx/a/o students entering higher education, and the need to appropriately role model for those students. Role modeling provides a sense of comfort and vision for students, which can indicate
to them their potential for success at the institution. Moreover, retention of Latinx/a/o students may increase the potential for students to see themselves as a college administrator, further helping the case for increased numbers of Latinx/a/o administrators.

From the constructs of Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit), as rooted in Critical Race Theory (CRT), it is important to note the truths of the experiences of Latina SSAOs as related to these concepts. Latina SSAOs are viewed as experts in the Latinx/a/o experiences on their campuses (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). They are called on to speak on behalf of the population; however, in many cases, this is a point of pride for Latina SSAOs. There is a tone of pride and ownership that comes with this for the women.

Experiences of Latina SSAOs in the workplace reflect aspects CRT as they navigate consistent attacks on their race and gender on from others on their team. Race and gender take on a notable role as they moved through their careers by way of attitudes towards them and their ideas by men on their teams. They experienced blatant disrespect on behalf of men on their teams, and dismissive comments directed towards them as a result of their gender or race. These comments and attitudes range from comments about their kindness related to gender, curtness related to gender and race, and timeliness related to race. The underlying aspects of race and the complexities related to Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1988) have made Latina SSAOs stronger and less reliant on the belief of others to magnify their competence.

Moreover, the study indicates an agreement of the experience of women at the intersections of their identities as Latina SSAOs. Their experiences as Latinas are a crucial piece to how they make sense of their world and the attitude they have accepted about their success, which was clear they believed they succeeded because of their identities and not despite them. The concept of cultural and community wealth remains true in this study and illuminates the
experience of these Latinas as they navigate increased responsibilities, challenges in the workplace, and unprecedented success. Their internal strength left to them as an inheritance from their family structures continues to pay dividends.

The incredible connection Latinas make to tie work to a higher life purpose is aligned with Sylvia Hewlett's (2015) research on the significant findings of what career women want in the workplace. Women in the workforce wanted these five things (Hewlett & Marshall, 2014): (a) Women wanted to flourish; (b) Women wanted to excel; (c) Women wanted to reach for meaning and purpose; (d) Women wanted to empower and be empowered; and (e) Women wanted to earn well. As indicated in the study, all Latinas indicated they did find meaning and purpose. In their work, in particular as linked to their identity as Latinas or first-generation students. These identities were salient targets for them as they served all students in their institutions. As they continued to do more for students, they continued to be more confident in their roles. No matter how tough the politics were, they stood firm to find the most meaning in influencing change to make a difference for those they served.

In practice, higher education can learn from Latina SSAOs in this study and have real accountability related to supervisory and leadership skills of supervisors in higher education. The presence of leadership and proper supervision of Latina administrators is key to developing the skills and competencies of young and mid professionals seeking student affairs vice presidency positions. Through the exposure of varied experiences and encouragement to seek professional development opportunities to increase competencies, Latinas can rise to levels of administrations where their lens can provide leadership to other campuses. A focus on identity-based supervision is a key point of learning. Latinas and women administrators should be mentored appropriately and supervised well, per their goals, and aligned with their talents.
The aforementioned is a key to assist Latinas with familiarity with what it takes to acquire new work responsibilities. The skill to take on new responsibilities provides professionals with the cognitive dissonance needed to know what it may be like to oversee areas that are new to them. Supervision and providing feedback is vital, as well, for Latinas and women in general, for building competence and confidence to take on new responsibilities with ease. As well, building this type of confidence over the years may ease the level of imposter syndrome often felt by women and Latinas when being offered influential roles.

