

The empowerment of Latina university students: A phenomenological study of ethnic identity development through involvement in a Latina-based sorority

by

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CHAPTER 1. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

Latinos are the second largest ethnic group in the United States, reaching 12.5 percent of the total population. Mexican Americans compose the largest subgroup totaling 58 percent of the United States Latino population (Guzmán, 2001). In addition to Mexican Americans, the United States Latino population also includes individuals that have immigrated from or have ancestors from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Dominican Republic, the countries of Central America, and the countries of South America (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000). Therefore, Latinos as a people come from very diverse backgrounds, with many nationalities represented. The characteristics that connect Latinos as an ethnic group are language, culture, and historical similarities (Casas & Pytluk, 1995; Santiago-Rivera, 2003; Shorris, 1992; Tatum, 1997).

With the increase of Latinos in the United States, educators face new challenges. Latino students have the highest reported high school drop out rate in the nation, reaching 27.0 percent; this is almost four times greater than the drop out rate for white high school students at 7.3 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). If Latino students do graduate from high school and attend post-secondary education, factors contributing to the attrition of Latino university students from the college environment include: family expectations, an unwelcoming campus environment, under preparedness for academic performance, and financial resources (Rendón, 1996; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993).

Once they have decided to attend college, Latino students are given the difficult choice of which college to attend. Hispanic serving institutions are an option with approximately 242 such colleges located within the United States and Puerto Rico. Hispanic serving institutions must fit two criteria to be federally funded. First, the student body must

consist of at least 25 percent Latino students enrolled in the institution with full time status. Secondly, at least 50 percent of the Latino population must be low income students. Hispanic serving institutions are not automatically designated; the institution must apply for the Title V program (U. S. Department of Education, 2004). Hispanic serving institutions are both two-year and four-year, private and public institutions primarily located where larger Latino populations reside. For example, 46 percent of the total Hispanic-serving institutions nationwide are in Texas and California (U. S. Department of Education). Within the state of Iowa, no Hispanic serving institutions exist. If a Latino student wanted to attend an institution within Iowa the student would need to select a predominantly white institution.

Predominantly white institutions come with their own set of challenges for Latino students, including feelings of isolation, disconnection, discrimination, and a lack of a sense of belonging (Hernandez, 2000; Hurtado, 1994; Rendón, 1996). One concern for Latino students is learning how to navigate through a new culture with different social and academic customs and practices (Hernandez, 2002). The process of balancing the traditional Latino ethnic culture with the dominant culture of a predominantly white institution can be overwhelming for some Latino university students, leading to high levels of stress (Hernandez, 2002; Muñoz, 1986).

Culturally related organizations have been found through empirical research to be a way to assist students in managing high levels of stress. One of the reasons Latino organizations have formed on college campuses is to provide subenvironments where Latino students can find support and connect with students from similar backgrounds (Hernandez, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Mayo, Murguía, & Padilla, 1995). Specifically, Latina organizations provide women with resources for discussing issues such as cultural history,

meeting other Latina university students of similar backgrounds, and sharing experiences of marginalization in the campus environment (Capello, 1994).

Over the past eight years, a heightened interest has grown about the development and impact of Latina sororities on college campuses. Three research studies were conducted which focused specifically on Latina sororities (Layzer, 2000; Olivas, 1996; Patterson, 1998). While Latina sororities were the focus in these qualitative studies, the researchers proposed different purposes for exploring the organizations. Olivas explored how a Latina sorority in the Northwest influenced retention rates of the members. She also studied how ethnic identity influenced the formation and practices of the sorority. Two years later in 1998, Patterson studied a Latina sorority on the West Coast examining how a Latina sorority impacted the members' integration and involvement with the larger campus environment. In the final study, Layzer researched the formation of a Latina sorority on a mid-Atlantic campus using an ethnographic approach. The primary reason women founded or joined the Latina sorority was to gain or maintain a sense of their own ethnicity (Layzer). Although each of these studies investigated different aspects of Latina sororities, the impact of the organization on an individual's ethnic identity has yet to be explored, especially on a Midwestern college campus.

This research study focuses on a Latina-based sorority located at a Midwestern, land-grant University. The sorority was founded by Latinas as a means for women to gather to examine issues they face as Latinas; however, now the sorority is a multicultural organization with interest in empowering women. Little prior research has been conducted exclusively on ethnic identity development and acculturation resulting from membership in a Latina-based sorority. These phenomena warranted further investigation using qualitative approaches.

Observing and interviewing the members of the sorority provided a clearer understanding of how these women make meaning of their experiences as sorority members and as Latinas on a predominantly white campus.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate through phenomenological methodology how a Latina-based sorority influences the ethnic identity development of those associated with it on a predominantly white campus in the Midwest. Using ethnographic methods, the study involved weekly observations during the organization's scheduled meetings and other extracurricular activities the group participated in throughout the duration of the study. Two focus groups consisting of five participants each were utilized to obtain background information from the participants. In-depth interviews were conducted through purposive selection of members whose stories needed further clarification. The participants were asked to reflect on their experiences and environments before beginning college and at the present time. A phenomenological approach was used to interpret the stories shared by participants to understand how the Latina women make meaning out of their own personal development and the salience of different aspects of their ethnic identity, as well as the role they see the sorority playing in their development.

Research Questions

Within the context of a predominantly white institution in the Midwest, how does involvement in a Latina-based sorority influence the ethnic identity of the participating members?

- a. How do the participants differ in ethnic identity at the beginning of their individual membership?

- b. How does the organized environment of the Latina-based sorority contribute to a change in identity of the individual participants?

Rationale

Latina university students face many unique challenges when entering the academic environment. According to Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, and Talbot (2000), “Latino women enroll in and graduate from 4-year institutions at a higher rate than Latino men; however, they continue to lag far behind African American women and non-Latino Caucasian women” (p. 513). Factors that contribute to this low rate of attainment of college degrees are low socioeconomic status, effects of cultural and gender-role stereotyping, under-preparation, stress from familial obligations, and institutional marginalization (Rodriguez, et al.).

Latina support groups in the campus environment provide a way for Latinas to discuss issues and concerns in an environment that can at times be very alienating (Rodriguez, et al., 2000). Cultural organizations can empower Latinas through developing an understanding of ethnic culture and history, sharing of experiences, finding role models, and eliminating stereotypes (Capello, 1994). Through studying the influences of the Latina-based sorority on ethnic identity development, student affairs professionals have a better understanding of how to advise and work with Latina university students.

Significance of the Study

A significant amount of research is needed in the area of Latino university student ethnic identity development in a variety of contexts (Torres, 2003a). The findings from this research study add a new perspective to previous research conducted with an emphasis on

Latina women and a Latina cultural sorority. The voices of Latina students from a predominantly white college campus add to the knowledge base through qualitative inquiry.

This study also provides information that Latina sororities can use to build and develop programs for Latina women. The findings can be used to assist sororities in understanding how different aspects of ethnic identity development are promoted or slowed within the organization. This in turn will help build the foundation for new programs in similar sororities.

The research study adds to the knowledge of student affairs professionals who advise Latina sororities. The findings assist student affairs professionals interested in how ethnic identity development is promoted. The study also adds to the knowledge of Latina women by clarifying the benefits of participating in a Latina-based sorority. Latina women gain a better understanding of how ethnic identity is influenced by participating in a cultural organization designed for Latinas.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this research study stems from the research conducted by Vasti Torres (1999, 2003a). From the research Torres (2003a) conducted examining the influences on ethnic identity development of Latino university students, two major themes emerged. The first theme, situating identity, focused on the necessity to identify an individual's ethnic identity at the beginning of post-secondary education. It was found that individual Latino students enter college with differing levels of ethnic identity based on the environment in which they were raised. The second theme, influences on change in identity, included the factors that encourage the development of ethnic identity once Latino students

enter the college campus. These two themes were useful in this research study focusing on the members of the Latina-based sorority.

Situating identity is an important theme to consider due to the variety of environments individuals come from before entering the university (Torres, 2003a). Torres indicated three conditions, “the environment where they grew up, family influences and generation in the United States, and self-perception of status in society” that contribute to situating an individual’s identity (p. 537).

The influences on change in identity development are also a significant component of this research study. According to Torres (2003a), “cultural dissonance and change in relationships within the environment emerged as relevant conditions and influenced change in the participant’s ethnic identity” (p. 540). The concept of cultural dissonance, “refers to the experience of dissonance or conflict between one’s own sense of culture and what others expect” (p. 540). Torres identified, “the change in relationships within the environment” as an important aspect when Latino university students search for “a peer group” at college (p. 543).

Role of Researcher

My interest in the ethnic identity development of Latino university students originated during a graduate level course that encompassed a variety of student development theories. Identity development was a primary focus throughout this course and an area in which I find great interest. The passion I acquired, in particular, for Latino ethnic identity has grown out of my relationships with Latino identified individuals, and the great need for student affairs professionals to gain a better understanding of how Latino individuals make meaning out of the academic experience.

I believe that reality is socially constructed; therefore, for the purpose of this study I “aimed toward consensus” within the Latina-based sorority; however I was “still open to new interpretations” (Lincoln & Guba, 1998, p.182) as the depth of information about ethnic identity development improved. I also believe it is important to note that ethnic identity development theories are merely a framework, a starting point. The Latina women participating in the study shared their individual stories, which did not fit directly into the theoretical framework.

It is also important to note that I came to this research study with an outsider’s, or etic, point of view. I grew up in Iowa and lived in an all-white, small, farming community until attending college at Iowa State University. I acknowledge that my own white racial identity comes with “aspects of culture (language, customs, religion, food)” that may vary drastically from those of the Latino ethnic culture (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000, p. 82). Keeping my biases and my own constructed beliefs in check was of utmost importance to the validity of this research study.

Presently, I am in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies studying higher education and student affairs administration with an interest in student identity development. Through conducting this research study, I have gained a clearer understanding of how a small group of Latina women on campus are grasping their own ethnic identity. Upon completion of my master’s degree, my goal is to make use of identity development theories in practice.

Context of the Study

The study took place at a land-grant university in the Midwest. For the purpose of this study and to maintain confidentiality, the university is referred to as Midwest University

throughout the text. Midwest University had a race and ethnicity breakdown in 2002 of 2.7 percent African Americans, 0.3 percent American Indian/Alaskan Native, 2.5 percent Asian/Pacific Islander, 1.8 percent Latino/a, 83.4 percent white, and 9.2 percent International, with International only dependent on non-resident status (Midwest University Fact Book, 2003). The percentage of Latino students at this predominantly white institution has been slowly increasing over the past five years (Midwest University Fact Book).

The Office of Minority Student Affairs provides many services and opportunities for Latino students on campus. Five organizations and committees offer different methods of involvement for students of all ethnicities to explore and learn more about the Latino culture. Most of these organizations were developed on campus between 1980 and 2000 (Midwest University website, 2003).

The Latina-based sorority is one of the five organizations that focus on Latino issues at the university. The sorority was founded at the university due to a need for an organization that would encourage and empower women both academically and socially. The members of the sorority do not live together in traditional sorority housing; however, many of the sorority sisters do share apartments or live in close proximity to one another. The sorority meets once a week on campus to conduct business meetings. The importance of academics, morals and ethics, and social interaction is stressed throughout the sorority. Community service is also a significant part of participation in the sorority. Outside the business meetings, the sorority sisters spend much of their time together both studying and socializing. The study examined the experiences of 13 undergraduate and 2 graduate students involved in the Latina-based sorority.

Assumptions and Limitations

The first assumption I held was that Latina University students are experiencing tension between fitting into the culture of a predominantly white institution and being a Latina at the same time. I also assumed the tension promoted the development of ethnic identity.

Secondly, I assumed that the Latina-based sorority assists in the reflection and development of its members' ethnic identity through building relationships and sponsoring activities related to Latina ethnicity. I believed that ethnic identity development was likely to occur through the interactions among the members and relationships built within this community. Further, the more an individual participates with the organization the more likely the individual will experience development of her ethnic identity.

Only Latina identified individuals at one predominantly white institution in the Midwest were asked to participate in the study. Therefore, results can not be generalized to other Latinas or women. The findings from this study can only be added to previous research conducted. A limitation to the study is the biases and past experiences of the researcher, which may influence interpretation of the data.

Definitions

I use the term **Latino** throughout this research paper in reference to all individuals, both men and women, who originated or whose ancestors originated from Latin America. This is an umbrella term; however, the common thread includes the shared Spanish language and many cultural attributes including but not limited to: family tradition, religious beliefs, and oppression within the United States. I do not use the term Hispanic, which is commonly used to identify these individuals, due to its rooted European meaning (Tatum, 1997). I use

the term **Latina** to refer to all female identified individuals of Latin American heritage (Kasturirangan & Williams, 2003).

The term **ethnic identity** refers to the amount an individual relates to or is knowledgeable about his or her own ancestral heritage. Portes and Rumbaut (2001) suggested that “ethnic identification begins with the application of a label to oneself in a cognitive process of self-categorization” (p. 151). This includes claiming membership in a group as well as recognizing a contrast in the dominant group (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). For example, an individual who is born into a family that immigrated to the United States from Mexico will have a certain level of ethnic identity depending on the amount his or her family and friends discuss their Mexican culture.

I used the term **Latina-based sorority** to identify the organization that I worked with throughout study. The mission of this organization, although founded by Latinas, focuses on women of all cultures and strives to provide both social and academic support.

Machismo describes the Latino man as “controlling, possessive, sexist and dominant, and often is associated with violence against women” (Santiago-Rivera, 2003, p.11). Santiago-Rivera also stated that within the family, machismo behavior for the Latino man resembles a protective nature with care for the members of the family.

Familism is a term used to describe the importance of family within the Latino culture. According to Gloria and Rodriquez (2000), familism defines family as the primary source for support in both material and emotional means. The Latino family is also the source for determining attitude and behavior responses. The family’s needs have priority over those of an individual family member.

The term **acculturation** refers to the amount an individual adapts to the dominant culture. According to Portes and Rumbaut (2001), this includes, “the development of linguistic and other cultural similarities with the dominant group” (pp.149-150). The term **enculturation** is defined as the process of learning about the cultural and essential qualities needed to participate in one’s own group (Casas & Pytluk, 1995). In this research study, I use the term acculturation to describe the amount a Latina university student has adapted to the dominant culture within the United States versus the traditional ethnic culture of origin. Similarly, I use enculturation to describe the amount a Latina student has adapted to her own ethnic culture. It is important to note that both constructs, acculturation and enculturation, are continuous and open ended processes (Casas & Pytluk).

The term **White culture** is used to describe the majority culture in the United States. This culture is identified as mainstream, English speaking, European White, individualistic, and detached from the past (Rendón, 1996).

The term **double minority** refers to the under representation of Latinas as women and part of the Latino ethnic group. According to Escobedo (1980), Latinas face the challenge of comprising two minority groups, women and Latino ethnicity. The concerns of Latinas are overlooked by women as being the concerns of the Latino ethnic group and in male-dominated groups as the concerns of women (Escobedo).

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of a review of literature relevant to this study of Latina university students. The literature review provides a framework and situates the study within the current knowledge base concerning Latina university students, as well as providing a comparison of previous findings from related studies (Creswell, 2003). First, an analysis of literature pertaining to the Latino population as a whole in the United States is summarized. Then, literature relevant to Latino university students and ethnic identity development is examined. Finally, information on Latina issues and Latina sororities is explored. The literature encompasses informative articles, research studies both qualitative and quantitative in nature, life histories, memoirs, and books related to Latino university students in the United States.

Latinos in the United States

Hispanic, Latino, and Chicano are labels used to categorize people who have immigrated from Latin American or Spanish-speaking countries to the United States. Through the literature review, I found many inconsistent ways in which these labels are used to describe this particular population of people in the United States. It becomes very confusing when different authors use the term Chicano, for example, to define different groups of people. Therefore, the first portion of this literature review is dedicated to clarifying these terms and describing the cultural characteristics that form the connection between subgroups of Latinos in the United States.

The U.S. Census Bureau selected the term Hispanic in the 1970's to define the growing population of people from Spanish-speaking countries, in particular Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Cuba, who were immigrating to the United States and remained unaccounted for at

that time in the U.S. Census (del Olmo, 2001). The countries that the term Hispanic envelopes are “Mexico, the countries of Central America (Guatemala, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama), the Spanish-speaking countries of South America (Columbia, Venezuela, Peru, Chile, Ecuador, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina), the Spanish-speaking countries of the Caribbean (Cuba, the Dominican Republic)” (Casas & Pytluk, 1995, pp. 156-157), Puerto Rico and Spain. It is important to note that “the federal government considers race and Hispanic origin to be two separate and distinct concepts” (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 1). Hispanic is used to define an individual’s ethnicity, not race.

Historically, according to del Olmo (2001), Latino was used to distinguish the Latin world from the English-speaking, Protestant countries. Consequently, Latino included the Roman Catholic countries of France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Central America, and South America. At this time, Latino is used as an umbrella term, which includes people who identify as Hispanic, as well as those from all other Latin American countries. Latino is used interchangeably with the term Hispanic by the U.S. Census Bureau (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001). Yet, two significant differences exist between the labels Hispanic and Latino. First, Hispanic does not include people of American Indian or Brazilian origin because these subgroups do not use Spanish as a primary language (del Olmo, 2001). Second, “Latino has gender, which is Spanish, as opposed to Hispanic, which follows English rules” (Shorris, 1992, p. xvii). Thus, the term Latina is used to identify women and Latino to identify men.

In the following excerpt, Shorris (1992) explained how the preference for using Hispanic or Latino changes with geography:

Hispanic is preferred in the Southeast and much of Texas. New Yorkers use both Hispanic and Latino. Chicago, where no nationality has attained a majority, prefers

Latino. In California, the word Hispanic has been barred from the Los Angeles Times, in keeping with the strong feelings of people in that community. Some people in New Mexico prefer Hispano. (pp. xvi – xvii)

Chicano, another popular label, is described by some as a political ethnic term referring to Mexican American, Central American, and South American people “residing in the US who share indigenous ancestry, memory, culture, and [conscience] of patriarchy, colonization, and racialized-political structural realities” (González, 2001, p. 654). In contrast, Chicano has also been narrowed to only those of Mexican descent who have immigrated to the United States.

Obtaining a conscious understanding of the meaning behind these labels is the first step to showing respect to the Latino community. The second step is showing sensitivity to how an individual person wants to self-identify, which demonstrates respect as well as an attempt to understand cultures and national origins (Arce-Kaptain, 2002). For the purpose of the research study, Latino is used as an all encompassing term; however, I asked the participants to self-identify when conducting field work.

Latinos are a racially mixed group of African Black, European White, and indigenous American Indian. Cultural values, not demographics, contribute to Latinos identifying as one ethnic group. The cultural values of familism and the Spanish language have the most significant weight (Tatum, 1997). Familism refers to “the importance of the extended family as a reference group and as providers of social support” (Tatum, p. 137). Santiago-Rivera (2003) described immediate and extended family as a core value of Latino people. This value of familism is characterized as an individual’s ability to be self-sacrificial to the family and the desire to remain living in close proximity with the extended family (Santiago-Rivera). It

is also noted that family is viewed as a major source of support when Latino individuals are migrating and experiencing acculturative changes. The Spanish language binds the Latino population together and can contribute to acculturative stress among Latino youth when entering the United States school system dominated by the English language (Tatum).

Other cultural values identified by Casas and Pytluk (1995) include: patriarchal family structure, respect, cultural fatalism, religiosity, belief in folk healing when in crisis, and a tendency to connect physical and emotional well-being. Santiago-Rivera (2003) also discussed Latino cultural beliefs on health and illness. According to Santiago-Rivera, “beliefs about health and illness and the practices associated with folk medicine vary tremendously across the various Latino groups and family generations” (p. 7). A combination of medieval Spanish, African, and indigenous beliefs are sometimes used to cure folk illness caused by the supernatural (Santiago-Rivera).

Marotta and Garcia (2003) conducted a study on Latinos in the United States using information gathered in the 2000 decennial census. The primary function of the study was to identify the most salient characteristics of the U.S. Latino population. The most significant piece of data found in the study was the dramatic growth rate of the Latinos, 13 percent of the total United States population (Marotta & Garcia). Of the Latino population, Mexican ethnicity represents the largest portion at 58 percent; however, according to Marotta and Garcia, “people of Mexican heritage were the least likely to have high school diplomas or higher educational attainment” (p. 26). It was also found that increasing numbers of individuals used Spanish as the primary language in the home. With this in mind, there is an increased need for linguistically diverse individuals in the work force. In addition, more individuals are requesting instruction in the English language (Marotta & Garcia).

Avilés, Guerrero, Howarth, and Thomas (1999) conducted a qualitative study that focused on the reasons Latinos drop out of high school that relates to Marotta and Garcia's (2003) finding of high drop out rates within the Mexican ethnic subgroup. Through this study, the themes of alienation and discrimination were apparent factors that played a role in the participants' decision to drop out of high school (Avilés, et al.). The findings and discussion produced suggestions to fight against alienation and discrimination in high school which include: teaching Latino history and culture, providing Latino role models, and hiring Latino instructors.

If Latino students manage to complete a secondary degree, the challenges faced in elementary and high school more than likely continue in post-secondary education. The following section examines literature related to Latino students in a university or college environment.

Latino University Students

Recent research has found that adjusting to the college campus environment and developing a positive sense of belonging are the two most challenging aspects for Latino university students. The following section consists of research studies and articles that focus on issues of academic adjustment, a sense of belonging, and involvement.

Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) conducted a study that assessed the factors in adjusting to college during the first and second years for Latino students. The participants reported that discrimination disengaged Latino students' feelings of attachment to the institution, while academic adjustment was found to be the most difficult aspect of Latino students' first year (Hernandez, 2000; 2002; Hurtado, et al.). Rendón (1996) wrote an article giving an account of her own experience with adjustment to post-secondary education. Not

only do Latino university students face ethnic and racial shock but they also contend with academic shock. Rendón described feelings of isolation and disconnection with other individuals on the college campus. Additionally, poor college adjustment for minority students was found to be promoted through stress factors such as academic under preparedness, negative expectations from white peers and faculty, family expectations or concerns, and academic competition (Muñoz, 1986; Smedley, et al., 1993). A lack of financial resources has also been reported to contribute to a great amount of stress for Latino students (Muñoz).

However, it has been found that college peers and family provided support that encouraged students to remain in school through the first year (Hernandez, 2000; 2002; Hurtado, et al., 1996). Family has been recognized as one of the most important and influential groups in Latino students' lives (Ortiz, 1986; Terenzini, Rendón, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, & Jalomo, 1994). Hernandez (2000) also reported that Latino students' families "can be used as an effective retention tool by familiarizing Latino parents with the college setting and providing them with an opportunity to meet and develop rapport with college educators and support staff" (p. 582). Hernandez (2000) continued by stating that "bilingual and culturally sensitive recruitment materials should be made available" (p. 582). One of the greatest challenges in incorporating Latino parents in a student's post-secondary education is the emphasis on individuality that is given to a student upon entrance into higher education in the United States (Hernandez, 2000). In contrast, research has also found that familial influence can also add to the stress level of Latino students when pressured to balance "parental expectations with their own definition of what it means to be Latino" (Hernandez, 2002, p. 81).

Another relevant topic that appeared in research studies aimed at gaining a better understanding of how Latino students come to feel a sense of belonging in campus environments. Hurtado (1994) conducted a study that evaluated “how high-achieving Latino students perceive the receptivity of their institutions to a Latino presence on campus” (p. 21). The results revealed that the participants believed that students at their institution know very little about Latino culture and “most students believe minorities are special admits” (Hurtado, p. 35). Further, when comparing the Latino students’ sense of belonging at predominantly white institutions versus institutions with larger populations of Latinos, more racial tension was found on predominantly white campuses, which contributed to a lessened sense of belonging. Low racial tension was experienced by Latinos who felt that college administrators and faculty were concerned about student development and validated students (Hurtado, 1992; 1994).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) conducted a quantitative study pertaining to Latino students’ sense of belonging. The students’ first and second years of college were taken into account while examining the students’ background characteristics and college experience and its affects on the students’ sense of belonging. The results showed that a “merging of social and academic interactions,” such as discussing course content outside of class with other students or talking with faculty outside of class, contribute to a high sense of belonging (Hurtado & Carter, p. 334).

The “merging of social and academic interactions,” led to research studies that focused on student involvement with faculty and campus organizations. Eimers (2001) designed a quantitative study that investigated the relationship between college experience and college success for students of color. The results of the study supported the idea that as

students increased involvement with faculty, the level of student academic success increased, too. Anaya and Cole (2001) also conducted a study that explored the student-faculty interactions of Latino students. It was found that formal contact with faculty encouraged Latino students' success, both academically and socially, on college campuses. Participants shared accounts of activities, such as discussing course work, working on research projects, and discussing career plans, which positively impacted their involvement. Anaya and Cole reported that "student achievement is enhanced when professors are perceived as accessible and supportive" (p. 11).

Mayo, Murguía, and Padilla (1995) used a quantitative study to evaluate the affects of student involvement in campus organizations and contact with faculty versus student involvement in social life and relationships with fellow students. The study was conducted at a predominantly white institution in the Southwest and included Mexican American, American Indian, African American, and white students. The study found that students' academic success as measured by GPA was encouraged through building positive relationships with faculty (Mayo, et al.). Additionally, the findings indicated that Mexican American students who participate in student organizations achieve higher GPA scores than those Mexican Americans who did not participate in campus-run organizations.

Consequently, it is not surprising that involvement in student organizations was found to be an important aspect in forming Latino students' sense of belonging. However, in the research conducted by Hurtado and Carter (1997), the results suggested that only Latino students who participated in religious organizations and fraternities and sororities had a greater sense of belonging than nonmembers. Further, in this study only organizations that

focused on culturally related activities played a role in a sense of belonging for Latino students.

Terenzini, Rendón, Upcraft, Millar, Allison, Gregg, and Jalomo (1994) examined through qualitative inquiry how students become involved in college. Data were collected from four institutions varying in size, mission, geography, curricular emphasis, and residential or commuter status (Terenzini, et al.). One significant finding reported was that many first-generation students deferred involvement in extracurricular campus activities until they felt comfortable with their academic performance. The significance of this finding of deferred involvement is that it may contribute to a student's lower sense of belonging.

Hernandez (2002) reported on a qualitative study that explored how Latino students make meaning out of their college experience, leading to their remaining in school and obtaining a degree. Echoed in this article were the elements of academic and social adjustment, family support and encouragement, involvement opportunities, and ethnic and cultural identity. Hernandez found as well that some of the participants made conscious decisions to not become involved in extracurricular activities due to the need and concern for academic study. The lack of involvement shared by six of the 10 participants may be a contributing factor to a negative first year experience for Latino students (Hernandez).

Hernandez (2000) also reported that extracurricular activities were found to be of great importance for students to connect with friends and become part of a community, which in turn broke down the large campus into small environments. The author stated that most of the Latino students developed friendships through Latino organizations that gave them the opportunity to "stay culturally grounded" and "to nurture one's sense of ethnic identity" (p. 583). It has been reported that "Latino students who have representative groups

to join at predominantly white institutions may feel less socially isolated and less culturally alienated” (Fuentes & Sedlacek, 1989, as cited in Hernandez, p. 583).

Significant amounts of research have been conducted examining the competition found between interminority groups, interracial groups, and Latino subgroups in higher education. Mentzer (1993) examined the movement from “bilateral (white-black) competition to one of multilateral competition” (p. 417). The study examined how different minority groups competed with each other. Mentzer found that conflict between ethnic groups excluding whites can be prevalent in higher education. Mentzer also stated that “studies of higher education that lump all minority groups together may be missing some important differences among groups” (p. 432). Mack, Tucker, Archuleta, DeGroot, Hernandez, and Cha (1997) also examined interethnic relationships of university students. They found in this quantitative study that Latino students were more likely to be pressured to attend ethnic events than white students.

Arbona and Novy (1991) conducted a quantitative study on within group differences of Latino college students. For the purpose of the study, the author split the Latino college students into two groups: Mexican American and non-Mexican American. The non-Mexican American group included Puerto Rican, South and Central American, and Cuban students. The demographic variables of “generational level, parental socioeconomic status, and mother’s and father’s level of education” were considered (p. 336). The results showed that a larger percentage of Mexican Americans were born in the United States, and reported lower levels of parental socioeconomic status and lower educational attainment than the Latino non-Mexican Americans (Arbona & Novy). However, the two Latino subgroups were similar in academic performance and retention rates. One factor Arbona and Novy believed may

have skewed the data was the large portion of non-Mexican American Latinos who were foreign born and consequently had lower English proficiency than did the Mexican American subgroup.

The aspects of alienation and interactional style between Asian, Hispanic, and White college students at a predominantly white institution were examined in a quantitative study. Steward, Germain, and Jackson (1992) reported that “successful Anglo, Asian, and Hispanic American students have similar interactional styles on campus and experience alienation to the same degree” (p. 153). The majority of the participants came from middle-class, White backgrounds, which the authors saw as an explanation for similar interactional styles between the ethnic groups. Steward, et al. also stated that since the majority of participants originated from middle class white communities, higher levels of acculturation may exist with the Asian and Hispanic students.

The cultural orientation of Latino university students was another topic discussed in the literature. A study conducted by Torres, Winston, and Cooper (2003) investigated how the factors of geographic location, institutional type, and level of stress affect cultural orientation in Latino students. The study included “370 Hispanic college students from institutional locations where Hispanics are significantly present in the population and from areas where Hispanics are not a critical mass” (p.153). Torres’ Bicultural Orientation Model was used to clarify the different effects of acculturation and ethnic identification. Three factors were cited in this study: geographic location, marginal orientation, and level of stress. The influence of geographic location on the level of acculturation and ethnic identity of Latino university students was a significant discovery from this study. High levels of acculturation were displayed by Latino students who attended colleges without a critical

mass of Latinos in the community, while low levels of acculturation were displayed by students who attended colleges with a critical mass of Latinos in the community. However, both sets of students displayed equal levels of ethnic identity development despite the presence of a critical mass of Latinos. Further, a large percentage of students with marginal orientation, that is, those who show low levels of ethnic identity in addition to low levels of acculturation, were identified only at colleges where a critical mass of Latinos existed (Torres, et al.).

Torres (2003b) described three different factors Latino students are confronted with, “the relationship between identity development and cultural orientation, environmental factors, and the link between generational status and parental expectations” (p. 3). Many Latino students are socially pressured to choose between the Anglo-oriented culture and their own ethnic culture (Torres). Torres also noted that her research discovered, “that although students [in non-critical-mass areas] may have adopted many of the norms of the majority culture, they still value, experience, and take pride in their Latino identity” (p. 4). From this article, it is apparent that the difference between Latino students living in critical-masses versus non-critical-masses is crucial to how they identify with the dominant culture and their own ethnic identity. Generational status is the third issue discussed in the article. First generation versus third generation Latino students face different familial and parental expectations due to the higher degree of acculturation in third generation Latinos (Torres).

Gloria and Rodriguez (2000) discussed issues of social support systems, cultural factors, and environmental contexts when reflecting on the experiences of Latino university students. They suggested that “Latino students are often faced with the need to adopt a bicultural understanding of themselves in academia” (p. 147). The “bicultural understanding”

referred to in this quotation related to the Latino student's understanding of ethnic identity development and acculturation of the dominant culture. Relationships that provided academic support were found to aid in the Latino student's persistence within higher education settings. Family members, role models, and mentors, in particular, provided personal and academic support (Gloria & Rodriguez).

Ethnic Identity Development of Latino Students

The stresses that Latino students experience when having to deal with their ethnic culture and the dominant culture have led to research and theories related to the process of ethnic identity development and acculturation. Casas and Pytluk (1995) compared and analyzed theories on ethnic identity formation and acculturation of Latino individuals. A primary focus of the article was to stop the glossing over of ethnic/racial labels and to evaluate the diversity that can be found in Latino subgroups.

According to Casas and Pytluk (1995), to understand an individual's ethnic identity, both enculturation and acculturation must be taken into consideration. Ethnic identity is considered a self concept that is continuously evolving and affected by acculturation and enculturation; therefore, one cannot assume that ethnic identity is the same for every Latino individual. Casas and Pytluk also noted that for a Latino individual to "identify with one culture in no way diminishes the ability of an individual to identify with any other culture" (p. 173). This leads to the theory and model developed and implemented by Vasti Torres (Torres & Phelps, 1997; Torres, 1999; 2003a).

Torres (1999) conducted a study to validate the Bicultural Orientation Model (BOM), which was introduced by Torres and Phelps (1997) to represent how different levels of

acculturation and ethnic identity development affect Latino university students (see Figure 1).

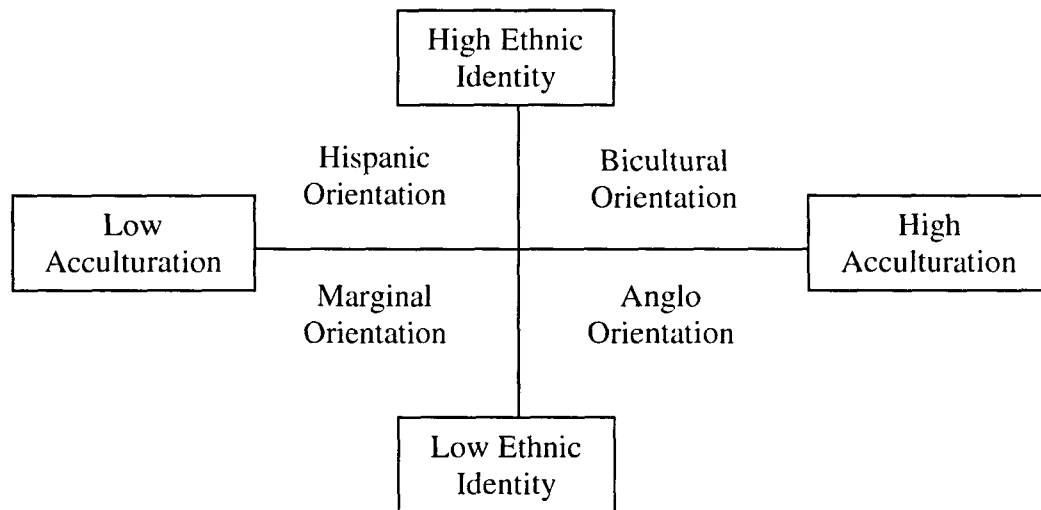


Figure 1.
Bicultural Orientation Model
(Torres, 1999, p. 287)

The model is divided into four quadrants: Hispanic orientation, bicultural orientation, Anglo orientation, and marginal orientation. The quadrants are formed by differing levels of acculturation and ethnic identity development (Torres). For example, a student who identifies highly with his or her own ethnic identity, but not with the dominant Anglo culture would tend to fit into the Hispanic orientation quadrant.

A significant aspect of the Bicultural Orientation Model is its two-dimensional nature. Acculturation and ethnic identity development are viewed as two separate constructs that must be evaluated separately when determining a Latino student's cultural orientation. The Bicultural Orientation Model differs from linear models that view acculturation and ethnic identity development on a continuum (Torres).

Through the study conducted by Torres (1999), it was found that Latino students who are more “acculturated to the Anglo culture and are less aware of their culture of origin” consider themselves to be bicultural with high level of ethnic identity” (p. 294). The study also validated that biculturalism, “a synthesis of two cultures and languages out of which a third arises,” (p. 288) can and does exist.

Torres (2003a) also conducted a qualitative study that examined the influences on ethnic identity development of Latino students during the first two years of college. The author identified ethnic identity formation as “based on one’s sense of self as part of an ethnic group” (p. 532). Ten students with diverse Latino backgrounds participated in the study. The two themes that emerged were identified as (1) situating identity and (2) influences in the change of identity development (Torres).

The first theme, situating identity development, was influenced by the participant’s home environment, familial influences, generational status in the United States, and self-perception of status in society. According to Torres (2003a), “the influences of where they grew up, their generational status in the United States, and self-perception of societal status play a major role in situating their identity in their first year of college” (p. 544). Torres noted the importance of understanding that not all Latino students enter college without having previously examined their individual ethnic identity. The second theme, a change in identity, contributed to the cultural dissonance the participants experienced in college, which encouraged the formation and development of ethnic identity.

Latina Issues

Reviewing recent literature specifically involving issues Latina women experience is also an important aspect of this literature review. The majority of literature found relates to

the constraints Latina women encounter due to being a double minority, Latina and women, in addition to the oppressing lifestyle expressed through traditional gender roles. Escobedo (1980) discussed the challenges that Hispanic women face in education and professional advancement. Hispanic women comprise two minority groups, women and Hispanic, which cause women's groups to overlook Hispanic concerns and Hispanic groups to be dominated by male concerns. Escobedo saw traditional family expectations and early life experiences as the two major factors contributing to low levels of motivation for academic achievement among Latina women.

Family expectations and traditional gender roles were a focus of many research articles. Chacón, Cohen, and Strover (1986) conducted a study exploring the oppression Chicanas face as both women and people of color in higher education. The researchers found that Chicanas received less parental support, particularly from the maternal side, for attending college. Chicanas also report higher levels of stress than men due to "higher levels of domestic obligations" (p. 314).

Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, and Talbot (2000) explored the various barriers Latina university students face on college campuses. According to Rodriguez, et al., "little is published about Latino students regarding successful recruitment and retention strategies, ways to better serve them in college, and barriers to completion of a degree" (p. 513). The factors of under-preparation, stress factors from financial and social constraints, familial obligations, and institutional marginalization are discussed. Under-preparation is attributed to the low numbers of Latinas placed in college-preparation courses in high school. Financial concerns are a primary stress for many Latinas as are family expectations due to gender role conflict with educational goals (Rodriguez, et al.). The authors also identified factors

contributing to high achievement among Latinas, which include: the mother's support of education, type of schooling, marital status, and biculturalism (Rodriguez, et al.).

Sexual behavior was the focus for two research studies. Sabogal, Pérez-Stable, Otero-Sabogal, and Hiatt (1995) conducted a quantitative study researching the differences in sexual behavior of Hispanic and non-Hispanic White adults. Gender, ethnicity, and acculturative levels were major factors discussed in the findings. The researchers "found fewer ethnic and more gender differences in sexual behavior among Hispanic and non-Hispanic White adults" (p. 151). A correlation was found between the Hispanic women's level of acculturation and number of sexual partners. As Hispanic women became more acculturated, the number of sexual partners increased. The authors believed that acculturation contributes to Hispanic women changing their beliefs and attitudes about traditional gender roles (Sabogal, et al.).

Faulkner (2003) used a grounded theory approach to study the sexual behavior of 31 young Latina women. The study was narrowed by including only Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican American women, with the idea that these women shared commonalities (Faulkner). Faulkner divided the participants into three groups based on the findings: Latinas who rejected, accepted, or altered traditional beliefs about sexual women. Through interviews, the researcher found that "Latinas wanted to avoid being players" or being labeled "flirt girls" (p. 191). A flirt girl is defined as a woman who is "free and open about her sexual desires; accepts 'straight-out' invitations for sex from men, has 'sex when she can,' sleeps and dates around, and 'allows her man to be with other women'" (p. 191). Cultural sex roles are defined through *marianismo* and *machismo* which "prescribe appropriate traditional gender roles of feminine and masculine behavior, including sexual

behavior” (Gil & Vazquez, 1996, as cited in Faulkner, p. 176). Implications of the study suggested that practitioners need to consider a Latina individual’s acculturation level in addition to ethnic identity.

Latina domestic violence survivors have also been studied. To further their understanding from a counseling perspective, Kasturirangan and Williams (2003) investigated through qualitative inquiry Latina women who had survived cases of domestic violence. Nine women participated in the study, which consisted of one 45 minute interview with each woman. An introductory meeting before the interview was used to build rapport between the participants and the primary researcher (Kasturirangan & Williams). Gender roles, family, and cultural values surfaced as the most commonly discussed issues involved in the women’s experiences with domestic violence. The personality trait of *marianismo* was described in many of the interviews. For example, some women gave accounts of feeling “strong and brave because they put up with abuse” (p. 173). The women portrayed an attitude of satisfaction and pride in suffering for the family, which was identified as a source of strength and support.

Esmeralda Santiago (1998) wrote a memoir about her life when she moved with her mother and siblings from Puerto Rico to New York City. At the time of the move, she was 13 years old. She included accounts of her experiences with the educational system, her struggle to learn the English language, and her first memories of discrimination due to the color of her skin and her Spanish native language. The cultural values of family and gender roles are expressed through her relationship with her mother and the experiences she shared of first dating men. Many of the accounts Santiago shared in the memoir of becoming a Puerto Rican woman reflect the cultural values and traditions summarized in the previous research studies.

González (2001) conducted a qualitative study to explore how adolescent Mexicana high school students make meaning out of “gendered cultural socialization and the cultural transmission” of education (p. 643). The author used the term Mexicana to identify women who have immigrated to the United States from Mexico. Through the conversations with the participants, González identified a close tie with spirituality in the women’s shared accounts. Through inductive analysis, González found that “cultural knowledge teaches tools and strategies for navigating through life and schooling, and for a successful future” (p. 652).