This study can also inform hiring practices since Latina SSAOs were frequently the innovators and professionals who moved forward significant policies and changes for students at the institution. It is important not only to diversify the campus because of the benefits for students as it relates to representation and role modeling but also because Latina SSAOs showed the heart they put into their work is unmatched. Day after day, Latina SSAOs provide the depths of care for not only students but professional staff as well. The departments for which they have led appear to feel cared for and to have had leaders who are not perfect but for whom taking care of employees is of critical importance. Latina SSAOs dig deep to understand their work and the people in their departments. Hiring Latinas, therefore, has the potential to sort through many of the organizational programs having to do with a lack of morale that many organizations are struggling with today.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study focused only on Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAO), and throughout the study, other aspects of their identities were salient parts of their experience. For the advancement of Latinx/a/o Educators across higher education, and Latina SSAOs
specifically, I suggest the following as studies to expand knowledge on Latinas in Higher Education and Student Affairs.

As a result of one participant identifying with the LBGTQ community, I believe there is more to be learned from the experience of queer Latinas in the academy and throughout Higher Education. A study regarding the pathways and experiences of LGBTQ Latina SSAOs in higher education can highlight the specific journeys of women within this community.

One of the three testimonios discussed the strong connection between "reversed" gender roles and her ongoing ability to achieve success in her role. Whereas in a traditional heterosexual marriage, women have historically been the ones to delay career progression for their husbands to excel in their fields, a participant in this study acknowledged having been the one to seek progression in her career. I suggest continued research on the perceptions of gender roles in Latino families, and scenarios of professional women as breadwinners.

As the field of student affairs evolves and expands to include areas of Higher Education in Enrollment Management, it is only in some rare circumstances that Senior Student Affairs Officers oversee this important aspect. Given the context of a participant with enrollment responsibilities, their outreach to other women in this particular niche in higher education serves as the necessary support. For the benefit of women in Higher Education Student Affairs, and Enrollment Management it is helpful to understand the path, struggles, and work impact of women who contribute to Enrollment Management in Higher Education.

Given the importance of community colleges in the United States to provide accessible education, it would benefit the industry to learn of the experiences of administrators in the community college setting. More knowledge can inform practices for students who attend, and pathways to attract Latinx/a/o administrators to the community college sector of higher
education. The participation of one community college SSAO as a part of this study is a valuable factor for the depth of the study. As such, it would behoove higher education to know more about Latinx/a/o administrators in the community college system, and the impact on students and society as a result.

Lastly, a point of inquiry and advice are given by Latina SSAOs in this study was the concept of strong supervision as a path to success for aspiring SSAOs. Accountability and skill-building are essential aspects of feeling confident to take on new roles. Latina SSAOs felt they would never be fully prepared for the next step because the breadth of their current portfolios was beyond some of their initial understanding. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to understand if Latinas or women in general, in top administrative roles, felt imposter syndrome to a lesser degree as a result of stronger supervision and exposure to more aspects of higher education than those who did not.

Conclusion

This study aimed to unearth the stories of Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) in higher education in the U.S. Through testimonios, Latina SSAOs found their voice in their story and could share, to the extent to which they desired, the challenges and/or joys of being a Latina SSAO in a position, which is assigned power and influence.

Although the critical nature of this study can seem to focus on a deficits of being Latina SSAOs in student affairs, the outcome and intent are far from deficit in nature. The strengths and assets brought to the table by Latinas in this study confirm that Latinas are positive products of their experiences and are thoughtful in maintaining ties to community. Yosso (2005) outlined the forms of capital available to persons of color and how they bring those strengths to a college
environment. The Latinas in this study bring with them assets that make them even more valuable to increasing the pipeline for Latina leadership in higher education.

I am hopeful that many more Latinas will rise to the position of SSAO. If the testimonios of Latina SSAOs taught us anything, it is that hiring Latina SSAOs will benefit both students and professionals, and will bring innovation, heart, hard work, and intellect front and center to the SSAO position across the nation. The testimonios of the participants reveal both the hope and work still left to accomplish as it relates to building a more diverse workforce and preparing for success when entering the SSAO role. It is not enough to get Latinas to the positions but to prepare the world around them for their powerful leadership once they do.