A final research article related specifically to Latina university students described ways Latinas can benefit from participation in support groups. According to Capello (1994), the support group provided “a way of discussing issues and concerns important to them as Latina college students” (p. 29). The issues that became relevant to the women within the support group were marginalization, the cultural issues of respect and authority, quasi-parenting obligations, and survival strategies. The researcher used counseling techniques to validate the experiences of the participants including: learning about their own ethnic culture and history, providing role models, reading material written by Latina authors, and eliminating stereotypes. Capello recommended the establishment of support groups where Latina women can share their individual experiences.

Latina Sororities

Discussion of research on the establishment of support groups, more specifically Latina sororities, will conclude this literature review. Only three research studies were found that focused primarily on Latina sororities. Therefore, this section includes articles and research directed toward sororities in general, ethnic Greek organizations, and Latina sororities.

Handler (1995) examined the results of a case study on the gender strategies of a historically white sorority. In-depth interviews were collected from 26 members of the sorority participating in the study. Handler found that the participants' primary reason for joining the sorority was "negotiating friendships among women and romantic relationships between women and men" (p. 252). The participants believed that their membership provided intrinsic friendship with other sorority sisters that could not be found outside the sorority. The sorority also offered a way to meet high status men in the competitive college culture (Handler). The sorority women separated themselves from women outside the sorority by viewing their membership as a way to remove the negative stereotypes of women.

An article similar in nature to the Handler (1995) article analyzed little sister organizations, which consisted primarily of white members. Stomblor and Martin (1994) found that social goals were the reason the participants of the study joined the little sister organization. The authors found that selection criteria used by fraternity men were physical and social beauty. The results of the study show that little sister organizations create a hierarchy forcing women to be subservient to fraternity members (Stomblor & Martin). It is important to note that this study made no reference to ethnic related sororities or fraternities.

Segregation was the focus of a research study comparing black and white sororities at a large, public university in the Southeast. Schmitz and Forbes (1994) used an ethnographic approach, interviewing 16 undergraduate sorority women, collecting observations, and revealing cultural themes of the sororities. Data on issues of comfort, segregation, attitudes and beliefs about recruitment, and barriers to integration were collected from interviews and observations. The study found that the "sororities remain unintegrated because there is no prevailing will to change" (p. 107). The researchers added that Greek organizations need to

eliminate traditions that are contrary to institutional values and develop strategies that do not promote racial exclusion.

Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) used qualitative inquiry to gain an understanding of why women join and participate in traditionally white sororities or traditionally black sororities. Three major themes emerged from the data analyses: finding men, engaging in community service, and enhancing careers (Berkowitz & Padavic). A distinct and apparent difference existed between the black and white sororities when asked questions on reasons for joining a sorority. Berkowitz and Padavic noted that the women who participated in the traditionally white sorority joined so that they could participate in activities that involved meeting fraternity men. The reasons expressed by members of the black sorority included making a difference and showing commitment to the African American community through service projects the sorority performed. The traditionally white sorority did not remark on commitment to community service (Berkowitz & Padavic). Both African American and white women believed that membership in their sorority would enhance their future success in careers (Berkowitz & Padavic). The African American sorority members felt that their membership would continue at alumnae status and the connections formed through their sorority would enhance their career options. The white sorority members, however, felt that upon graduation involvement in their sorority would cease, but the prestige of Greek involvement represented on their resume would enhance their career options (Berkowitz & Padavic).

Roberto Rodriguez (1995) discussed the foundation of both Latino fraternities and sororities at universities and colleges. Some of the first Latino fraternities were formed by elite and wealthy students from Latin America studying in the United States during the late

1800's (Rodriguez). However, these organizations were not reported as involving the local population and died out in the 1930's. The majority of the Latino fraternities that currently exist were formed in the Midwest and East due to the isolation many Latino students felt on predominantly white campuses (Rodriguez). Many Latino fraternities and sororities distinguish themselves from traditional Greek organizations by using Aztec or Spanish names rather than Greek letters, referring to themselves as *Hermandades*, which means brotherhood and sisterhood (Rodriguez). According to Rodriguez, "Many long-time Chicano and Latino campus activists theorize that the reason Latino fraternities did not evolve until the 1980s is because of discrimination, segregation and the long history of anti-Black and anti-Latino actions by Greek-letter organizations nationwide" (p. 28). Today, the purpose of many Latino fraternities and sororities is to assist the Latino community (Rodriguez). This element of community involvement is similar to the commitment the African American sorority members discussed in the Berkowitz and Padavic (1999) study.

Three studies were found that specifically involved Latina sororities. Each of the studies used qualitative inquiry to explore various aspects of Latina sorority members and Latina sorority organizations as a whole. Olivas (1996) studied a Latina sorority in the Northwest, examining how identity played a role in the formation of the sorority and how membership in the sorority influenced student retention. The findings from this study relate to research conducted on Latino student involvement (Hernandez, 2000; 2002; Mayo, et al, 1995), a sense of belonging (Hurtado, 1994; Hurtado & Carter, 1997), and membership in support groups (Capello, 1994). The author found that the sorority was formed to preserve and maintain a sense of their cultural values. Involvement in the sorority was also a way to alleviate the amount of stress found on a predominantly white campus and gave the women a

sense of belonging at the university. The themes of respect, preserving cultural identity, family, and barriers related to oppression and discrimination emerged from the transcribed interviews and observations (Olivas). According to Olivas, part of the Latino culture is retained by the sorority; however, other parts of the Latino culture such as traditional gender roles are not preserved due to the negative impact they represent for Latina women.

In a qualitative study, Patterson (1998) explored how a Latina sorority impacts the members' involvement in the campus environment and institutional integration. The study was conducted on the West Coast. The participants identified primarily as Mexican American, low socioeconomic status, and having parents who had obtained elementary education (Patterson). The themes of socialization and support emerged, with some participants sharing accounts of joining the sorority for academic support while others joined to be with other women of similar backgrounds (Patterson). Patterson noted that membership in the sorority validated the women's cultural values "particularly as they struggle to balance the institution's expectations for autonomy with their families' cultural and gendered role expectations for them as Latinas" (p. 185). The findings from the study show that the Latina sorority assisted its members in locating a safe place within the larger campus culture (Patterson).

The final research study found was conducted by Layzer (2000), who completed an ethnographic study researching the formation of a Latina sorority on a Mid-Atlantic campus. The study was conducted during the first three semesters of the sorority's existence. The culture of the group was a primary focus for the researcher, who examined how the conception of ethnic identity contributes to the group's culture, as well as other forces that influence the culture of the sorority (Layzer).

The formation of ethnic identity was expressed by many of the participants as an important benefit that came with joining the Latina sorority (Layzer, 2000). For example, participants whose primary language was English spoke of learning Spanish from other members of the sorority as an advantage of membership. According to Layzer, the participants believed success in the campus culture was achieved by adopting the dominant cultural values; however, within the community constructed by the Latina sorority, the members were able to separate themselves and maintain a sense of ethnic identity.

Conclusion

The review of literature consisted of many research studies related to the Latino ethnic population. The issues of Latino university students' sense of belonging, involvement in student organizations, and interaction with faculty have been investigated by researchers. Theories and models for the development of ethnic identity and acculturation have been created and researched in studies focusing on Latino university students. Research related to the issues Latina women face also exist; however, a gap in the research is apparent between ethnic identity development and Latina university students within the context of a Latina-based sorority. The current research study helps to fill this gap in the research through exploring how Latina university students make meaning out of their own ethnic identity formation, as well as the role they see the sorority playing in their development. Additionally, through in-depth descriptions and personal accounts this research study included the voices of the participants that have been absent in many of the prior research studies.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

General Methodological Approach

The methodological approach for this study is viewed through the lens of social constructivism. “The term constructivism denotes an alternative paradigm whose breakaway assumption is the move from ontological realism to ontological relativism” (Lincoln & Guba, 1994, p. 61). Qualitative inquiry is used to provide contextual information, insight into human behavior, and the emic view (Lincoln & Guba).

According to Merriam (2002), qualitative research consists of the desire to “know how people do things, and what meaning they give to their lives” (p. 18). The qualitative methods uncovered how involvement in a Latina-based sorority influences the ethnic identity of the participating members at a predominantly white institution. This research revealed how the members of the Latina-based sorority make meaning out of their involvement and how this involvement correlates with their ethnic identity development.

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumption underlying social constructivism is the integration of ontology and epistemology during the process of the research study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1994), “the distinction between ontology and epistemology disappears” within a social constructivist approach (p. 65). Ontology focuses on the question of what reality is and the nature of reality, while epistemology is how reality is interpreted by the researcher and the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). For example, the Latina-based sorority I researched constructs its own social reality based on historical, ethnic, and cultural experiences. As I began to conduct fieldwork, the Latina-based sorority and I became “interactively linked so

that the ‘findings’ are literally created” during the research study (Lincoln & Guba, 1994, p. 63).

The primary focus of the methodology for this study included the interaction between myself and the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). The methodology was qualitative in nature, using a phenomenological approach which is discussed next.

Research Approach

A phenomenological approach was used in this research study. According to Merriam (2002), “a phenomenological study focuses on the essence or structure of an experience” (p. 7). The experience that I assumed to be shared among the Latina-based sorority members is an influence on ethnic identity. An integration of ethnographic methods was used to discover the experience the women share.

The ethnographic aspect of the study included four strategies defined by Wolcott (1997); participant-observation, use of written materials, the analysis of non-written sources, and interviewing. Participant-observation was conducted during five sorority meetings and four extra-curricular activities. My own written notes were gathered during these interactions with the 15 participants. A survey was given to each of the participants to collect written material for analysis. Non-written sources such as mapping and artifacts related to the sorority and its members were reviewed and recorded in my notes. Mapping was used, “to plot how different categories of people...move through [a] space, and to probe reasons they might offer to explain how things happen to be used or placed as they are” (Wolcott, 1997, p. 164). I used mapping to track where the participants sat during the weekly meeting and to study the culture of the sorority. The final strategy included interviewing the participants through both group and individual sessions. Interviews were used to gain more in-depth

information from the participants. A combination of life history and informal interviewing techniques were used to gain information about how membership in the sorority influences the women's ethnic identity development (Wolcott).

Participants

The participants for this study are members of a Latina-based sorority at Midwest University. The only common thread running between all participants is female gender. A wide array of diversity is present within the group including: national origin, native language, age, time spent in the United States, major of study, and leadership role within the sorority.

I met with the sorority as a whole to become familiar with the group and how it functions culturally. I was able to build rapport with the participants through the weekly meetings and the four events I attended. The development of rapport and the need to be accepted and trusted by the participants is crucial in qualitative research (Glesne, 1999). This was true for my study as well. Trust was built through my presence during the seven week time period of participant-observations.

After introducing the study and becoming familiar with the participants, I concluded that it was of utmost importance to be inclusive of as many participants as possible during the audio-taped interviews. This conclusion came from the response of the participants when I described the purpose of the interviews. A large amount of interest in the interviews was expressed; therefore, I added two focus group sessions to the data collection procedure. Fifteen women participated in the participant-observations and completed a written survey. Of those 15 women, 10 participated in a focus group discussion. Six of those participants were purposively selected based on their responses to participate further in two individual interviews each. Purposeful sampling gave me the ability to select for information rich

participants that shared stories that apply to ethnic identity development (Patton, 2002). I also purposively selected for the individual interviews participants with varying experiences and backgrounds (Glesne, 1999). Three of the five women completed the two individual interviews, two of the women participated in only one interview, and one participant declined to participate in an individual interview. Additionally, three participants were invited to participate in three individual interviews each since they were unable to participate in the focus groups. Appendix A lists the 15 women and their level of participation in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

According to Jones (2002), “phenomenology is concerned with the lived experience and with uncovering the essence of a particular phenomenon,” while “ethnographic research typically focuses on cultural contexts and perceptions of individuals in those contexts” (p. 647). This research study consists of a combination of phenomenological and ethnographic methods; therefore, interviews and observations were the main sources of data. I began the study by attending a weekly meeting and presenting the plan for my research to the group, inviting those interested to participate. Of the 16 women involved in the Latina-based sorority, 15 women chose to participate in the study and signed the informed consent form (see Appendix B). The observations began the following week after the consent forms were signed and collected and continued for a seven week period. The first week of observations, a survey was distributed to the 15 participants that consisted of questions related to ethnic identity and how the Latina-based sorority influences the ethnic identity of the group as a whole (see Appendix C). The surveys were analyzed and used to familiarize myself with the participants and their past experiences. My familiarity and understanding of their background information helped build rapport with the participants during the focus groups and individual

interviews. During the second week of observations, I invited the group to participate in focus group sessions. I offered three times for five women each to participate. All of the 15 women were interested in participating in the focus groups; however, only two focus groups with five women each were completed. The third focus group was cancelled due to a time conflict and a lack of attendance. A second informed consent form describing the procedures of focus group participation was composed and signed by all 10 focus group participants (see Appendix D). Three of the 15 participants, Eva, Justice, and Marizabeth, could not fit either of the focus groups into their schedule; therefore, I created a third informed consent form and invited them to participate in three individual interviews each (see Appendix E).

Additionally, these three women came from diverse backgrounds and experiences, so they fit into my plan for purposive selection for individual interview participation. After the completion of the two focus groups, I decided to invite six of the 10 focus group participants to be involved with individual interviews and created the final informed consent form (see Appendix F). This decision was made so that I could clarify responses that were incomplete from the focus groups and to gain a more in-depth understanding of each of the six individuals' ethnic identity development.

Prior to the focus group sessions, I created a list of seven questions to ask the group that related to their background experiences before college and then after joining the sorority (see Appendix G). The first focus group session lasted for 60 minutes, while the second focus group session ran for 90 minutes. The individual interviews ranged from 30 minutes to 120 minutes with the majority averaging 90 minutes. I created a separate list of interview questions for the three participants interviewed three times (see Appendix H) and the five participants interviewed after focus group participation (see Appendix I). The focus groups

and individual interviews remained semi-structured with the questions being used as a guideline only (Patton, 2002). All of the focus groups and individual interviews were audio taped, transcribed, and analyzed prior to the next contact I had with the participants, with the exception of the observations. The final interviews with the six participants who completed the individual interview process included a member check where I explained my tentative themes, showed where I believed they fit within the themes, and asked for their opinion, corrections, and any additional information they felt should be included. The member check provided the participants the time to evaluate my perspective and interpretations of the data collected and to correct any misinterpretations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002).

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis began with the first observation conducted and the written survey collected and continued until the last audio-tape was transcribed, analyzed, and the coding of information was complete, as recommended by Maxwell (1996). After each contact with the participants, I reflected on the experience, my interpretation of the relationship between the participants, and my own personal reflections after interacting with the participants. After the completion of each focus group and individual interview, I transcribed the tapes and read through the transcripts. During that time, I began to take notes on what I saw and read in the “data and developed tentative ideas about categories and relationships” (Maxwell, p. 78). Then I began to code the data by rearranging it into themes for comparison analysis (Maxwell). The process of analysis was inductive in nature, drawing from the data gathered to build themes and concepts rather than constructing tentative themes prior to data collection (Merriam, 2002). The second set of interviews was used to clarify questions that arose after reading the first interview transcript. During the second interviews, I was able to ask more in-

depth questions and either solidify or reorganize the information that appeared from the first interview. Member checks were conducted during the final interviews with Eva, Marizabeth, Justice, Aihnoa, Isabella, and Marimar. Isa Marie and Ines were unable to attend their final interview. The six member checks conducted gave the participants the opportunity to comment on my interpretation of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2002).

Design Issues

Ensuring qualitative validity is of utmost importance throughout the process of the study. The issues of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are addressed. Credibility, or confirming the findings to be believable and credible from the participant's perspective, was determined with member checks during the third interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). During the member check, the participants had the opportunity to listen to me explain my interpretation for the transcripts. I created mini-themes for the member check participants and asked clarifying questions. I also explained the tentative themes that I formed from the completed transcripts at that point in time. The participants approved my interpretations.

Transferability was regulated through a rich description of the context of the study and thorough assumptions made about the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The context of the study is a large, predominantly White university in the Midwest. The name, Midwest University, is used to insure confidentiality. It was also assumed that the Latina-based sorority did in fact contribute to a change in ethnic identity. The description of the academic institution and the context of a Latina-based sorority add to the transferability of this research study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) referred to dependability as the responsibility of the researcher to record changes within the context and structure of the research and any affects on the findings. When changes occurred in collecting the data for this study, the appropriate corrections and additions were made in the description of data collection procedures. The addition of focus groups and individual interviews was included in the description of procedures.

The final aspect of qualitative validity is confirmability, or the possibility of others confirming the results for the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure confirmability, I created an audit trail, which is a collection of all the data and writings I have worked on throughout the study. All of the information recorded during the observations and focus groups was included in the audit trail. The audit trail also includes my reflections as the researcher in the study.

Limitations

Since the study conducted was qualitative in nature, the reader must keep in mind that generalizability is not possible when interpreting the findings. The findings from the study consist of the accounts of the participants from a Latina-based sorority at a predominantly white institution in the Midwest. Ethnic identity development of Latino university men and Latina university women outside of the sorority was not addressed.

CHAPTER 4. PARTICIPANT PROFILES

The 15 individuals who participated in this study come from very diverse backgrounds and experiences. This chapter is dedicated to presenting the profiles of the women and allowing the reader to gain a deeper understanding of who these women are as individuals, as students, and as part of the sisterhood. First, a group profile is provided and then individual profiles of each participant are illustrated using quotations from the transcripts.

Each participant chose a pseudonym at the beginning of the study that is used throughout this chapter to identify each woman. Appendix A lists the 15 participants by their pseudonym. The table is organized in alphabetical order according to how each woman self-identified. When reading through the profiles it is important to note that the women in this study share very diverse beliefs, background experiences, and connections with the Latino culture. As Chacha remarked in the first focus group, “each of us have our own stories that we could make into novels.”

The Participants as a Group

The 15 participants were asked through the survey, during the focus group discussion, and at individual interviews to describe how they prefer to self-identify in relation to their ethnicity. As a whole, all of the women were comfortable identifying as Latina; however, each of the participants also identified according to their own affiliation or their ancestors' affiliation with a certain Latino country or region. Some of the participants come from a combination of cultures and identified with both ethnicities. Ten of the 15 participants identified as descendants of Mexico, three women identified as Puerto Rican, and the last two

women identified as Costa Rican American and Peruvian-Cuban American (See Appendix A).

Throughout the 12 weeks spent collecting data, all of the women participated in observations during the first seven weeks and a written survey that was collected during the second week. The following is a breakdown of how the 15 women participated in different methods of data collection. Eva, Justice, and Marizabeth participated in three individual interviews. Aihnoa, Isabella, and Marimar participated in a focus group discussion and two individual interviews each. Ines and Isa Marie also participated in a focus group discussion but in only one individual interview. Chacha, Evangelina, Frida, Liliana, and Victoria participated only in a focus group discussion. Jazlin and Lola participated only in the observations and survey.

The following profiles are only glimpses of who these women are as individuals. I have pulled from the transcripts information each woman shared about her experiences before coming to college and then her experiences in the campus environment. More of their experiences within the sorority and at college are included within the themes presented in chapter 5.

Eva

Growing up at home, I never really felt excluded. I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that I look Caucasian. Growing up in suburbia, people don't really have too much exposure to people from all over the world or different [ethnicities]. They tend to have the stereotypical view of what a Mexican looks like. I just didn't fit that view. I think growing up no one really associated me with [being Mexican].

Eva identified herself as Hispanic-Caucasian. Her father is Mexican and her mother is of Scottish descent, born in the United States. She described the neighborhood in Minnesota where she grew up as predominantly white, upper class suburbia. When I asked Eva about her family she explained the close connection she has with her father's family.

My dad's side of the family is so close. I think that's just because it is a very traditional family. My dad has four sisters and two of them live in Chicago. We'd go to Chicago all the time and visit them. But my mom had one brother and we hardly ever see him. So whenever I hear family, I generally think of my dad's side.

The appreciation for diversity was a strong part of Eva's experience with her family.

One of my aunts married an Italian immigrant, my other aunt married a Hungarian, and then another [aunt] married a German. So [my family] is so diverse. All of my cousins are Mexican [from my dad's family] and everyone has an accent. That was just the way it was. It wasn't pointed out that we were all kind of different. [When we gathered together] the food and everything was definitely more with the Mexican culture but at the same time everyone's family was so different. We all thought it was a really good thing.

Eva also spoke of the times she traveled with her parents and brother to visit their family in Mexico. She has a close connection not only with her aunts and their families but also with her extended family in Mexico.

Throughout high school, Eva did not feel alienated from her peers; however, the only time she felt a connection with her Mexican culture was with her family. She did not find a connection with other Latino identified peers or within a Latino community since she grew up in a predominantly white neighborhood.

Attending college was something that Eva had always planned to do. "It was just the next thing to do. Everyone goes to college after high school and I was really excited about it." Eva is not a first generation student. Her father had earned a master's degree and her mother had completed some higher education. Eva first attended a small public university of approximately 11,000 students. She described this institution as a place where many of the students traveled home on the weekends and she found it challenging to meet new people because everyone had their own "niche of high school friends already." Eva had previously visited a friend at Midwest University and liked the atmosphere. She decided to transfer to Midwest University because she felt the programs were strong academically and she liked the campus environment and activities she could participate in as a student.

The lack of connection Eva felt with her Mexican culture during high school increased when she moved away from her family to attend college. Eva described herself as not looking like a stereotypical Latina. She has blonde hair and blue eyes and her physical appearance became even more salient as she entered college and moved away from her family. Eva explained that when her peers asked about her last name and who she was ethnically she became very uncomfortable. She received so many negative comments about her ethnicity that she became very tense when people asked. As a result, when she came to college she avoided all activities or organizations that focused on ethnicity.

Eva told me of an incident on the Midwest University campus. Even though she did not feel connected to a Latino community on campus, she still identified herself as Hispanic or Latina; therefore, she received information from the minority student services office on campus about events and opportunities she could participate in as a minority. Eva decided to take advantage of tutoring services offered through this office. When she entered the office

and explained she was interested in tutoring services, the individual working explained that the tutoring services were only for minority students and questioned her identity because of her physical appearance. Eva was granted tutoring services after she explained her ethnicities, but now she rarely goes back to the office and always brings a friend with her.

In the final interview I asked Eva more about her experience with the minority services office on campus. I asked her if the experience caused her to question the term “minority.”

I remember thinking, okay how are they going to measure who gets free tutoring then? Are they going to have a chart of different colors of skins and put your hand next to it? If [your hand] is too light then “nope, sorry, we can’t give you services?”

I’m sure that they help a lot of people, but they weren’t helping me.

Before joining the sorority, Eva did not participate in any activities related to her ethnicity. I asked her how she became interested in the sorority and her experiences when she first became involved.

I met Jazlin in a Spanish class. She was telling me about the sorority and she said I should join. At the time I had a pretty good network of friends [through the residence halls] but I wanted to meet more people and get more involved. As far as campus activities, I never did anything related to ethnicity. And that’s just because I’d get negative comments about how people thought I was just Caucasian. I felt excluded.

Eva explained that the sorority was different compared to other activities or organizations she had tried to participate in during college. She did not feel excluded when she attend a sorority interest group meeting.

What I liked [about the sorority interest group meeting] was that none of them mentioned anything about the fact that I was blonde. That was really nice. I think if they [had questioned me], I probably wouldn't have joined. But they were so accepting and didn't even mention [my physical appearance.]

Eva stated that people still question who she is because of her physical appearance, but since joining the sorority she is better able to cope with the questions and explain that she is Latina. Also because of her involvement in the sorority she now has a connection with her Mexican heritage and she is becoming more comfortable in the Latino community on campus.

Justice

I grew up in Texas for seven years. Then I moved to Nebraska with my aunt and uncle. I refer to them now as my mom and dad so a lot of people get confused with that. I tell everybody that I think my real mom wanted me to have a better life that she couldn't give to me at the time.

Justice was raised primarily by her adopted parents, the sister and brother-in-law of her biological mother. When she entered into junior high and then high school, she attended a private, Catholic school. During this time in her life she did not consider her ethnicity. English was the primary language used in her household. "I didn't see anything wrong with being who I was and no one ever brought [being Mexican American] to my attention."

Justice identifies herself as either Mexican American or Latina and she talked about her interest in learning more about who she is as a person.

I either say I'm Mexican American or I say I'm Latina. I used to say [Mexican American] a lot when I was in high school. I think I say Latina more now only because I've learned more about myself and where I come from than when I was in

high school. I mean I am Mexican American but if you wanted me grouped with people, I would say Latina.

Justice still has a strong connection with her family in Texas. She spoke of visits she made to her grandmothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins, as well as her biological mom and dad. Not being able to use the Spanish language has been an obstacle for Justice since one of her grandmothers speaks only Spanish.

My grandmother, my real dad's mother, does not speak English. She speaks Spanish only. So that was a challenge I think [when I was] growing up because she came to my high school graduation. I couldn't understand her at all. I didn't know what she was saying.

Justice continued to explain that as she has learned Spanish in college, she can now communicate with her grandmother. Learning the Spanish language is significant to Justice because of two reasons: Spanish is part of her Mexican culture and Spanish is the language needed to communicate with some of her family members.

At college Justice was challenged to learn about her ethnicity. The new environment and friends she was involved with at college prompted her to consider her own background.

College was when it really hit me because there were so many people and I didn't know anybody. For awhile I hung out with the girls that were Vietnamese because I felt comfortable with them and then I tried hanging out with some other girls on my floor that were White. I adapted to the different people on my floor. I met these two Black girls and I started hanging out with them and eating lunch and dinner with them. So I met a lot of Black people at [Midwest University] and I guess I was a little closer to being a minority. I could relate to these people.

Justice did not connect with the Latino community on campus until she became involved in the sorority. Her primary source of friends were students living the residence halls, but she was interested in meeting other Latino students. She asked a campus staff member who worked with minority students how she could meet other Latino students on campus. The student affairs professional suggested that Justice attend a student organization on campus that focused on Latino issues. Justice explained her experience.

I went to a [Latino student organization] meeting and I hated it. The people were weird to me. I was so used to hanging out with the Black community that when I was finally introduced to my own Latino community I was so uncomfortable. I wasn't used to seeing other Latinos. I just think that at that point in my life I was so involved with my friends in the Black community that I didn't know how to adapt to my actual self. I went to one meeting and I never went back.

The decision to attend college was made early in Justice's life with the encouragement of her parents. Her parents explained, "[College] is the only way you are going to have a better life for yourself." Justice also wanted to attend college so she could give back to her parents and her brother and sister.

I want to give back to [my parents] and I also plan on having a college fund for my brother and sister. It was a struggle for me to go to college. I had to take out loans. It was a struggle for my mom to pay for junior high and high school. My plan is to graduate just in time so that I can help my mom pay for my brother's high school [education]. That's one of my main reasons why I want to go to college. I want to give back to my family.

Justice also explained another reason for going to college and continuing with her education is the pride she sees in her family for her accomplishments. Her grandma attended her high school commencement, undergraduate graduation, and she plans to attend Justice's graduate school graduation ceremony, too.

Justice defined her greatest struggle at college as being a first generation student. She talked about financial difficulties leading to stress and the lack of obtaining scholarships. "The only time I ever struggled on campus was just financially. No one really went to college [in my family] because of the fact that we're so poor and not having enough money." As a student in engineering, she explained that she was a double minority, a Mexican American and a woman. Stress was also compounded when she battled difficult classes only to earn mediocre grades. Justice explained how her mom reacted to the grades she received.

She thought college was like high school. She didn't understand that college is different. The classes are more demanding. I mean if you bust your butt off and pull a C you're thankful because the class was really hard. She didn't understand and she thought I was just slacking off and not studying hard enough. I'm kind of like on my own when it comes to my studies.

Marizabeth

I'm from Puerto Rico. My family is only four people, but my mom has eight other brothers and sisters and my dad has four other brothers and sisters so the house was always full of people. I'm close to both my mom's and dad's families.

Marizabeth described herself as a calm and sincere Puerto Rican. She attended a Catholic school in Puerto Rico where Spanish was the primary language used. Her decision to move to the Midwest for college was made after she attended a college informational fair

during her junior year of high school. Both of Marizabeth's parents attended college; her father earned a four-year degree many years ago and her mother is currently working on a two-year degree.

At college, Marizabeth fully integrated herself into the Latino community. She participated in a program the summer before her first semester of college that enabled her to meet other minority students on campus. "I surround myself with the Latino community. It's been easy. It's just an everyday thing. I don't speak English that much compared [to] the huge amount of Spanish that I speak everyday."

Family is important to Marizabeth and one way she keeps that tie to her family on campus is through a cousin who is also a student and originally from Puerto Rico. "I have a cousin here. We weren't really close [before] but now every Friday is our day. We go and eat and go to the movies or just stay home and watch [T.V.]." On campus, Marizabeth has also been able to create a sense of family through her participation in the sorority. "The girls from the sorority, they are my closest friends right now. It is a family and we [are] sisters."

Maintaining proper Spanish grammar has been a challenge for Marizabeth. She and her cousin practice using an extensive Spanish vocabulary to preserve their language.

I'm speaking Spanish all the time, even more than English. But I still forget words. And it's just words that are not used that often so it's important for me to keep [practicing the Spanish language] and not forget, because if I'm staying here I want to teach [Spanish] to my kids. I guess it's just a matter of not losing yourself in all this diversity.

I consider myself half Spanish and half Puerto Rican. Yet, when I'm [in Spain] I'm not really, truly Spanish because I don't have the accent. Stereotypically speaking, I don't fit the picture. However, when I am home [in] Puerto Rico, nobody fits the picture cause there's not really a mold for us over there either. So my upbringing is Puerto Rican with a little sprinkle of Spanish.

Aihnoa's father is Spanish and her mother is Puerto Rican. She is close to both sides of her family, but she has spent most of her time with her mother's family since they lived in Puerto Rico. Aihnoa described the neighborhood she grew up in as middle class. Both of her parents attended college; her mother earned a master's degree and her father earned a bachelor's degree.

In elementary and secondary school, Aihnoa attended a private military school and took classes that required English as the primary language. At the same time, her father constantly corrected her Spanish grammar, both written and verbal. Aihnoa takes pride in her usage of the Spanish language.

My father never allowed me [to butcher the Spanish language]. He would always go over whatever I had done in school, at least for my Spanish courses. My father worked very hard to polish and make sure that I was representing and carrying myself as a good Puerto Rican citizen.

Aihnoa decided to come to the Midwest to pursue her goal of preparing herself for veterinary school. She first attended a small liberal arts college and then transferred to Midwest University. A comfort that she found at these two institutions was other Puerto Rican students who she could relate to at college. She was able to find a home within the Latino community.

Breaking negative stereotypes about Puerto Ricans has become a personal assignment for Aihnoa. She is also interested in educating others about Puerto Rico as a subgroup within the Latino ethnic group.

Through my experiences with the sorority, I want to create more awareness of the different ethnicities there are out there. If somebody asks me, “Oh, are you Mexican?” I’d be, “No, I’m not Mexican, I’m Puerto Rican. A Puerto Rican is...” and I would just [tell facts about being Puerto Rican and Puerto Rico]. I just want to create distinction between each individual [Latino subgroup].

Before joining the sorority, Aihnoa explained that she might have been offended about people mistaking her as being a part of another Latino subgroup.

I’ve taken it as my personal assignment to make sure that every time I meet somebody and they ask a question [about Puerto Rico or my ethnicity] to patience myself and try to be kind enough to shed some light about things that they don’t know.

Aihnoa also shared her feelings of becoming Americanized and acculturating to the dominant Midwestern culture. She explained that when she moved to the Midwest she began to lose perspective of life in Puerto Rico. Aihnoa stated, “My mom has mentioned to me a couple times that I’ve Americanized myself.” A change in language, actions, and even the clothing she wears were examples of how Aihnoa has begun to acculturate to the Midwestern United States culture.

Isabella

My biological dad was Cuban. He died when I was two. So my mom remarried when I was four to a man from California who is very American. My half sisters, [whom] I

call my sisters, speak mainly English and we spoke mainly English in the household.

I grew up very Americanized but my mom is Peruvian so I know a lot about the Peruvian culture and the language. I got to experience that more than my sisters did.

Even though English was the primary language within the household, Isabella spoke of growing up in a combined culture of the dominant Midwestern influences and the ethnic Peruvian culture from her mother and the extended family that lived in her family's neighborhood. Isabella considers Spanish to be her first language; however, she rarely speaks in Spanish.

Spanish is actually my first language and if you know me you might be surprised because I don't speak Spanish a lot now. I get really self-conscious about it, but it was my first language until I started school. Then I learned English and that was what I was supposed to speak at school. And then my mom remarried [to] someone who didn't know Spanish.

When I asked Isabella about the first time she thought about her Peruvian or Cuban culture, she remembered a time in grade school when she realized her first name was very different from other Americanized names. A classmate suggested that she switch the spelling and the pronunciation of her name to make it easier to pronounce. From that point on Isabella switched her name to the more Americanized version.

In high school Isabella associated primarily with white students and some Asian students. She described her experience as very Americanized and did not feel any different from other students. Her mother encouraged her to attend college.

My mom definitely wants us all to further our education because she finished high school and got to go to [a community college] for a little while but not at the

university. My mom always said you have to go and then the family definitely always encouraged us to go.

The move to college challenged Isabella because she was homesick and missed her family. The reason she attended Midwest University was because it was located close to her family. “Keeping close [to family] is very important. That’s one of the reasons why I came to [Midwest University]. I didn’t want to go far away from home. It was just uncomfortable. I’ve always had family around me.” Isabella still maintains the connection with her family through visiting home often. She also has an uncle who works close to Midwest University so if she needs anything from home she has him to assist her.

One of Isabella’s greatest challenges on campus has been people assuming she is Mexican or Puerto Rican. “It gets kind of annoying that people only think there are Mexicans and Puerto Ricans out there.” Isabella is proud of who she is and enjoys sharing her Peruvian culture. Isabella explained that it is very hard to identity herself as half Cuban since she did not experience any Cuban culture. Since coming to college, Isabella has been exploring her Cuban culture. The sorority has inspired her to learn more about Peru and Cuba since many of the sorority members know so much about their individual backgrounds.

Marimar

I consider myself Mexican American. I was born in Texas. My parents moved to Mexico when I was around one or two and then we stayed there for eight or nine years. I went to first, second, and third grade in Mexico and then we moved to [the Midwest]. I still don’t think I belong here. Yes, I’ve been here for 11 years but this is not me. I don’t fit in. This is not my culture.

When Marimar moved from Mexico to the United States with her family she explained that they still immersed themselves in a Latino community. Her two main sources of friends were people she met through church and through school in her English as a Second Language courses. As Marimar grew up in the Midwest, people questioned who she was as a person and her ethnicity. She always stated that she was Mexican.

I was always asked, “What are you?” because there weren’t many Mexicans in the school. And I would say I’m Mexican and I would always get racist comments and discrimination. My dad always told me, “No mija no, no, you’re not Mexican, you’re Mexican-American. You’re like everybody else you know.” He was like, “Don’t let anybody put you down, you’re Mexican American” so that’s what I consider myself because I can’t really say I’m Mexican for the whole thing. I can’t carry out a whole conversation in Spanish now; it’s really hard.

Marimar also explained that she does not consider herself to be Chicana because she wasn’t raised in the United States. She gives more weight to her Mexican side than her American side.

Family and religion are very important in Marimar’s life. Moving away from her parents and coming to college were difficult for her; however, having her older sister at college helped her to transition. Being Catholic and attending church every Sunday with her family is also something that Marimar values. On the weekends she cannot travel home from college, she misses her family and attends a church close to Midwest University.

The classes Marimar takes for her undergraduate program are her greatest challenge. In the area is she studying, there are very few minorities and very few women. “I always seem to be the only minority if not the only Latina.”

Ines

When I was 14, six years ago, we moved to [the Midwest]. I had never seen so many white people in my entire life. I remember going to middle school and everybody kept looking at me. I never ate the lunch they [served]. I would always take my lunch and I would take my frijoles and rice. I didn't have friends. I didn't know any English.

Ines self-identified first as Mexican, but then during the focus group she explained more about her background.

I grew up half Mexican and half Tarahumara and that's the native [people in the area of Mexico where I grew up.] My grandma was a full Tarahumara so I always saw the Mexican side of it and the Indian side of it. All my childhood I was with the Tarahumaras. I was considered Tarahumara even though I'm not really dark. So I grew up around their beliefs and traditions. The Mexican aspect of [me] came from my dad's side of the family. I always got pulled between being Mexican and Indian, Indian and Mexican.

When Ines moved to the United States with her family, she realized that she would no longer be able to practice Tarahumara traditions. After a short time in the United States, Ines and her family moved to a larger city where she began to meet more Mexicans; however, Ines still did not feel like she fit in with them. She explained during the focus group session that she tried to share her Tarahumara beliefs and traditions with her other Mexican high school peers but they could not relate to her and disliked her. "We came from such different backgrounds so I didn't have any friends throughout high school. I didn't talk to anybody."

Ines is a first generation college student and stated that she wanted an education. “My parents always told me that they wanted me to have more than they’ve had so that kind of pushed me [to go to college]. I came to [Midwest University] because I couldn’t be far away from my family.”

At college, Ines identified only as Mexican and left out her Tarahumara background. “I told nobody when I came to college, like nobody knew that I was half Indian, half Mexican.” At this point she explained that many of her sorority sisters did not even know about her Tarahumara background. Ines is just feeling comfortable enough to share more of her background within this group of women.

Ines believes that her Puerto Rican friends and other friends within the Latino community on campus have taught her about the diversity within the Latino ethnic group. Before coming to college she knew very little about Puerto Rico and the culture that exists there. She enjoys teaching others about her culture and at the same time learning about diverse Latino cultures even within Mexico that are different from her own.

Isa Marie

I tried to fit in and I tried to blend in and the more I tried, the more I realized that I’m very different. I may be light skinned but I still have certain ideals and certain ways I say things or do things that don’t mesh with [the dominant culture]. Then when I met the ladies of my sorority, I feel at home now and I’m even more proud to say who I am.

Isa Marie described her background as an equal combination of cultures, Mexican and Italian. She grew up surrounded by her maternal Mexican family. At the same time

though, her Italian paternal family had an influence on how she was raised. An example of the mixing of cultures is found in her families' religious beliefs.

It was the two cultures mixing. Some [cultural characteristics] are very distinct but some [characteristics] were not, like religiosity. Both sides of the family are very Catholic and my dad's side was crucifix, Jesus oriented while my mom's side was very Virgin of Guadalupe [oriented]. [My parents] mixed them so we always had those two prominent religious figures.

The greatest challenge Isa Marie has faced on campus has been "looking Caucasian" and identifying as Latina. When she first came to college, she lived on a residence hall floor that was predominantly white. Her friends were Caucasian and she did not have a connection to a Latino community. Isa Marie's first two years of college were spent torn between what people saw when they looked at her and who she really was as a Mexican-Italian woman.

Isa Marie did begin to make connections with the Latino community on campus through participating in events and organizations that concentrated on issues of ethnicity. Through her involvement she met the women of the sorority.

When I met the ladies of the sorority I started to explore experiences in the past that I'd gone through and related them to some of the experiences [my sorority sisters] shared with me. I understand myself more now than I did my freshman year when I didn't have anybody to relate to.

Chacha

I grew up in a small predominantly white town and [attended] a Catholic high school, I being the only minority [and] Latina in our whole high school other than my three

older sisters. I didn't see myself any different than anyone else [in my high school].

The only thing that kept me with my Mexican heritage was my parents.

Chacha was born and raised in a small, Midwest town where her Mexican culture was not part of the community. She had very little connection with her culture. "It's sad to say but when I was little and in high school I didn't want to say I was Mexican or Mexican American." However, as Chacha began to learn more about her culture and gained a better understanding of her heritage at college she is now proud of who she is and excited to tell others about it when asked.

When Chacha first came to college, she attended a student organization on campus that focused on Mexican Americans and Latinos. She went to the meeting with her older sister who was also a student at the time. At this meeting everyone was asked to introduce themselves by stating their name for the group. When Chacha introduced herself, she pronounced her name as she had always done with an Americanized pronunciation. Chacha continued to explain that some members of the Latino group teased her about how she said her name because she did not pronounce it with a Spanish accent.

I remember them making fun of me because I didn't pronounce it right. My whole life I was taught to pronounce my name the Americanized way by my teachers. My parents would use the Spanish pronunciation but I just thought oh, you know, that is their accent. So my whole life I grew up thinking my last name was [Americanized pronunciation] and then coming to college all my friends told me, "No, your last name is [Spanish pronunciation]."

Chacha struggled with not being white enough while in high school but at the same time not being Latina enough when she came to college after joining a Latino community on campus.

Evangelina

I was born in Mexico. Therefore, I do identify myself as Mexican. For most of my life, I was only identifying myself as Mexican. Recently, I think I identify more as Chicana because when I go to Mexico, I'm kind of American and when I'm [in the Midwest] I'm Mexican.