Latina SSAOs are resilient, ambitious, focused on family, and always seek to do the right things in the face of adversity. What's more, Latina SSAOs are committed to the student experience and provide students the type of care they were once given by others as students when they began college.

The Latinas interviewed in this study shared a connection to the research and me as an aspiring Latina SSAO. Throughout our conversations, we shared laughs, stories, congratulations, condolences, and ultimately shared moments that unearthed a bond with each other and with all Latina SSAOs past, current, and those to come. These testimonios tell individual stories that may connect with other Latinas seeking the SSAO role, and the lessons are valuable because their stories matter to the future of higher education, and the future of Latinx/a/o students. The research matters and is essential because of what it means for future hiring and supervision practices of Latina administrators, and for Latina SSAOs entering the role to know that those who have come before them believe in what she will accomplish.
We learned that Latinas are reliable professionals who seek justice and want to provide students with the best possible experiences under their leadership. Latinas were given opportunities to expand their knowledge by being offered opportunities outside of their areas of expertise, and therefore gained a broader understanding of their institution. This prepared them to take on the SSAO role. Latinas took valuable professional risks in the direction and encouragement of supportive supervisors and mentors who saw their potential. Latinas had professional colleagues, mentors, and sponsors whose support through their careers is paramount to their success.

We learned that to advocate for women and Latina college administrators, and to create healthy professional pathways for them will inevitably widen the pipeline for Latinas to enter SSAO positions across the nation. Encouraging Latinas can come by way of inspiring women to further their education, open the doors for professional development or learning opportunities, and provide the chance to diversify their experiences in the workplace. Latina SSAOs showed that when given a challenge, a priority, or a population of students to support, they will succeed and will create structures, which are sustainable beyond their time at the institution. Given the opportunity to make a difference; Latinas will use their influence and power to make things happen!

A salient message on behalf of Latina SSAOs is simply the power of saying yes. Saying yes to opportunities, professional portfolio advances, and to what may appear to be a professional risk were crucial for successfully entering the SSAO position. As well, we learned through the study of the need Latina SSAOs see to mentor, sponsor, and create opportunities for other Latinas to gain skills to succeed in other SSAO positions. It is important for Latina SSAOs
to say yes to being a mentor, and to be involved nationally in professional organizations willing
to prepare Latinas for the higher education workforce.

Finally, the intersectionality of Latinas and others of their salient identities are factors to
their success, as well. Other identities such as sexual orientation, age, other compounding
marginalized identities such as sexual orientation or belonging to a religious minority, could
further impact the experience of Latinas in the workplace. However, Latina SSAOs must face
both gender and race politics as leaders within their institution. This lens and struggle have
become commonplace, causing Latinas and all women in positions of power to build strength
around the experience of having to prove their worth and expertise around the table. Latinas
continue to prove more than just their worth, but that race and gender still matter in the
workplace.

I hope that aspiring Latina SSAOs who read the testimonios will gain confidence to know
they have what it takes to be successful. It is also my hope that non-Latina administrators will
see the significance of Latinas in power. Latinas wield their power to benefit the entire
community and will always use their influence to do what is right. May the stories of these bold
Latina SSAOs live on in the hopes and dreams of those inspired by their lives.
REFERENCES


http://www.pewhispanic.org/2013/05/09/hispanic-high-school-graduates-pass-whites-in-rate-of-college-enrollment/


APPENDIX A:

PARTICIPANT INTEREST EMAIL

Dear ______,

I am writing to ask your help to participate in my qualitative research study titled: Our Place and Power: Testimonios of Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers.” The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs) at colleges and universities. The goal of the study is to better understand experiences and circumstances that prepared Latinas for their position, how the position has shaped the way they view influential and powerful positions, and to gain advice for aspiring Latina Senior Student Officers. I am thrilled to conduct this study, not only because it is important information to gather, but also because I feel compelled to capture the stories of the brilliant Latinas with whom I am lucky to share the globe.