Evangelina moved to the United States with her family at age seven. She described herself as "excited to come and I thought it would be great." However, she began to experience discrimination first hand. "I began to be judgmental myself about Caucasian people just because they treated me one way so I wanted to treat them just as bad." Learning English at a young age caused Evangelina to lose her Mexican accent. She shared an experience of being complimented on her American accent. She was saddened by this compliment because she explained she is proud of who she is.

I was always proud to be a Mexican and I still am but I think that I have changed my view of myself into more Chicana just because I realize there is a big difference between me and my cousins who have always been in Mexico.

During high school, Evangelina was able to befriend very few people. "There was really nobody to relate to and everybody seemed like they were very closed minded." At college, she wanted to meet people of similar backgrounds and experiences.

I just felt like getting involved with similar people like me because my experiences during my four years in high school were very difficult. I think the difference that college has made is meeting other people from the same cultural background but them having very different experiences as myself. I guess I'm just able to see the

different sides and before I think I was closed minded in the sense that I thought that most people had similar experiences as me.

Frida

It was my mother who taught me the traditions [that were] lost when I went to school. I totally forgot I was even Mexican really until I hit high school and that's when some of the haters reminded that I was Mexican and that I wasn't white.

Frida was born in Mexico and moved with her mother to the United States as a young child. When I asked the focus group Frida was participating in what was their preferred ethnic identification, Frida responded.

I am [Frida]. I am Mexicana, but I have Midwest and American influences. I don't like to call myself Mexican American just because I go by the technicality, I was born in Mexico. I am Mexican. That's where my birth certificate is from, I am Mexican. Even though, yeah, if you go to Mexico, I'm not Mexican by any standards, I am American, but I just say, "Yes, I'm Mexican with American, Midwestern specifically, influences."

Frida described her household as "very diverse." Her mother met Frida's brothers' father and he is Vietnamese. "So I grew up learning Vietnamese, Spanish, and English, but when both my parents were there it was only English so that both could understand what was going on."

Before coming to college, Frida described the community she grew up in as predominantly white. The schools she attended were predominantly white as well and she did not feel accepted in the small Latino community that existed. "A lot of the Latinos around me who knew me didn't really like me. I just figured because I was different. I didn't hang around any other Latinos and most of my friends were White, Black, or Asian."

Anger is Frida's reaction to the ignorance and prejudices she encountered at college. She shared her experience of being one of the few minority students within a large lecture hall of 200 students. "I remember there would be seats next to me, like perfectly open, but yet no one would sit in them and for the longest time I couldn't understand it. That made me feel even more singled out." The anger she felt towards discrimination against herself and the Mexican culture made her want to find positive role models in her culture who have contributed to this society.

Through the focus group discussion, Frida talked about this struggle and pull between not being "White enough" in the predominantly white community she was raised in and at the same time not being "Latina enough." She was not accepted by the Latino community because she was not part of their community growing up.

Liliana

I was born in Mexico. I was raised in Mexico. I didn't have any other backgrounds. I mean Mexico's really not that very diverse. I didn't even pay attention to [traditions] until I moved to Iowa, but I was 16 by that time.

Liliana moved to the Midwest at the age of 16 to live with her family. The transition between Mexico and the Midwest was very awkward. She attended a private Catholic school where she was one of only three Latinos in the entire high school. During this time Liliana began to realize her Mexican culture. "I've always been Mexican, I just never realized it because I didn't have anyone to compare myself to." Moving to college was an easy step for Liliana because she had already left her family and friends behind in Mexico at the age of 16.

Liliana explained that what she has gained by moving to the United States is the pride she has in her culture. Discrimination and harassment directed at her ethnicity are issues

Liliana has faced. Negative experiences have influenced Liliana to move ahead and learn about her culture so that she can better educate people and break stereotypes.

Victoria

I identify myself as a proud Puerto Rican. I was brought up Puerto Rican [in an] American-Puerto Rican kind of way. We have a lot of things in common with the American culture and I do consider myself an American.

Victoria shared vibrant memories of her experiences in Puerto Rico and then moving to the Midwest. Discrimination against the Latino culture became a reality when she first moved to the Midwest.

When I first came to the States, it was really hard. You know what racism is and you know what being discriminated against is, but you don't really know what it is until you feel it or until you're being discriminated against.

Victoria experienced discrimination while trying to board an airplane to travel home to Puerto Rico. The flight attendants would not let her board because they thought she was Mexican and an illegal alien. At this point in her life she "started doing a lot of Puerto Rican things." She started listening to Spanish music all the time compared to the popular English music she listened to while living in Puerto Rico. She started dancing salsa and merengue. "I stopped taking diction classes that I was taking so I could soften my accent. I stopped taking [the diction classes] because I thought [my accent] was something I should keep. It's something that is part of me."

Now at college, Victoria feels like she can be herself and enjoys both Puerto Rican and American cultures. She feels more Americanized and talks with less of an accent compared to her friends in Puerto Rico. The Spanish language has become a significant part

of her relationship with her two roommates. One of her roommates is Bolivian but grew up in the United States learning very little Spanish. “She doesn’t speak Spanish that well. She tries really hard to talk to me and my other roommate in Spanish all the time. When you talk to her in Spanish you notice that she has a hard time. It’s like me trying to talk in English.”

Victoria also compared her accent and usage of English with her other roommate who is Puerto Rican. However, Victoria’s Puerto Rican roommate attended a school where English was the primary language used. “She doesn’t have an accent at all. She speaks really good English. I just had public school English.” Victoria explained, “It just helped me to understand that every Puerto Rican that I meet here is not going to be like me.”

Jazlin and Lola

Jazlin and Lola participated solely in the observations and written survey. Both women were born and raised in the Midwest, and they both identified as first generation college students; however, Lola had an older sister who attended college, too. Jazlin self-identified ethnically as Costa Rican American while Lola self-identified as Mexican American.

Summary

As a group, the participants come from many diverse experiences and backgrounds. The amount of time lived within the United States, primary language spoken at home, and parents’ educational attainment were factors that varied greatly within this group. Yet, three major commonalities still existed among the participants: the importance of family, an interest in the Spanish language, and pride in their own culture.

When I was collecting data from the focus groups and individual interviews, the importance of family to these women emerged. Every one of the participants spoke of the

influences of their own family, as well as the structure of a family on campus within the sorority. The significance of family is discussed in more depth as a theme in chapter 5.

All of the participants that I met with during interviews and focus groups valued using the Spanish language. The group is split into two interests with the Spanish language: those who want to maintain their usage of the Spanish language and those who want to learn the Spanish language. At the end of the sorority meetings, I observed the participants break up into groups. Some of the groups conversed in Spanish while others used English. In the groups where Spanish was spoken, some participants would sit and listen while others would be very vocal.

Pride in their culture was the final major similarity noted among the participants. Even though many of the participants grew up within the United States and lived with the dominant culture, they spoke about the necessity to preserve their own culture or combined cultures. Enculturation to the Latino culture was apparent in some of the women's stories through learning the Spanish language, listening to music in Spanish, eating culturally diverse foods, and continuing Latino traditions and beliefs.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter is committed to the organization of the findings that emerged from this research study. The findings are discussed and illustrated through the intertwining of related literature, as well as the voices of the participants and the experiences they shared. Three major themes materialized through my field work experience and the analysis of the data collected: Maintaining a Sense of Family, Embracing Latino Culture, and Empowering Latina University Students. The themes are organized in a chronological order of how the women experienced establishing a relationship with the sorority and then the growth and development they experienced after becoming actively involved with the Latina-based sorority. The three themes all relate to how the sorority impacted the lives of the participants.

The role the sorority plays in maintaining a sense of family for the participants was very clear in the conversations I had with the women. The first theme, Maintaining a Sense of Family, encompasses not only the participants' families away from college but also the formation of family on campus through the sorority. The second theme, Embracing Latino Culture, is comprised of the four Latino cultural characteristics that were the most prominent in the interviews and focus group sessions. Many of the participants discussed the importance of embracing their culture and how the sorority was used as a vehicle to explore those cultural characteristics. Some of the women learned about the Latino culture through the sorority while other participants explained that through the sorority they have the ability to share and teach others about their culture. The final theme, Empowering Latina University Students, includes an analysis of the environmental influences of the sorority. The empowerment of the participants is only possible because of the familial bond the participants share and the open environment the sorority provides for the exploration and

expression of cultural characteristics. The final theme is divided into three sections: Cultural Awareness of One Another's Pasts, Ethnic Identity Development within the Sorority, and the Effects of Empowerment. Cultural Awareness of One Another's Pasts consists of the participants' holistic desire to learn about and to understand each other's past experiences. Ethnic Identity Development within the Sorority focuses on the experiences of participants who explained a change in their own ethnic identity development due to their sorority involvement. The Effects of Empowerment includes four examples of how the participants demonstrate the empowerment they established through their participation in the sorority: pride in culture, multicultural openness, learning ourselves and educating others, and expanding the role of women.

Maintaining a Sense of Family

The significance of family emerged through many of the participants' experiences shared during the focus groups and individual interviews. Familism was discussed in chapter 3, the literature review, and described as "the importance of the extended family as a reference group and as providers of social support" (Tatum, 1997, p. 137). The participants gave numerous examples that illustrate this connection to their individual families, as well as the family found within the sorority. The theme, maintaining a sense of family, is separated into family before college and family within the sorority.

Family before College

A large number of the participants shared the common value and interest of staying connected to their immediate, as well as extended families. Many of the participants emphasized the close ties they had to their extended family. Overall, it is important to note that the participants in this study identified their families as placing a high value on

education. Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, and Talbot (2000) reported that “family obligations, educational aspirations that conflict with parental expectations, and gender-role conflict” (p. 517) contribute to the stress Latina university students experience; however, for the participants in this study these sources of stress did not emerge. In fact, the interviewed participants described their parents as a main source of encouragement for their education. For example, Ines explained that her parents wanted her to have a better life and that was found through obtaining a college education.

Eva had the ability to compare the differences in level of family involvement between her mother’s Scottish-descent family from the United States culture and her father’s family from the Mexican culture. If the immediate and even extended family is held with high importance and viewed as a reference group within the Latino culture, Eva’s experience with her father’s family is a supporting example (Tatum, 1997; Rodriguez, et al., 2000). She explained, “Whenever I think of family I generally think of my dad’s side. I always felt fortunate that I did have a close family.” She continued to describe the family reunions she attended in Mexico and meeting her father’s cousins. Eva believes that family is “number one”; however, she did not feel this same attachment to her maternal family. Her familial reference group was with her paternal family exclusively.

Justice also illustrated this connection to family through her interviews. She described herself as “family oriented” and she believes “family is the number one [Latino cultural characteristic].” Justice’s comments about her relationship with her immediate and extended family parallel the writings of Santiago-Rivera (2003), which described the immediate and extended family as a core value of Latino people. Justice’s goal is to complete her college education so that she can assist her family financially. Justice explained, “One of the main

reasons why I want to go to college is because I want to give back to my family because they sacrificed for me.” The desire to excel in college in order to care for the family is considered important for Latino university students (Tatum, 1997).

Evangelina also described the characteristic of communal rather than individualistic thinking within the Latino culture in relation to family.

I think my [culture] differs from others in that we like to help everyone not just ourselves. I guess I know that the American culture and other cultures believe that it’s you climbing up the ladder and getting the best for yourself no matter who you step on, but the way I was raised was not like that. You should help others. If you’re moving up don’t let others stay behind. You should take them with you.

In their interviews, Isabella and Marimar shared the feelings of separation when they first moved away from their parents to attend college. Both of these participants explained that a main reason they chose to attend Midwest University was its close proximity to their families. The desire to live in close proximity to immediate or extended family is a characteristic of the Latino culture (Santiago-Rivera, 2003). Nevertheless, Isabella and Marimar also had familial connections within the community of Midwest University who helped them with adjusting to the college. Marimar explained how she felt about leaving her family to come to college.

I’m really attached to my family and it was just hard for me to come to college. Even though I’m [not a far distance away from them] it was just hard. It was just too hard to be without seeing my parents everyday.

Marimar then talked about her older sister who was already a student at Midwest University. Marimar lived with her older sister for four semesters, which helped her transition to the new

campus environment and away from her parents. Isabella explained in her interview that when she first came to college she traveled home almost every weekend to visit her family. Marimar still does travel home almost every weekend to visit family and attend church.

Some of the participants also described not only the importance of family and the difficulty of moving away from family, but also the expectations placed on them by their family. According to Hernandez (2002), familial influence can add to the stress level of Latino students when they are pressured to balance “parental expectations with their own definition of what it means to be Latino” (p. 81). For example, Aihnoa shared her perception of her way of life and “the institution of the family.”

At least for me the way I grew up, there’s no family unless you have a father, a mother, and children. The way I was brought up, you grow, you get your education, you find somebody, then you marry, you work, then you have children. In that order. For Aihnoa, the process of life and creating a family causes a lot of pressure in her life, especially since she feels she needs to be a role model for her sister and cousins in Puerto Rico. When Aihnoa came to the United States from Puerto Rico, she found that the natural way of life that was taught to her in Puerto Rico is not necessarily the same in the United States. “It’s such a loose style of life [in the United States].”

Aihnoa also talked about her appreciation for her family as well. “[Family] is a structure that whenever you need something, whenever you need help or something materialistic or just being able to talk to somebody, they’re there for you, period.” Aihnoa’s comments, as well as many of the other participants’ experiences do agree with much of the literature that recognizes family as one of the most important and influential groups in Latino students’ lives (Ortiz, 1986; Terenzini, et al., 1994).

Family within the Sorority

The sorority was reorganized at Midwest University in 2000. At this time Marizabeth was a freshman and friends with a student who was interested in the commencement of the sorority. Marizabeth explained her thoughts on hearing about the purpose of the sorority.

I guess I liked how she put it. It's going to be a family. We missed our family and [one of the founders said] "It's going to be a family away from home." So I guess that's what mostly attracted me to [the sorority].

Many of the participants described the sorority as "a family away from home" or "a home on campus." According to Orozco (2003), participation in a Latina-based sorority provides a sub-environment on campus where Latina university students can relate and connect to others who have experienced the same struggles and challenges in an academic setting. The family within the sorority can be identified by three components: support, mothers, daughters, and sisters, and role models.

Support. Support and finding a connection with other students is a primary reason why Latino organizations form on college campuses (Hernandez, 2000; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Mayo, et al., 1995). According to Capello (1994), Latina organizations provide women with resources for discussing issues such as cultural history, meeting other Latina university students of similar backgrounds, and sharing experiences of marginalization in the campus environment. The Latina-based sorority was found to provide an immense amount of support to those who participated in this study.

Within the Latino culture, family is looked to for a great amount of support and guidance (Tatum, 1997). The distance from which the participants came to Midwest University varied greatly; however, all the participants agreed that the sorority provided them

with a family on campus, a family away from their biological or adoptive families. In an interview with Isabella, she explained that support was one of the benefits of participating in the sorority.

The support group is really great. [My sorority sisters] are always there. There's always someone that is willing to empathize with what you're going through or has been there already. Like even classes. There's so many girls that a lot of classes [at least someone] has taken.

In focus group discussions, the value of support was evident in examples given by Victoria and Marimar. Marimar described the support she received from the sorority after her biological sister graduated and moved away from college.

I know I have 17 other women behind me. What I value the most I guess is that they're my second family. They're my family away from home. I know I can count on them. I know they're there for me.

Victoria explained a similar situation. When she is in need of help, her family in Puerto Rico is too far away to assist her but she has the sorority for support.

I know that if I'm down and if I need anything from money to helping me with my studies to taking me all the way to the other half of the world, I know that [my sorority sisters] are going to help me do it. That's really helpful.

Mothers, Daughters, and Sisters. During the observations and interviews, I noticed the participants referring to one another as sisters or mothers or daughters. The labeling they used for one another brought the sorority together even more so into a tighter knit group. Siblings within the Latino culture view their relationships as unconditional and hold them in higher esteem above friendships outside the family (Garcia, 2002). I found this to be true also

with the participants. On campus, the relationships the participants had with their sorority sisters were similar to the relationships they have with their immediate and extended families. The labeling used within the sorority showed this close relationship of family. For example, when Liliana talked about her sorority pledge mom, she referred to her as “mama.”

I’ve learned so much when it comes to doing business. Especially from mama cause she’s so businesslike. She likes to get things done. I’m a procrastinator myself. So that helps me because I don’t want to disappoint her, and I don’t want to disappoint any of my sisters.

Liliana shows respect to her pledge mom and sorority sisters through accomplishing tasks on time even though it is not in her nature to finish quickly. Showing respect to the hierarchy within a family is a characteristic that is prevalent in the Latino culture (Santiago-Rivera, 2003). Liliana’s story resonated feelings of respect towards her older sorority sisters.

Many of the participants liken their sorority sisters to family before college. Isa Marie compared her connection to her sorority sisters as equal to that with her blood sister.

I have a younger blood sister and the way we argue and fight, I do that with my sorority sisters and it’s nice to know because it’s like I have family here. My family’s in Wyoming. It’s a long ways away and I think it’s nice to have that connection and to know that if I needed any of these ladies no matter what time it is or where I am, I can call them and they will be there for me and on the same token knowing that they can rely on me to be there for them.

Isabella also showed the connection she had to her pledge mom and the respect she has for her. Isabella explained that her pledge mom had really done her job playing a “mom” role in reference to being concerned about her relationship with her boyfriend at the time

(now her fiancé). Isabella stated, “It’s really comforting to know that [she] would go that far for me.”

Role Models. The sorority provides a way for Latina university students to find role models and concurrently develop into a role model. In a foreword written by Nicholasa Mohr (1996), she described the difficulty of finding role models in the dominant U.S. society.

There were no positive role models for me – out there in the dominant society – when I was growing up. When I looked and searched for successful Latinas to emulate my efforts were futile. As a Puerto Rican and a female of color, my legacy was one of either a negative image or was invisible.

The formation of role models within the sorority was evident from the focus group discussions and then interviews. The mere presence of older siblings, or sorority sisters, to emulate was a comfort and a relief for both Ines and Victoria. Ines’s story is an example:

I’m the oldest in my family so I’ve always had to be a role model for my brother and my sister. I’ve always had to be the first one to do this and that and take care of them. And now I feel good when I’m here because, I don’t have that pressure from my mom and dad. I feel like I’m kind of the baby in the family. And it’s nice because I’ve never had that, I’ve never been a baby in the family and it feels good.

Victoria shared the same sentiment and explained that she too is the oldest in her family; however, in the sorority she is the youngest. She is happy to have her older sorority sisters as role models. At college, it is important for her to have sorority sisters she can talk to about college and academic related issues.

When I asked Marimar how her involvement in the sorority has affected her, she stated that the role models she has found in some of the sorority sisters have influenced her greatly.

I think our president has impacted my life a lot just because she's a great role model. She is a well balanced woman, which is what we should all try to do, balance ourselves. I really look up to her and someday I hope I can get all my things organized that way.

Marimar also explained that becoming a role model herself to her younger sibling and cousins is also important to her.

The sorority is something that younger girls can look up to even if they're not in the sorority. In my family, the sorority is a great way for my younger cousins to see me involved in school. I think it motivates them and gives them that spark to think about college and just going out of that circle where [my family] has been stuck for awhile.

Where no one ever went to college or never even finished high school.

The sorority is a place for women to find role models and also develop into role models themselves. The role models within the sorority are also viewed as sisters, mothers, and daughters. Family, within the Latino culture, is not limited to the nuclear family, but also includes the extended family (Hernandez, 2002). The participants described the sorority as part of their extended family that serves as an immediate family while they are university students.

Embracing Latino Culture

The development of Latino cultural characteristics was identified as an apparent ambition of the participants. After interviewing the participants, I identified two groups in

relation to embracing the Latino culture. For those participants raised with the Latino culture by their families, the need to continue that cultural bond was evident. The remaining participants not raised with the Latino culture had a vested interest in learning about it at college. This necessity to embrace Latino culture can be connected to the way Latinos identify as an ethnic group. A woman claiming to be Latina “solely on the basis of ancestry, with no ethnic or cultural markers attached, is less likely to be accepted as a genuine member of the group” (Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001, p. 44). Consequently, the ability to embrace and explore cultural characteristics within the sorority is a significant advantage of becoming a member for those who want to be culturally connected. The cultural characteristics the participants spoke of to the highest degree include: the Spanish language, foods and celebrations, religion, and respect. Each of these cultural characteristics connects back to the participants’ linkage to the importance of family within the Latino culture.

The Spanish Language

The significance of the Spanish language was evident in most of the conversations I had with the participants. Many of the participants believed that developing and practicing Spanish at college was fundamental to their connection with the Latino culture. For those who spoke primarily English, Spanish was still a significant part of how they identify as being Latina. Many of the women spoke Spanish on a daily basis, while others could understand spoken Spanish, but they were uncomfortable to speak it themselves. Yet, the latter women still found the Spanish language to be a significant part of their identity. According to Tatum (1997), the cultural value of the Spanish language is a significant part of the Latino culture; therefore, it was not surprising that many of the women shared their need to maintain the Spanish vocabulary or their interest in learning Spanish.

Marimar shared an example of this when she talked about no longer identifying as Mexican. “I can’t carry out a whole conversation in Spanish now. It’s really hard. I hate it. I get frustrated because I use so much slang. I make up my own little words using Spanglish.” However, in a later interview, Marimar did explain that she enjoys, “helping other [sorority] sisters learn the [Spanish] language better.”

Marizabeth shared a similar experience in using the Spanish language. Since moving to the Midwest from Puerto Rico, Marizabeth spends the majority of her time with her friends in the Latino community on campus and speaks primarily Spanish. Yet, she still feels that she is losing her grip on the Spanish language, so she constantly practices Spanish vocabulary with her cousin who is also at Midwest University.

The need to maintain a Puerto Rican, Spanish accent became important to Victoria. When Victoria first moved to the Midwest, she enrolled in an English diction class in order to soften her Puerto Rican accent. Nevertheless, “avoiding the use of Spanish” or changing an individual’s accent does not “guarantee acceptance by the dominant society” (Tatum, 1997, p. 141). Soon after living in the Midwest, the experience of discrimination for Victoria enhanced her pride in the Puerto Rican culture and language. She explained that she “started being more Latina.” She began to listen to music sung in Spanish and stopped listening to the English music she listened to in Puerto Rico. The thick Puerto Rican accent she possessed became an important part of her identity and she stopped taking English diction classes that were meant to soften her accent.

For Aihnoa, maintaining a proper Spanish language is also a salient part of her identity. At the same time, English was also made a priority in her life through the elementary and secondary school she attended. When Aihnoa moved to the Midwest to

pursue her dream of becoming a veterinarian, her accent and primary Spanish language were questioned. Aihnoa explained that at college everyone was surprised when she said that she was Puerto Rican. They could not believe that Aihnoa did not have a Spanish accent.

The stories of Aihnoa, Victoria, Marizabeth, and Marimar illustrate the importance of the Spanish language. For these women, the Spanish language was not solely a form of communication, but it also is an aspect of their identity and represents their cultural values (Tatum, 1997). The sorority forms a place where women who share these experiences can meet and relate to one another. Justice, Isabella, and Eva also talked about the Spanish language, but they came from another viewpoint. They grew up speaking very little Spanish, if any, and speak primarily English, even though Isabella does claim Spanish as her primary language.

Justice did not grow up in a household where Spanish was spoken. Her mother and father did know Spanish but the language was not used in the household. The absence of the Spanish language in Justice's childhood raised two dilemmas for her. First, some of her close relatives speak only Spanish; therefore, it is difficult for her to communicate with them. Second, lacking the Spanish language in her life creates the feeling that she does not know her culture. Justice spoke of a real desire to learn Spanish while she was in college, in particular after she joined the sorority. Through the sorority, Justice practiced Spanish with other sorority sisters and listened to their conversations. She has also begun taking Spanish classes along with her graduate program. At her undergraduate graduation ceremony, she was able to communicate with her grandmother in Spanish. Justice believes that learning Spanish brings her closer to her identity as a Latina and that the sorority has played a major role in

her identifying with Latino culture. “Language has always been a salient variable in identifying level of ethnicity,” according to Torres (2003b, p. 4).

Isabella is also studying Spanish as part of her undergraduate program; however her mother did teach her Spanish at an early age. English became the primary language of her household after her mother remarried. The Spanish language is part of the connection that Isabella finds between her sorority sisters and her Peruvian heritage.

Eva also grew up in a household that spoke primarily English. However, Spanish was used among her father’s extended family, so she was familiar with her family’s Spanish pronunciation. When Eva joined the sorority, she heard some of the sorority sisters speaking to one another in Spanish. Eva explained that she identified with the sorority through hearing the group use Spanish interchangeably with English, which is something she had only experienced with her family. “Hearing them speak Spanish just automatically reminded me of my family.”

Food and Celebrations

When I asked during the interviews about different aspects of culture that the participants found to be significant, food and celebrations were mentioned by many of the participants. The participants made comparisons between different Latino foods, such as Puerto Rican or Peruvian or Mexican. The ritual of attending Catholic mass, coming together for weekly Sunday meals, celebrating religious holidays, and birthdays are examples of special occasions in the Latino culture that are instrumental in bringing the family together (Santiago-Rivera, 2003). The participants gave examples of how the sorority extends these rituals to their family on campus.

During an interview with Isabella, she explained that each time new members join the sorority they have a cultural potluck to celebrate. Each member brings a dish from their own culture. Isabella explained that through the sorority she learned that Puerto Rican and Peruvian meals have similar characteristics.

Food is used to express and celebrate individual cultures within the sorority. For example, Isa Marie talked about introducing her Italian culture into a sorority potluck.

I've taken a more active involvement in understanding who I am and [explaining who I am] to my sorority sisters. So when we have our potlucks, I'll bring spaghetti or I'll try to make lasagna. That way [the sorority sisters] kind of get to experience something different. And then I tell them how my family cooks it.

Through cooking and foods, Isa Marie is able to show her sorority sisters part of her Italian culture.

Celebrations and family gatherings were also cultural characteristics that many of the participants agreed were important. The participants who could easily drive home to visit their families spoke of the need to be with their families during times of celebration. Those participants who lived too far away from their families to make it feasible to travel home talked of missing the family gatherings and clung even more so to the family unit made within the sorority.

Marimar's story is an example of the importance of attending family gatherings and celebrations. During our last interview, she shared how she had not visited her family in three weeks, which was a very long time for her to not see her family. Family gatherings and celebrations for Marimar are a good excuse for her to travel home to spend time with her family.

There are always little celebrations [within my family]. Like my cousins are always having babies, so there's always baby showers. I appreciate [the celebrations] because it's the only time when I get to see my family, because I don't get to see them that often.

Some of the other participants also spoke of family gatherings and celebrations, but now that they are at college, they live too far away to attend them. Marizabeth shared the sentiments of missing her family and not seeing them grow and change with age. The sorority for her is a family and a home at college where family gatherings and celebrations can still occur.

Eva also spoke of family gatherings and celebrations where her family would come together in either the Midwest or in Mexico. Now at college, Eva has less time to spend with her family and the sorority again has become the place where celebrations can occur.

Isa Marie also mentioned how the sorority implements the type of family gatherings she is used to on a weekly basis.

Within the sorority we really have become a family because we'll have those gatherings on Tuesdays and Thursdays. It started out with three of us having lunch and now it's five or six of us all together taking up two tables and eating lunch. It gives you that whole family feeling because we have moms and daughters in the sorority. We've kind of created that close knit bond.

Religion

The significance of religion and Catholicism was spoken of in four of the participants' interviews. Three other participants also mentioned religion as being important to Latino culture, but not necessarily part of their life at the moment. The value and

acceptance of religion, in particular Catholicism, within the sorority is apparent. Latina students involved in religious organizations and sororities have been found to have a greater sense of belonging on college campuses (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). This was very much true for some of the participants. The following excerpts come from the interviews when the women were describing significant cultural characteristics.

Religion for Marimar is a central part of her life and she values being Catholic. Conflicts do arise for Marimar between needing to attend religious events and activities on campus. She explained that “my priority is going to church and spending time with my family.” Every weekend she tries to drive home to attend church with her family, but sometimes activities at college interfere and she cannot travel home. On days of religious celebration, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, lent, Good Friday, and Easter, Marimar’s priority is to be with her family and taking part in the religious celebrations.

Isa Marie also spoke of religion as being an important part of her family. She grew up with the combined Catholic beliefs of her Italian and Mexican families. At college, Isa Marie said it has been difficult for her to attend church and she did not think much about her religion until recently. Earlier in the semester, a friend of the sorority passed away in a tragic accident. Since the accident, Isa Marie explained that the topic of religion has been discussed more among the sorority sisters.

We started discussing [religion] more and inviting each other to mass more. It’s really weird because some of us didn’t go to mass before and now we want to go. We invite each other to go like a family would. I don’t know very many sororities or fraternities that create that family bond but we do.

Ines talked about her combination of Tarahumara beliefs and Catholic beliefs. She explained that she is more comfortable attending Spanish mass rather than an English mass because she is used to responding in Spanish. Ines has attended the Spanish mass on campus and sometimes travels home and attends the Spanish mass with her family. Ines also feels that by teaching others about her Tarahumara beliefs she is able to maintain a sense of those beliefs.

When I asked Isabella to describe certain cultural values or beliefs that she felt were significant to her Peruvian-Cuban identity, the belief in God and religiosity was the first value she mentioned. She explained that her grandmother is a very religious woman who prays for many hours. Christian artifacts, such as a picture of Jesus on the cross and a book of prayers called novellas were common items that Isabella described that were used by her grandmother.

Aihnoa, even though she described herself as not a fervent practitioner, did identify herself as Catholic. She shared the same feelings as Ines and Isa Marie. Similar to Ines, Aihnoa does not feel comfortable attending an English mass. She also explained that the death of a close friend caused her to think more about her religious beliefs.

Justice identified herself as “Catholic but not really religious.” She described her family in Texas as being very religious. Her biological mother’s side of the family is Catholic, while her biological father’s side of the family is non-denominational. She remembered her Catholic grandmother as a person who read the bible every night and had a rosary and prayed. Justice also enjoyed attending a Spanish mass at home with her mother and siblings. She described the Spanish mass as being nice because the entire congregation

was Latino. Even though she couldn't understand the Spanish language, she still enjoyed the service.

Marizabeth also talked about religiosity and her Catholic beliefs. She attended a Catholic school while in Puerto Rico and now at college she misses the religious celebrations that took place in that setting. In particular, she mentioned celebrations that occurred during Easter and Christmas. Marizabeth explained that she misses attending and celebrating these religious events in Puerto Rico now that she is at Midwest University.

Respect

The final cultural characteristic that emerged during the focus groups and interviews is the value of respect. Respect, in the Latino culture, infers that each individual is valued regardless of achievements (Capello, 1994). Three participants discussed how the value of respecting their elders, especially within their family, plays a vital role in their culture. The respect that the women learned from their families also applies within the Latina-based sorority.

Isabella first brought up the value of respect in a focus group discussion. At that point in the discussion we were talking about characteristics that define the Latino culture. Isabella stated that respect is very important within her family. Isabella agreed that respect is definitely more important in the household that she grew up in compared to the homes of some of her friends who are not of the Latino culture. The value of respect is something that Isabella feels she has carried over to the sorority. Isabella remembered a time she had really disappointed her pledge mom within the sorority during her pledging process. Isabella stated, "I could hear the disappointment in her voice and it was like disrespect." The bond and

connection Isabella formed with the sorority carries with it the respect she learned from her family.

Liliana shared that she shows respect to the sorority by being an active and timely participant within the sorority. She stated that she has a tendency to procrastinate; however, she does not want to disappoint her sorority sisters. “I don’t want to disappoint them and that gives me the initiative to do things and to get them done quickly and do good so everyone will feel proud of me.” Santiago-Rivera (2003) reported that showing respect towards family members and other people of authority is highly valued and encouraged within the Latino culture. The stories of Isabella and Liliana show this respect toward their sorority sisters.

Isa Marie also spoke of the importance of respect. She explained that not only is it necessary for her to show respect to her elders, but it is also important for her fiancé to show respect to her family. Isa Marie tied the value of respect to her belief in the Catholic religion.

It is important to note that each of the cultural values previously mentioned, the Spanish language, food and celebrations, religion, and respect, all connect to family. The family within the Latina-based sorority is strengthened through these cultural characteristics.

Empowering Latina University Students

The sorority created not only a home or family for the participants and a safe place to learn about and practice cultural values and activities, but also a place where Latina university students are empowered through the development of ethnic identity. The participants shared stories of how the sorority empowers them to educate themselves and others about Latino culture, express pride in themselves as Latinas, as women and as university students, and to gain an appreciation for multicultural awareness.

Marizabeth explained to me that the sorority's main purpose is to empower women first and then embrace culture, not only Latino culture, but all cultures. She stated that "our founders were Latinas but we are about women. What we want is to empower women and embrace each other's culture."

At the beginning of the field work, I learned that the sorority consists of much more than just an emphasis on Latino culture. The theme, Empowering Latina University Students, correlates with the findings of Vasti Torres (2003a). Torres (2003a) reported two major themes from her study on the influences of ethnic identity of Latino college students: Situating Identity and Influences on Change. The final theme, Empowering Latina University Students, is separated into three sections; the first two sections relate to situating identity and influences on change, respectively.

The first section, Cultural Awareness of One Another's Pasts, relates to how the participants share their past experiences. Latino culture and ethnic identity were salient for some of the participants prior to college, while other participants were not immersed in or had no reason to reflect on Latino culture. As the participants became familiar with other Latinas within the sorority, they compared past experiences. The importance of being culturally aware and accepting of each other's past experiences became apparent through the interviews and focus group discussions. Torres (2003a) noted the importance of acknowledging "that not all Latino students begin college with Unexamined Ethnic Identities (Phinney, 1993)" (p. 544). The participants did situate their own ethnic identity within the sorority through comparing past experiences of the sorority sisters.

The second section, Ethnic Identity Development within the Sorority, relates to the changes in identity the women undergo due to their involvement with the sorority. The

sorority's familial attributes and emphasis on embracing cultural characteristics encouraged the ethnic identity development of participants within the study. Torres (2003a) reported that "changes in personal relationships and involvement in Latino student groups can influence personal growth and identity development" (p. 544). The findings in Ethnic Identity Development within the Sorority also reflect and expand on the findings of Torres.

In the final section, The Effects of Empowerment, I discuss four separate ways in which the participants were influenced through empowerment gained primarily through the relationships within the sorority. The topics of pride in the Latino culture, the necessity of multicultural awareness within the sorority, the need to educate each other, as well as others outside the sorority, and expanding the role of women were shared by many of the participants.

Cultural Awareness of One Another's Pasts

According to Torres (2003a), "the influences of where [students] grew up, their generational status in the United States, and self-perception of societal status play a major role in situating their identity in their first year of college" (p. 544). Torres noted the importance of understanding that not all Latino students enter college without having previously examined their individual ethnic identity.

The cultural characteristics that bind this group of women together could be summarized as using the Spanish language and a commitment to family. From Marimar's interviews she explained that she wanted to join the sorority because she knew she would have things in common with the women in the sorority. She believed the women in the sorority would be "just like me." The sorority members would have the same experiences, and Marimar joined because she felt she would be able to relate to the sorority, "since most

of them had some kind of Latina background.” Marimar found this to be true after becoming a member.

However, diversity within the Latino culture is also something that emerged from the data collection as a prominent part of the sorority. Frida explained the significance of diversity within the sorority during a focus group discussion. “Everyday you always learn something different about each one of your [sorority] sisters. It’s anything that ranges from food to clothes to culture. There is always something different because none of us are the same.” Even though many of the participants within this study identified openly as Latina, many of the participants were quick to point out experiences and cultural differences among the sorority sisters. Ines also agreed with identifying as Latina; however, she was able to learn about other Latino cultures within the sorority. She explained “I identify myself as Latina but within the sorority I’m Mexican. A lot of us are from Mexico but we still do things differently and we sometimes even use a different dialect. The sorority has helped me to understand differences in Mexican culture.”

For example, Marizabeth experienced different Spanish dialects when she first began speaking in Spanish to her friends. Marizabeth explained “when I got here and I started talking with my friends in Spanish I couldn’t understand what they were saying. It was completely different and it took me by surprise.” Marizabeth, a Puerto Rican, was referring to her friends of Mexican descent. Through the sorority, Marizabeth has the opportunity to learn about the cultures and experiences of the women from other parts of the Latino culture, such as Costa Rican or Mexican or Peruvian-Cuban.

Aihnoa has been involved with the sorority since it restarted in 2000. The sorority, even though it is one unit, consisted of three separate subgroups: the Mexicans, the Puerto

Ricans, and the Costa Rican and Peruvian-Cuban. For Aihnoa, getting to know the women from the different Latino subgroups has been one of the greatest benefits for her growth and development. Aihnoa explained that she has learned a lot about the Mexican culture because the majority of the sorority is of Mexican descent. Through the sorority Aihnoa has learned to understand the cultures of different ethnicities. She gave examples of using the proper vocabularies and cultural attributes.

Diversity is not only found in the experiences on campus, but diversity is also found in the reflections of the women on their home environment. Eva described her home neighborhood as an upper middle class neighborhood. Both of her parents attended post-secondary education. Justice spoke of the struggles her family had with money. No one in her family had graduated from college before her. The stories the women shared about their previous experiences agree with Torres's (2003a) research that states the importance of situating identity. Torres lists characteristics that influence an individual's identity development: home environment, familial influences, generational status in the United States, and self-perception of status in society. Each of these factors emerged through the interviews.

Alienation and a lack of a sense of belonging occurred differently for some of the participants in this study. Some women spoke of never feeling alienated on campus, while Frida and Marimar remembered the feelings of alienation while sitting in large lecture halls. The seats around them remained empty in the packed lecture halls. Students coming in late squeezed into a seat between many other white students while the vacant seats around them remained wide open. Discrimination Latino university students experience during their first year of college initiates feelings of alienation and a lack of attachment to the institution

(Hernandez, 2000; 2002; Hurtado, et al., 1996). Involvement in organizations that focus on culturally related activities does create a greater sense of belonging on campus for Latino university students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Therefore, involvement in the Latina-based sorority that focuses on cultural activities as well as empowering women became a great resource of support for these women.

Eva, in contrast, described her experiences before coming to college as normal and she never felt alienated. She attributes this to her appearance, having blonde hair and light colored skin. However, Eva did describe alienation at college when she tried to gain access to services provided by the office on campus that assists minority students. Eva's ethnicity was questioned when she asked about tutoring services for minority students.

The past experiences the women bring with them are recognized, accepted, and validated within the sorority. Consequently, "Validation is empowering, confirming, and supportive" (Terenzini, et al., 1994). The key element I found in the sorority is that as a member you are expected to be different and you are valued as an individual. Victoria explained that the sorority has helped her to learn about the differences between her Puerto Rican culture and other Latino cultures. "I guess with the sorority it was okay to be different because [the sorority sisters] were different, too. It wasn't just me. I'm like them because I'm different from them and they're different from everybody else."

Isa Marie and Isabella both talked about being inspired to learn more about their own ethnicities through listening to the stories of their sorority sisters. Isa Marie also stated that it does not end at her own Mexican ethnic identity. She also wants to learn more about other Latino subgroups. Additionally, the sorority made Justice inquisitive about her ethnic identity. She asks questions and wants to learn more about different ethnic music and dances

related to her Mexican culture. Justice stated that one of the most important parts of the sorority is that “we’re all culturally aware of one another.”

Ethnic Identity Development within the Sorority

During the individual interviews, I asked the participants questions about how they identify with the Latino culture and their thoughts on their own ethnic identity and how it relates to the sorority. Four women spoke specifically on how the sorority has encouraged their growth and development by enabling them to learn more about their own ethnic identity. Through this process, the women grew closer and more comfortable with the Latino culture and defining who they are ethnically. The sorority was a key factor to influencing a change in the women’s ethnic identity development, which coincides with the research conducted by Torres (2003a). Through the sorority, the women’s sense of self-identification became stronger. Cultural dissonance that is experienced at college encourages and influences a change in ethnic identity (Torres, 2003a).

Through the sorority, both Isabella and Marizabeth were inspired to think more in depth about their specific Latino culture. At first, when other sorority members would ask “What’s your story?” or “Where are you from?” Marizabeth would simply say Puerto Rico, but then she began to listen to the stories of her sorority sisters. Stories of moving to the United States, differences in cultures, and experiences with racism emerged from the sorority sisters’ conversations. Marizabeth began to think about the meaning behind being Puerto Rican. The sorority increased her awareness and interest in her Puerto Rican culture, so that she could explain more about who she is as a Puerto Rican. Marizabeth noted that her participation in the sorority has been a valuable learning experience.

Not necessarily about my background only but also about me and also who I want to be and what I want to do and what I can do and what I cannot do, what my limits are. I have much more patience with people asking questions [about who I am] or people being ignorant [about Puerto Rico].