Participation in the study is based upon pre-determined criteria;

1. The participant identifies as Latina,
2. The participant is employed at a college or university in the United States as the SSAO, and
3. The participant has been in their SSAO role for at least one year.

If you are eligible for the study, and would like to participate, there will be two steps to the study.
First Step: You will be asked to fill out an electronic questionnaire with approximately five
demographic questions, and two more in depth questions about being a Latina SSAO. This will
take you no more than 20 minutes to complete both sections.

Second Step: You will be asked to participate in a 90- minute interview that will include
walking through a timeline activity, where you will be given instructions and questions ahead of
time. This timeline will be a starting point for our time together, and will precede a semi-
structured interview with outlined questions that I will also provide ahead of time. This portion
of the study will take 90 minutes, plus any prior preparation time you determine helpful.

As a participant no individually identifiable information about you or your institution will be
shared with others without your written permission, except if necessary to protect your rights or
welfare; or if required by law.

I hope that you will join me in this journey to prepare more Latina SSAOs to take their seat and
power at the table. Please contact me by________, and I will share a tighter time frame for the
study.

Thank you for your consideration,

Julie A. Leos, Ph.D. Candidate
Email: juliealeos@gmail.com
Phone: 210-269-5978
Curriculum and Instruction
Department of Leadership, Counseling, Adult, Career and Higher Education
College of Education
University of South Florida
APPENDIX B:

Electronic Questionnaire

Questionnaire Information Part 1: Demographic Information

1. Age at the time of first SSAO position
2. Please list the departments that you oversee within your division
3. Length of time in current SSAO position
4. Highest Degree Achieved
5. Were you a first-generation college student? Yes or No.

Questionnaire Information Part 2: 5 Questions about her experience:

1. As a Latina in the SSAO role, when do you find yourself most aware about your gender and racial identities at work? Share an example of when you were most aware that you were a woman and also when you were most aware that you were Hispanic or Latina.
2. What does it mean to you to be a part of a small population of Latina SSAOs in the United States?
3. What advice or suggestions do you have for women who wish to pursue a similar role as yours?
APPENDIX C:
CRITICAL JUNCTURE TIMELINE ACTIVITY WORKSHEET
APPENDIX D:

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE PART 1 (CRITICAL JUNCTURES/TIMELINE)

Prior to the interview, the participant will be given the critical junctures timeline and the critical junctures activity timeline questions.

Guide:

● The participants will be thanked again for participating in the study. The researcher will share once more the reason for the study and how it will enhance the knowledge and experience of aspiring Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers (SSAOs), and higher education as a whole.

● Before beginning this activity, the interviewer will ask if there is anything that needs to be plotted on the timeline that falls chronologically before they began their career, or their SSAO role. There will be a space on the timeline to account for the timeframe between their birth and entering the workforce.

● The interviewer will ask the participant to plot the following items on their timeline and they will create the timeline together.

Please plot on your timeline the following significant junctures in your career:

1. Please plot one (or two) experience(s), position(s), or time(s) in your life and/or career path that prepared you most for your current SSAO position what would that be?
   a. Follow up Question: What makes that example so salient for you?
2. Please plot any mistakes you have made that taught you lessons that allowed you to learn more about yourself as a professional.

3. If you feel comfortable sharing details, what was the lesson and how does that lesson play a role in your professional life today?

Please plot on your timeline the following significant junctures in your current SSAO role:

1. Please plot a moment where you had to break through a barrier by taking a significant risk.
   a. What was the risk and barrier? Can you share how you felt or lessons learned regarding this time in your life?

2. Please plot a moment where you had to assert your authority to get something accomplished.
   a. Can you share more about this experience? What were the consequences?

Additional Probing Questions:

1. Can you point to one critical juncture that you believe has given you the strength of character or the mindset to succeed in your current role?