The question of 'Who am I?' is one of great significance that many of the participants in this research study have answered or are currently trying to answer. "Ethnic identity is one aspect of the important question, 'Who am I?'"(Bernal & Knight, 1993, p. 1) The sorority has provided not only resources to learn about Latino culture, but it also creates an environment where the exploration of self is validated. Isa Marie explained that it was not until she became a member of the sorority that she really felt comfortable on campus. The sorority to Isa Marie is a place where she can explore who she is culturally. She can openly express her Mexican and Italian ethnicities.

My first two years [of college] it was mainly trying to prove to other people who I am and then when I met the ladies of the sorority I started to explore experiences in the past that I'd gone through and try to relate them to some of the experiences they shared with me. Now, when people ask me questions about my culture, about my ethnicity, I am able to give them a correct answer and I'm able to understand it also. I understand myself more now than I did maybe my freshman year when I didn't have anybody to relate to.

The sorority provides a place of comfort where open discussion on topics of ethnicity can be expressed, analyzed, and learned. Isa Marie continued to explain that now she feels comfortable talking about her ethnicity and culture. She is more knowledgeable. Isa Marie

defined the sorority as a support system that deals specifically with ethnicity. Isa Marie explained:

It's been easier for me to speak to people about [my ethnicity]. Originally I'd be like "Yeah, I'm Mexican Italian" and kind of just leave it at that. Now it's kind of like I explain to people why I'm this way because of my ethnicity and this is why I love to cook and this is what I love to eat.

Justice grew up learning very little about her Mexican culture. The sorority is a resource for Justice to learn about herself. She is too far away from her family in Texas to ask questions about the Mexican culture, but she has her sorority sisters, some of whom grew up in Mexico, to ask questions about the Mexican culture. In addition, she learns about different Latino cultures through those sorority sisters who are Costa Rican or Peruvian-Cuban or Puerto Rican.

When I came to college I didn't know who I was at the time and now I think having [my sorority sisters] around helps me a little. I'm one step closer to finding more information about myself because of them.

Justice also explained that she joined the sorority to develop her identity. She was not close to a Latino community on campus and she wanted to learn more about herself. The sorority was an organization where she could find a connection with other Latina university students. After Justice joined the sorority, her participation in other Latino organizations and events on campus also increased.

Eva also did not participate in any Latino ethnic organizations or activities prior to joining the sorority. The lack of connection between herself and her own Mexican culture made her feel that she was not even Latina. During her first years of college, she avoided

involvement in Latino organizations because she did not want to be questioned about her Caucasian appearance of blonde hair and light colored skin.

I felt like I was denying myself a lot of activities and I think after a while I almost started to believe that I wasn't Latina just because I wasn't exposed to it at all. I'm really glad that I got the guts and joined the sorority because I think it helped me a lot with [identifying as Latina]. I actually can now identify more and accept who I am. The sorority provides Eva with a reference group of other Latina women her age. Before joining the sorority, the only Latina peers Eva knew were her cousins. The only way she identified with being Mexican was through her family. Eva explained:

The sorority has helped me to realize that I am Mexican but not just with my family. They always just look at me for me and who I am. [The sorority] has made me feel okay because before I felt like I could never really be proud of who I was because there was always someone reminding me that I look really different. I can be proud of my culture and my sorority sisters don't say anything negative towards me.

Eva also explained a similar experience as Isa Marie's in that she feels more comfortable now talking about her Mexican identity and explaining who she is culturally. Before joining the sorority, Eva was not comfortable participating in programs designed for minority students. Eva described herself as being intimidated and defensive. After joining the sorority, she is comfortable participating with Latino ethnic events.

The Effects of Empowerment

My conversations with the participants led to my understanding of the main purpose of the sorority: to empower women. Marizabeth in our second interview explained this concept to me when I asked her how the sorority identifies itself as a group.

We are a historically Latina-based sorority with multicultural membership. That's our way of saying we accept everybody. Our founders were Latinas but we are about women. We're not about culture. I mean we embrace each other's culture. What we want is to empower women.

The empowerment of women emerged as a strong theme throughout the 12 weeks I interviewed and met with the participants. What I found was that through empowerment, the participants were able to show more pride in their culture, developed multicultural awareness within the sorority, became capable of educating others outside the sorority about Latino culture, and expanded their understanding of the role of women.

Pride in Culture. Pride is a contagious attribute that seemed to spread through the sorority, as evidenced by the stories of the participants. Torres (2003b) reported that pride in “ethnicity is more important to minority students than it is to white students” (p. 4). For example, Isa Marie explained:

My sorority sisters have given me more pride in [my culture]. They make me want to learn more about my culture. I have taken a more active involvement in understanding who I am and even at the same [time] teaching my sorority sisters about my Italian culture.

Eva, Isa Marie, Aihnoa, and Frida all spoke of pride in themselves as individuals, pride in the sorority, and pride in the Latino culture. Frida stated:

A lot of people say that [the sorority] is really proud and full of pride. I, for one, don't think it's a bad thing. They don't get to see the inside and see what we have with one another and that's why we hold some of what we do to our hearts.

During the observations and interviews, I felt a sense of pride among the group of women. The women wore the sorority colors to the meetings and rarely did a participant come to an interview or focus group without wearing the sorority colors or symbols in a necklace or shirt.

Both Isa Marie and Aihnoa believe the sorority has heightened their pride in themselves. Isa Marie stated, “When I met the ladies of my sorority now I feel at home and it’s like I’m even more proud to say who I am.” The pride that Eva senses within the sorority makes her even more prideful of her own family and Mexican heritage.

Multicultural Openness. After establishing a better understanding of the members as individuals and learning about differences between Latino cultures, the women also expressed their interest in and the importance of opening the sorority to multicultural membership. The sorority founded by Latina university students now defines its organization as a historically Latina-based sorority with multicultural interests. Many of the participants’ reflections and experiences support this goal of the sorority.

In Marizabeth’s interview she reflected on the reorganization of the sorority in 2000. “I guess in the beginning it was started because of a need to find other Latinas. Then once we were established we were interested in multicultural membership.” Marizabeth explained that talking with prospective members and explaining to them the purpose of the sorority helps put the purpose of the sorority in perspective. The sorority’s main purpose is to empower women independent of race or ethnicity. Justice also voiced the same opinion about the purpose of the sorority as a support group for women. “We are slowly opening the doors to other women who still need that support group but they may not be Latino.”

Justice also sees similarities between the Black Greek sororities and fraternities when comparing them to the Latino sororities and fraternities.

We have this organization that we each go to that helps to empower us and we go to one big meeting. All of the organizations come together. We talk about issues and everybody wants to educate [Midwest University] about who we are. Whether we're Latina or Latino or Black.

Victoria referred to the sorority as being very open and welcoming to others independent of ethnicity. "We treat [sorority sisters] as people and we welcome them to our place. We don't look at any color. We don't look at ethnicity."

The sorority is very accepting of differences in culture. Learning about one another's lives and creating dialogue about differences opens the doors for multiculturalism (Ortiz & Rhoads, 2000). Aihnoa spoke of how the sorority is a place where diverse people are accepted.

The sorority is a place where you can feel comfortable about your culture because you don't stand out. Different cultures are accepted and the fact that you're different, it's okay for us. Because for starters we're all different so there's no opportunity for us to hold your culture against you.

Isa Marie also agreed that differences among members are either accepted or the beliefs are adjusted so that the sorority sisters can work together.

Aihnoa also spoke of reaching outside the sorority and creating awareness. "Through my experiences with the sorority what I have wanted is to create more awareness of the different ethnicities there are out there. I guess I just want to create distinction between each individual [Latino subgroup]." Aihnoa stated that before joining the sorority she might have

been offended if someone mistook her for another Latino subgroup. She continued to explain:

I have taken it as my personal assignment to make sure that every time I meet somebody and they ask a question that sometime ago I would have been, “How stupid are you?”, “How can you not know the difference?” Now, I catch myself, I pace myself, I patience myself and I try to be kind enough to shed some light about things that they don’t know and the sorority has helped me with that.

Learning Ourselves and Educating Others. Another influence due to empowerment focuses on the desire to educate those outside the sorority. Latina students are validated when past experience, language, and culture are considered to be important aspects in the educational setting (Rendón, 1996). Liliana said it best in a focus group discussion when asked about the most valuable part of the sorority: “I think it’s great that we can influence each other so we can even go and influence others.” Liliana was referring to learning from other sorority sisters and then teaching others outside the sorority. Many of the participants talked about how they were motivated to go out and share their stories and the stories of their sorority sisters with others outside the sorority. The sorority is a friendly place where they can talk openly about who they are and learn about other Latino subgroups, and then turn around and spread the word about the Latino culture to others outside the sorority.

For example, Ines talked about teaching her sorority sisters about her own Mexican culture: “We all teach each other and learn from each other. You learn so much from the Puerto Ricans and the Costa Rican. I feel proud of what I’m teaching them.” A sense of pride is gained by teaching and that sense of pride urges the sorority sisters to reach out to others.

Isa Marie, Eva, and Marizabeth all shared their experience of talking to their friends outside the sorority about their Mexican heritage. Isa Marie stated:

My friends outside [the sorority] have really taken an interest since I've gotten that comfort zone, where I'm used to being able to talk about [my ethnicity] constantly.

I've been able to open up more with [my] friends outside [the sorority].

Eva also agreed in saying that before joining the sorority she felt that she couldn't talk about her Mexican identity or express it to others. Marizabeth gave an example of how students in her design classes now use Spanish words that they have learned from her. She enjoys teaching others her native language.

The sorority has also motivated some of the participants to reach out and educate others on campus. Isa Marie explained that the sorority strives to acknowledge any ethnicity or any person.

Those of us focusing on our education right now are still interacting with various groups and making sure that we're still involved. And I think that's what kind of sets us apart and that's what kind of makes us understand who we are because we're educating people as well as getting ourselves educated.

Victoria also is motivated to learn about her own culture, as well as other Latino cultures so that she can explain the Latino culture to others.

For other participants, the motivating factor to learn about the Latino culture was family. Once Justice joined the sorority and began learning more about her Mexican heritage, her dad also began talking to her about it and grew interested in talking about their heritage. Before joining the sorority, Justice did not have a close group of friends within the Latino

community. Justice's dad is very happy that she now has that group of friends and is learning more about the Latino culture.

Marizabeth is also wanting to learn more about her Puerto Rican culture because she wants to be able to share it with her future children and family.

I guess I understand how important [dancing and the Puerto Rican culture] is and if I want to teach it to my kids and pass it on then I've got to experience it and learn it. I guess as much as I can.

The sorority was also a stepping stone for some of the participants to become comfortable and to feel accepted by the Latino culture and community on campus. Once Eva became comfortable with the sorority, she began to participate in other Latino organizations or events; therefore, joining the sorority was a "big deal" for Eva. Prior to joining the sorority she avoided participating in ethnic organizations. Justice also did not participate with any other Latino organizations or events on campus prior to joining the sorority. "I didn't get involved with [other Latino organizations] until after I was in the sorority. So the sorority sparked my interest and impacted me the greatest."

Expanding the Role of Women. Marizabeth talked about the empowerment the sorority provides its women. She spoke of breaking away from the traditional roles into which machismo in Latino culture places women. When I asked her about similarities between different Latino cultures she replied:

The cultures are pretty similar in like how things work and what is expected of people in society. I guess we, all the girls, we've experienced machismo. In the sorority we encourage each other to go and do it ourselves and like maybe now we're

kind of all feminists. We're just trying to break what we were taught. We want our girls to feel empowered.

Justice also agreed with Marizabeth with the importance of academics and becoming solid role models for future younger generations.

Academics is really important [to us]. And I think that helps us because we are women and we are Latina. In order to succeed in life you have to do well [in your academics]. I think it's just because we want to succeed and there aren't very many Latina women that are role models out there. We're the few that, if we can do it other generations that are after us will see us. We'll have younger people looking up to us.

Summary

Through my conversations with the participants, I found the sorority to be a source for comfort, support, and a place where the past and present experiences of the members are valued. The three themes, Maintaining a Sense of Family, Embracing Latino Culture, and Empowering Latina University Students, represent ways in which the participants identify with the sorority and how growth and development occur. The familial atmosphere that is formed within the sorority creates a sense of belonging and a home for validation, support, and friendship. The participants shared their experiences of Latino cultural characteristics that are either expressed or learned through the sorority. Through this open environment, the empowerment of Latinas takes place and the development of ethnic identity is encouraged.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Summary of the Study

The purpose of the study was to determine how a Latina-based sorority influences the ethnic identity of its members. The study took place over a 12 week period by using a phenomenological perspective with the majority of the data collected through audio-taped focus groups and individual interviews. The theoretical framework of Torres (Torres & Phelps 1997; Torres 1999, 2003a) was used as a foundation for the study of ethnic identity development of Latina university students.

Fifteen individuals who were involved with a Latina-based sorority participated in the study. The 15 participants came from diverse backgrounds and experiences, with the only cultural commonality being their identification as Latinas. The study consisted of observations at weekly meetings and four extracurricular activities, a written survey, two focus groups, and individual interviews with eight of the 15 participants. All of the focus groups and individual interviews were audio-taped, transcribed, and the transcripts were analyzed.

Three major themes emerged from the data collected: Maintaining a Sense of Family, Embracing Latino Culture, and Empowering Latina University Students. Each of the themes were supported with the experiences of the participants, which I pulled from the coded and analyzed transcripts. After analyzing the transcripts, I conducted a member check with each of the eight individual interview participants. At the member check, I listed the tentative themes and my interpretations of the transcripts, which gave the participants the opportunity

to correct any misinterpretations. The interpretations were added to the themes in addition to relevant literature.

The first theme, Maintaining a Sense of Family, encompassed the value of familial influences that is prevalent in the Latino culture. This theme was divided into two sections: family before college and family within the sorority. Family, for the participants, was a significant part of their lives. All of the participants shared a close bond with their own individual families, both immediate and extended families. The participants equated the sorority to their own family. The sense of family that was developed through the sorority gave the participants a sense of inclusion, validation, support, and empowerment at a large, predominantly white university. Through the sorority, the women experience a sense of security and gain the resources to learn about the Latino culture.

The second theme, Embracing Latino Culture, reflected the participants' need to build close ties to their own culture. This theme consisted of the four most talked about cultural characteristics: the Spanish language, food and celebrations, religion, and respect. The need to maintain and learn more about the Latino culture was a strong attribute of all the participants. The Spanish language was used after the meetings I observed between the participants. Those participants whose primary language was English still wanted to learn Spanish. Food and celebrations were used in the sorority to celebrate the arrival of new members and other festivities. Religion was a strong value among some of the participants and was viewed as a tie to their culture and family. Respect was also revealed through the relationships among the sorority sisters.

The final theme, Empowering Latina University Students, was the outcome of the participants' development of ethnic identity through the sorority. The development of ethnic

identity led to feelings of empowerment. This theme included three sections: Cultural Awareness of One Another's Pasts, Ethnic Identity within the Sorority, and The Effects of Empowerment. Many of the participants shared experiences of learning from one another within the sorority and valuing the experiences of the other sorority sisters. Being culturally aware of each sorority sister's past experiences and placing value on that experience was widely discussed among the participants. The sorority was instrumental in assisting the participants in learning about and developing their ethnic identity. Finally, the participants talked about the pride in their culture that they found through their involvement in the sorority. The sorority also encouraged the women to become multiculturally aware, educate others about the Latino culture, and also expand Latina roles.

Overall, I believe the findings within these three themes do answer the research questions that were created at the beginning of the study. The research questions that drove my study were:

Within the context of a predominantly white institution in the Midwest, how does involvement in a Latina-based sorority influence the ethnic identity of the participating members?

1. How do the participants differ in ethnic identity at the beginning of their individual membership?
2. How does the organized environment of the Latina-based sorority contribute to a change in identity of the individual participants?

Involvement within the Latina-based sorority meant that the participants had become a member of a Latino family. Family, within the sorority, created a support system; each participant had a mother and some of the participants had daughters, and role models were

found within the sorority. The sorority pulled the participants closer to the Latino culture and to ethnic identity through the development and institution of a family. The sorority also influenced ethnic identity development by validating the significance of Latino cultural characteristics. Usage of the Spanish language encouraged the participants to identify with the Latino culture. The participants described cooking Puerto Rican or Mexican or Peruvian foods to eat together as a family that showed a pride, an interest, and a love for their culture. The sorority is an environment that encourages enculturation to the Latino culture. Enculturation is defined as the process of learning about the cultural and essential qualities needed to participate in one's own group (Casas & Pytluk, 1995). Some of the participants had adapted to the Latino culture through their involvement in the sorority, while other participants maintained a high level of ethnic identity.

The participants did differ in ethnic identity at the beginning of their individual membership. Some of the participants came to the sorority with a high level of ethnic identity while other participants came to the sorority with a low level of ethnic identity. For example, at the final interviews and member check with four of the participants, we talked about their levels of ethnic identity and acculturation based on the Bicultural Orientation Model (Torres, 1999). Before joining the sorority, one of the members identified as Anglo Oriented, two of the members identified as Hispanic-Oriented, and one identified as Bicultural Oriented.

The organized environment of the Latina-based sorority did influence a change in the ethnic identity development of some of the participants. The participant that identified as Anglo Oriented on the Bicultural Orientation Model (Torres, 1999) now identifies as Bicultural Oriented as a result of her involvement with the sorority. The two members who identified as Hispanic Oriented believe they still have a high level of ethnic identity

development; however, they now have a higher level of acculturation and have moved into a Bicultural Orientation. The final participant who identified as Bicultural Oriented believes she still has a high level of acculturation, but her level of ethnic identity has increased even more since her involvement with the sorority.

In general, the sorority had a major influence on the ethnic identity development of the participants. Not all of the participants were influenced equally, dependent on their background and past experiences. For this study, it was important, as Torres (2003a) suggested, to situate the individual participants' ethnic identity prior to joining the sorority to determine how the sorority had influenced the participants.

Reflecting on the past research studies that involved Latina sororities, I believe this study specifically furthered the knowledge base in relation to ethnic identity development. None of the three previous studies focused specifically on ethnic identity development (Layzer, 2000; Olivas, 1996; Patterson, 1998). The first study conducted on a Latina sorority by Olivas (1996) explored how a Latina sorority in the Northwest influenced retention rates of the members. The influences of ethnic identity on the formation and practices of the sorority were investigated. Patterson (1998) studied a Latina sorority on the West Coast examining how a Latina sorority impacted the members' integration and involvement with the larger campus environment. Layzer (2000) researched the formation of a Latina sorority on a mid-Atlantic campus by using an ethnographic approach.

When comparing the four studies, the context of this last study at a predominantly white institution in the Midwest adds to the diversity of contexts among the three previous studies. The studies of Olivas (1996) and Patterson (1998) were conducted on the west Coast and the study conducted by Layzer (2000) took place on the east Coast. The data collection

procedures I used were similar to the methods used by Olivas (1996) and Patterson (1998) while Layzer (2000) used more ethnographic methods and spent an extended amount of time in the field.

Implications for Practice

Since a Latina-based sorority provides a sub-environment, a family, and role models for Latinas in the academic setting, practitioners and faculty need to be involved in offering the opportunity for the Latino culture to be explored on campus in order to dissolve negative stereotypes. The development of ethnic identity through involvement in a Latina-based sorority is also a significant aspect of the findings of this study that has implications for practice on college campuses. This section includes six implications drawn from the study for practice in the college environment.

A Latina-based sorority on a large, college campus gives Latina university students the opportunity to become part of a sub-environment within the campus. The sub-environment can be composed of a diverse group of women compassionate towards the experiences of women from all ethnic backgrounds; however, within the context of this study, the women were primarily Latina. The women involved in the sorority had the opportunity to meet and relate to other women coming from similar backgrounds and past experiences. The findings suggest that this sub-environment generates a sense of belonging for Latinas on a predominantly white campus.

The literature states that it is important to recognize that academic institutions value individuality and the ability of students to detach from past experiences (Rendón, 1996). Consequently, Latinas who value past experiences and cherish close relationships with family and people outside the academy may never become engaged in the college

environment. The findings show that involvement in a Latina-based sorority can create an environment on campus that supports the values of the Latino culture within the dominant environment.

Moreover, the Latina-based sorority creates a family for Latina women to take an active part in while at the university. A major finding of the study is the value of family for Latina women while at college and away from their immediate and extended families. The institution of family within the sorority creates a secure and familiar environment where Latinas can connect with other Latinas on campus. The implication of this finding is that student affairs practitioners and faculty must also understand the value of familial influences that are the foundation for some Latina students' sense of belonging on the college campus.