2. Which critical juncture was the most challenging but sharpened your skill level or resiliency the most?
APPENDIX E:

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE PART 2 (INTERVIEW)

After the critical junctures activity takes place, participants will utilize the remaining time in their 90-minute interview for a semi-structured interview.

- After the activity the researcher will state that they are now moving to the structured interview question portion part of the interview.
- The researcher will state to the participants that the remainder of our time together will be surrounding your current role as Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO)

Main Question 1(W1) : What do you believe is the most important component of your role as SSAO?

  - Probing Question for Main Question 1: Can you share a story about how you came to know that this was the most important role?

Main Question 2 (W2) : Talk about your experience being a Latina in a position of power in higher education, and what does it look like for you each day?

  - Probing Question for Main Question 2: How did you learn how to wield your own power and influence? Can you share a story or example of when you first understood that your positional power gave you influence?

Main Question 3 (W2) : Many women experience the concept of a double bind; have you seen or experienced any examples of this? If so can you provide any examples?
• Probing Question for Main Question 3: (If so) Can you share a story or example of how you came overcome this stigma or the double bind?

Main Question 4 (W3): It is often lonely at the top, under which conditions or situations do you feel the most alone, and can you tell me a story of when you realized this?

• Probing Question for Main Question 4: With whom and where have you found support in your role as SSAO to achieve your career goals? Can you share a story about when you needed your support system the most?

Main Question 5 (W3): Do you believe you were prepared to take on the SSAO role?

• Probing Questions for Main Question 5: What do you wish you would have known about being a Latina SSAO before entering the position? What skills are you grateful you learned prior, and what do you believe aspiring SSAOs should hone in on more?

Main Question 6 (W3): Why do you believe there are so few Latina SSAOs across higher education in the United States?

• Probing Questions for Main Question 6: What advice do you have for aspiring Latina SSAOs about transitioning successfully into the role?
APPENDIX F:

PEER DEBRIEFING/OUTSIDE REVIEWER FORM

I, ________________________________, have served as a peer debriefer and as an outside reviewer for Our Place and Power: Testimonios of Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers by Julie Leos. In this role, I reviewed the interview transcriptions; reviewed themes based on data, and discussed emergent themes with the principle investigator. I served as peer debriefer so that the principle investigator could discuss, early and often, the findings or interpretations at which she had arrived. Further, I served as a peer debriefer that identifies as Latina, or have some expertise or understanding of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latinx/a/o Critical Race Theory (LatCrit).
Dear __________________,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study titled Our Place and Power: Testimonios of Latina Senior Student Affairs Officers. There are a few portions that make up the study:

▪ First, there will be an electronic questionnaire with brief demographic questions (five), and two in depth questions to collect qualitative data. This questionnaire should take no longer than 30 minutes. (Email)

▪ Secondly, there will be a 90-minute interview that involves the creation of a timeline where critical junctures of your career will be plotted. Questions will be provided ahead of time and you will have the ability to create the timeline ahead of time, if you desire. If not, you will have the opportunity to do this during the interview and the researcher will guide you through the process. This should take between 20 and 30 minutes. The remainder of the time will be used to complete an interview to go through remaining questions. All questions will be sent to you ahead of time! (In person or via ZOOM technology)

The Interview:

There will be two options for the interview portion of the study.

1. If I am able to travel close to where you are located, I will meet you in a mutually convenient place. Ideally it can be an office or conference room, which we can confirm ahead of time.
2. If the first option is not possible, I will schedule an interview using ZOOM technology. This option requires a computer with a camera and microphone.

Recording: The interview will be recorded and kept for no more than five years. If we meet in person I will record the interview with a MAC Book and a small recording device. If we choose the ZOOM technology, I will record the interview and use a small recording device separately.

Thank you again for saying YES! Below is a link to sign up for a quick 10 - minute phone chat in order to schedule a date for our interview, and to decide which format for interview we will use. SIGN UP LINK HERE

Sincerely,

Julie A. Leos