The establishment of Latina role models within the sorority was found to be beneficial for the participants in this study. The Latina role models provided support and encouragement and they were the individuals emulated within the sorority by other members. Post-secondary institutions can also provide Latina role models by hiring Latina staff and faculty. Latina professionals not only provide role models for Latina university students, but they also add to the diversity of the campus environment (Rodriguez, et al., 2000).

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of offering opportunities for Latinas to experience, explore, and maintain cultural characteristics. The development of Latina organizations, the celebration of Latino traditions, and the integration of the Spanish language through bilingual staff, faculty, and programming supports the growth and development of Latino culture and awareness of this culture in the college environment. The integration of Latino culture on college campuses promotes awareness not only for Latina university students, but also for students, faculty and staff of other ethnicities.

Furthermore, student affairs practitioners and college faculty need to be conscious of Latino culture in order to dissolve destructive stereotypes and to have the ability to enable Latina university students to become more confident in the college environment. For instance, one could begin with being knowledgeable about the different cultural characteristics of Latino sub-groups on campus. An example of this is learning about Puerto Rican culture and its history as a territorial commonwealth of the United States. In addition, the findings suggest that it is vital for university staff and faculty to understand that the Latino ethnic group is not a race. Culture defines the Latino ethnic group, not skin color, hair color, or eye color.

The findings illustrate that involvement in a Latina-based sorority does, in fact, influence ethnic identity development. The impact of familial influences at college and the exploration of Latino culture encourage the formation of ethnic identity. As ethnic identity increased, the Latina participants acquired a sense of empowerment and pride in the Latino culture. The findings also suggest that Latina university students' backgrounds and past experiences also play a major role in the process of ethnic identity development.

Recommendations for Further Research

The research study focused on a Latina-based sorority on a predominantly white campus in the Midwest. The 12 week study consisted of observations, focus groups, and interviews. The exploration of Latina sororities has only begun. In this section, I present suggestions for further research that focuses on Latina-based sororities in a variety of contexts, the empowerment of Latinas, ethnic identity development among Latino sub-groups, multiculturalism, and extending the research with Latino fraternities.

The exploration of Latina-based sororities on campuses with a larger population of Latino students is warranted. The context of this study was a predominantly white institution and many of the participants had similar backgrounds coming from predominantly white neighborhoods and experiences. Only a few of the participants experienced growing up within a larger critical mass of Latinos. The influences of a Latina-based sorority on the development of ethnic identity on a more diverse college campus would add to the knowledge, along with data collected on a predominantly white campus.

The empowerment of women emerged as a result of ethnic identity development through involvement in a Latina-based sorority. I believe the topic of empowerment needs further investigation through studying the empowerment of Latinas in organizations outside of Latina-based sororities. Moreover, exploring the empowerment of Latinas in ethnically diverse campus environments could add to previous information on this topic.

The Latina-based sorority was a diverse organization; however, segregation still emerged between the two major Latino sub-groups within the sorority: Mexican and Puerto Rican. Further research needs to be conducted on the differences between the experiences of Latino sub-groups on predominantly white campuses. The differences in ethnic identity development between sub-groups could then be explored.

The impact of multicultural membership on a historically Latina-based sorority needs to be explored. The research could focus on two phenomena. First, the recruiting strategies of Latina-based sororities could be investigated. How do Latina-based sororities create inclusive sub-environments on a predominantly white campus? A second research focus could be on the evolution of a Latina-based sorority as the membership becomes more diverse. How does the culture of a Latina-based sorority change as diversity in membership changes?

Further research on the ethnic identity development of members involved in Latino fraternities would add to the findings of this study. This study excluded Latino university students and should not be applied to Latino ethnic identity development. Do familial influences and the exploration of Latino culture lead to the empowerment of those involved with Latino fraternities? This is a question that also needs to be explored.

Personal Reflections

Throughout the research study, I was able to reflect on my actions, my mistakes, and the interactions I had with the participants. I learned ways to improve my qualitative research skills, such as focusing and directing better interview questions, facilitating a focus group session smoothly, and conducting informative member checks. I faced the need to alter methods of data collection continuously during the 12 weeks I worked with the participants. I grew not only professionally as a qualitative researcher, but also personally through an increased awareness about an ethnic group very much different from my own. The following are my personal reflections about the process of the study, the findings, and my interactions with the participants.

The first thing I learned from this research study was to plan ahead in the design for the fieldwork; however, to be flexible at the same time. During the 12 week study, many changes occurred in my data collection process. The design of the data collection changed from observations and three in-depth interviews with three participants to observations, three in-depth interviews, two focus groups, and more in-depth interviews with the focus group participants. Prior to the initial fieldwork, I would not have known that my plan for data collection would expand that significantly.

Another unplanned event was the delays with collecting data due to changes in interview schedule and the death of a friend of the sorority. When working with real, live participants, life happens and it is important as a researcher to go with the flow of life. Even though at times the changes in the data collection procedures added stress to my life, I would not change the end results. The additional interviews and focus groups resulted in a great amount of trust in our relationship, as participants and researcher. I also gained a greater understanding of the women who are part of the Latina-based sorority.

As I interviewed and met with the participants, I began to notice that some of the participants identified the Latino ethnic group as a race as well, and not solely as an ethnic group. Even though the Latino ethnic group is defined by its culture, the association of Latino identity as a racial identity was evident with some of the participants. Therefore, it is important to be sensitive to how an individual identifies with the Latino ethnic group.

In reference to multicultural competency, I have learned about two important aspects of the Latino ethnic group. First, the Latino ethnic group is not a racial group. A broad spectrum of phenotypes is included in this ethnic group including: Indigenous Native American, African Black, and European White; therefore, I found it to be very important to refrain from labeling people and to let the individual label herself. Second, I learned that the Spanish language and familial bonds are the two distinct characteristics of the Latino culture. Lacking one of these characteristics can lead to disconnection with the Latino culture. For the Latino culture to survive in the United States, these two characteristics must remain intact.

I believe my experience with this research study has given me a better understanding of the Latino culture and a greater respect for Latinas. In the future I plan to take the advice of Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, and Talbot (2000): “the simple act of pronouncing a

Spanish name correctly can go a long way in making Latinas feel more comfortable in an academic setting” (p. 524). Not only trying to pronounce Spanish words correctly, but also being knowledgeable about Latino sub-groups can be a beginning to connecting with Latinas.

I have benefited immensely from this study and the participants that devoted their time to sharing their story with me. After meeting with the participants in interview sessions, they left me with the feeling of empowerment and pride in the Latino culture. I am very thankful that I had the opportunity to listen to the voices of this diverse group of women. The rich information on the lives of Latina students and the Latino culture found in the literature is incomparable to listening to the lived experiences of the participants in this research study.

APPENDIX A. PARTICIPANTS

Pseudonym	Self-identified	Time Lived within the U.S.	Primary Language	Level of Participation
Jazlin	Costa Rican American	Born in U.S.; Iowa	English & Spanish	Observations & survey
Evangelina	Chicana	Born in Mexico; Moved to the U.S. as a child (Iowa)	Spanish & English	Observations, survey, & focus group
Eva	Hispanic-Caucasian	Born in U.S.; Minnesota	English	Observations, survey, & 3 interviews
Marimar	Mexican American	Born in Texas; Moved to Mexico; Moved to the U.S. as a child (Iowa)	Spanish	Observations, survey, focus group, & 2 interviews
Lola	Mexican American	Born in U.S.; Illinois	English	Observations & survey
Justice	Mexican American	Born in U.S.; Texas/Nebraska	English	Observations, survey, & 3 interviews
Chacha	Mexican American	Born in U.S.; Iowa	English & Spanish	Observations, survey, & focus group
Liliana	Mexican	Born in Mexico; Moved to the U.S. as a teenager (Iowa)	Spanish	Observations, survey, & focus group
Frida	Mexican	Born in Mexico; Moved to the U.S. as a child (Iowa)	Spanish & English	Observations, survey, & focus group
Isa Marie	Mexican-Italian American	Born in U.S.; Florida/Wyoming	English	Observations, survey, focus group, & 1 interview
Ines	Mexican-Tarahumara	Born in California; Moved to Mexico; Moved to the U.S. as a teenager (Iowa)	Spanish	Observations, survey, focus group & 1 interview
Isabella	Peruvian-Cuban American	Born in U.S.; Iowa	English	Observations, survey, focus group, & 2 interviews
Marizabeth	Puerto Rican	Born in Puerto Rico; Moved to the U.S. (mainland) for college	Spanish	Observations, survey, & 3 interviews
Victoria	Puerto Rican	Born in Puerto Rico; Moved to the U.S. (mainland) at 17	Spanish	Observations, survey, & focus group
Aihnoa	Puerto Rican-Spanish	Born in Puerto Rico; Moved to the U.S. (mainland) for college	Spanish	Observations, survey, focus group & 2 interviews

APPENDIX B. OBSERVATION INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Study: The formation of ethnic identity through participation in a Latina sorority

Investigators: Jennifer Gray Nunez, B.S.
Nancy J. Evans, B.A., M.Ed., M.F.A., Ph.D.

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore how ethnic identity is influenced through participation in a Latina sorority. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your membership to a Latina sorority.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for seven weeks and will involve my presence at weekly meetings and any activities the sorority participates in throughout the seven weeks that are open to those not affiliated with the organization. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed.

I will record observational notes of the activities that take place at weekly meetings and when I am present during other activities.

I will request copies of any non-written or written material you wish to share with me throughout the seven weeks that you believe relates to your ethnic identity development and the Latina sorority. Non-written material includes photographs, artifacts related to the Latina sorority, etc. Written material includes journals, memoirs, etc.

You will also be asked to complete a survey about your perception of your ethnicity prior to and after joining the Latina sorority. You may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

RISKS

At this time, no foreseeable risks are present from participating in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be the direct benefit to you of gaining a better understanding of your own ethnic identity development. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing valuable information about the ethnic identity development of Latina university women.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken. In all texts I prepare, including the thesis, pseudonyms will be used to refer to you and to other members of the sorority. Only I will have access to observation notes and non-written materials will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Any typed documents will be password protected and stored on my personal computer. All data collected will be destroyed by January 1, 2005. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact Jennifer Gray Nunez, (515)294-8302, jgray@iastate.edu or Dr. Nancy J. Evans, Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, (515)294-7113, nevans@iastate.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-4566; austingr@iastate.edu or the Research Compliance Officer, Office of Research Compliance, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-3115; dament@iastate.edu

SUBJECT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) _____

(Subject's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)

(Date)

APPENDIX C. SURVEY

Please respond as fully and accurately as possible. Leave any questions blank which you do not feel comfortable answering. Indicate N/A for those questions which do not apply to you.

1. Where were you raised and by whom?
2. Who had the most influence on you before attending college?
3. What language(s) do you speak most often at home?
4. What type of community were you raised in?
5. What is your preferred ethnic identification?
6. Who in your immediate family, besides you, attend(ed) college?
7. What or who influenced your decision to join the Latina sorority?
8. How long have you been a member of the Latina sorority?
9. How much time do you spend per week involved in activities associated with sorority?
10. What is your most memorable experience with being a member of the Latina sorority?

APPENDIX D. FOCUS GROUP INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Study: The formation of ethnic identity through participation in a Latina sorority

Investigators: Jennifer Gray Nunez, B.S.

Nancy J. Evans, B.A., M.Ed., M.F.A., Ph.D.

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore how ethnic identity is influenced through participation in a Latina sorority. You are being invited to participate in this study because of your membership to a Latina sorority.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately one month and will involve participation in a 90-minute focus group with 5-6 other members of the Latina sorority. You will also be asked to review a preliminary draft of the results of the study to insure that it accurately presents your experiences. During the study you may expect the following procedures to be followed: During the focus group, you will be asked to reflect on how your ethnic identity has been influenced by family, your home community, the campus environment, peers, and involvement in the Latina sorority. The researcher will observe the group to note the order of persons speaking and to take notes on nonverbal communication they observe in the group. The focus group will be audio taped and the tapes will be transcribed for study by the researcher. Following analysis of the information obtained from the focus group, you will receive an email asking you to comment on conclusions the researcher has drawn based on her analysis of the comments made during the group discussion. You will be asked to select a pseudonym for identification purposes. No identifying information or actual names will be placed on the tapes or transcripts. The tapes will be erased as soon as data have been analyzed and the results are written up. During the focus group, you may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks at this time from participating in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be the direct benefit to you of gaining a better understanding of your own ethnic identity development. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing valuable information about the ethnic identity development of Latina university women.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy our records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken. Each participant will be given a pseudonym of her choice. This pseudonym will be used to identify your comments during the focus group on the transcripts of your focus group session. Only the researcher will have access to the tapes and transcripts. These materials will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and electronic versions of the transcripts will be kept in password protected computer files. Materials will be kept only until results of the study are analyzed and written up. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact Jennifer Gray Nunez, (515)294-8302, jgray@iastate.edu or Dr. Nancy J. Evans, Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, (515)294-7113, nevans@iastate.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-4566; austingr@iastate.edu or the Research Compliance Officer, Office of Research Compliance, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-3115; dament@iastate.edu

SUBJECT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) _____

(Subject's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)

(Date)

APPENDIX E. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Study: The formation of ethnic identity through participation in a Latina sorority

Investigators: Jennifer Gray Nunez, B.S.
Nancy J. Evans, B.A., M.Ed., M.F.A., Ph.D.

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to continue your participation in the research study on how ethnic identity is influenced through participation in a Latina sorority. You are being invited to participate in audio taped interviews because of your membership in a Latina sorority.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in the audio taped interviews, your participation will last one month and will involve three, 90 minute, in-depth interviews. During the first interview you will be asked a series of questions to gain a context for your understanding of your own ethnicity. The second interview will focus on the development of your ethnicity since participating in the Latina sorority. The third interview will allow me to ask follow-up questions for clarification and allow you to review and comment on the findings.

All interviews will be audio taped and transcribed to allow me to study them. To maintain your anonymity, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym. No documents (tapes or transcripts) will contain your actual name or identifying information. The tapes will be erased as soon as data have been analyzed and the results written up. Transcriptions will be kept in a personal computer file that is password protected. During the interviews, you may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

RISKS

At this time, there are no foreseeable risks from participating in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be the direct benefit to you of gaining a better understanding of your own ethnic identity development. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing valuable information about the ethnic identity development of Latina university women.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken. In all texts I prepare, including the thesis, pseudonyms will be used to refer to you and to other members of the sorority. Only I will have access to the data which will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Any typed documents will be password protected and stored on my personal computer. All data collected will be destroyed by January 1, 2005. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact Jennifer Gray Nunez, (515)294-8302, jagray@iastate.edu or Dr. Nancy J. Evans, Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, (515)294-7113, nevans@iastate.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-4566; austingr@iastate.edu or the Research Compliance Officer, Office of Research Compliance, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-3115; dament@iastate.edu

SUBJECT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) _____

(Subject's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)

(Date)

APPENDIX F. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW OF FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS INFORMED CONSENT

Title of Study: The formation of ethnic identity through participation in a Latina sorority

Investigators: Jennifer Gray Nunez, B.S.
Nancy J. Evans, B.A., M.Ed., M.F.A., Ph.D.

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to continue your participation in the research study on how ethnic identity is influenced through participation in a Latina sorority. You are being invited to participate in audio taped interviews because of your membership in a Latina sorority.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in the audio taped interviews, your participation will last one month and will involve two, 90 minute, in-depth interviews. During the first interview you will be asked a series of questions to gain a context for your understanding of your own ethnicity. The first interview will also focus on information that was discussed during the focus group. The second interview will allow me to ask follow-up questions for clarification and allow you to review and comment on the findings from both the focus group and individual interview.

All interviews will be audio taped and transcribed to allow me to study them. To maintain your anonymity, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym. No documents (tapes or transcripts) will contain your actual name or identifying information. The tapes will be erased as soon as data have been analyzed and the results written up. Transcriptions will be kept in a personal computer file that is password protected. During the interviews, you may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you feel uncomfortable.

RISKS

At this time, there are no foreseeable risks from participating in this study.

BENEFITS

If you decide to participate in this study there may be the direct benefit to you of gaining a better understanding of your own ethnic identity development. It is hoped that the information gained in this study will benefit society by providing valuable information about the ethnic identity development of Latina university women.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken. In all texts I prepare, including the thesis, pseudonyms will be used to refer to you and to other members of the sorority. Only I will have access to the data which will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Any typed documents will be password protected and stored on my personal computer. All data collected will be destroyed by January 1, 2005. If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact Jennifer Gray Nunez, (515)294-8302, jgray@iastate.edu or Dr. Nancy J. Evans, Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, (515)294-7113, nevans@iastate.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the Human Subjects Research Office, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-4566; austingr@iastate.edu or the Research Compliance Officer, Office of Research Compliance, 2810 Beardshear Hall, (515) 294-3115; dament@iastate.edu

SUBJECT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Subject's Name (printed) _____

(Subject's Signature)

(Date)

INVESTIGATOR STATEMENT

I certify that the participant has been given adequate time to read and learn about the study and all of their questions have been answered. It is my opinion that the participant understands the purpose, risks, benefits and the procedures that will be followed in this study and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

(Signature of Person Obtaining Informed Consent)

(Date)

APPENDIX G. FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did your family or the community you grew up in influence how you identify yourself?
2. What is your preferred ethnic identification? If you would, please describe different aspects of that identification.
3. Has your ethnic identification changed over time? Why or why not?
4. At college, what or who has influenced your ethnic identity the most? And in what ways?
5. What campus activities have given you the opportunity to learn about your ethnic identity? (classes, organizations, friends, etc.)
6. How do you feel your involvement in the Latina sorority has influenced your understanding of your ethnicity?
7. What aspects of your membership to the Latina sorority do you value the most? (for example: friendships, involvement in an organization that focuses on Latina issues.)

APPENDIX H. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview 1: Context

1. Tell me about your home background and family. Where are you from?
2. How large is your family?
3. What do your parents do for a living? Did they ever attend college?
4. What was your high school like (i.e., ethnic make-up, public or private, small or large)?
5. How would you identify yourself in relation to ethnicity? Is this self-identifier one a member of your family would use to describe his or her self?
6. Please talk about when you realized your own ethnicity? How older were you? Who or what event introduced you to thinking about it?
7. Did your family and friends in the community in which you were raised discuss issues related to ethnicity?
8. Why did you choose to attend Iowa State University?
9. What types of activities are you involved in on campus or in the community?
10. Why did you choose to become a member of the Latina sorority?
11. Describe your major network of friends and acquaintances on campus.
12. Has this community of people influenced how you identify yourself in relation to ethnicity? If so, how?

Interview 2: Experience

1. What does being Latina (or other self-identifier) mean to you?
2. Tell me about an event at college that caused you to think about your ethnicity.
3. Has the perception of your ethnicity changed since attending college? If so, how has this new perception impacted you? Your family? Your high school friends? Your college friends? Your career goals?
4. Describe specific cultural values or beliefs that are significant to your ethnicity?
5. How has it been for you to maintain your cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors on campus?
6. Being Latina (or other self-identifier), what struggles and challenges have you encountered on campus?
7. Describe any specific aspects of the sorority that have confirmed or developed your understanding of your ethnicity.
8. How have other members of the sorority influenced your understanding of your ethnicity?
9. What similarities in ethnicity do the members of the Latina sorority possess? What differences?
10. How do you define your ethnic identity as a group versus individually?
11. Of the activities you are involved in, what has been the greatest impact on your ethnicity?

Interview 3: Follow-up and member check

1. This interview will consist of additional exploration of information offered in the first two interviews that may not be clear or that may need more elaboration.
2. Students will also be presented with preliminary themes from the data analysis and will be asked to verify that these themes are an accurate representation of their background and experiences. They will have an opportunity to correct any misinterpretation or add additional information.

APPENDIX I. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR FOCUS GROUP
PARTICIPANTS

1. Review of background, family, and community before college.
2. Please describe your high school. What was it like?
3. Please talk about when you first realized your own ethnicity? How old were you? Who or what event introduced you to thinking about it?
4. What types of activities are you involved in on campus?
5. Describe your major network of friends on campus.
6. Has this community of people influences how you identify yourself in relation to ethnicity? If so how?
7. What does being (self-identifier from survey) mean to you?
8. Tell me about an event at college that caused you to think about your ethnicity.
9. Describe specific cultural values or beliefs that are significant to your ethnicity.
10. How has it been for you to maintain your cultural values, beliefs, and behaviors on campus?
11. Being (self-identifier), what struggles or challenges have you encountered on campus?
12. How have other members of the sorority influenced your understanding of your ethnicity?
13. What similarities do you as a group possess in your past experiences? What differences?
14. Of all the activities you are involved in, what has been the greatest impact on your ethnicity?

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