

LEVERAGING LATINX PARENTS' CULTURAL WEALTH: *PLÁTICAS* WITH
PARENTS ABOUT THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL
SPACES IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

A Dissertation
by
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Abstract

LEVERAGING LATINX PARENTS' CULTURAL WEALTH: *PLÁTICAS* WITH PARENTS ABOUT THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL SPACES IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA.

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Everyday practices continue to normalize racism and perpetuate deficits and disparities. In North Carolina, for example, appalling projections indicate that Latinxs will fall short in educational attainment for the next 40 years. This project serves as both an invitation to *revisit* and *transform* educational attainment in the region of Western North Carolina, the rest of the state, and the nation as a whole.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) informed by LatCrit “consciousness,” referred to as CRT/LatCrit, is used as the theoretical lens to explore this phenomenon. This lens centralizes race and ethnicity, along with their many intersections, and promotes critical attention be given to disparities of outcomes that continue to be related to race and ethnicity. Further, this study provides a space via *pláticas* in which the lived experiences of Latinx parents and families, including my own, are *funds of knowledge*. This idea runs contrary to divergent

views, such as colorblindness, that render communities of color invisible and buries the formidable *cultural wealth* that communities of color employ to foster success.

By design, this project uses *Thinking with Theory* interwoven with analysis, theories, my own observations, thoughts and complications, and the co-participants of this project as we occupy the willed and planned space of *confianza* produced by our arrangement. This project recognizes that its very presence is disrupting, preparing, and plowing the ground before seeds can be sown and cultivated. Moreover, this paper promotes pragmatic solidarity for innovation and transformation by paying attention to programs that are already helping to change the landscape of education in our region by being culturally responsive, collaborative, and thinking of families and parents as crucial participants in the educational experience. In conclusion, this study entreaties for more spaces in which teaching and learning can simultaneously occur, particularly from those who are silenced and marginalized. *Pláticas* present a possibility worthy of consideration.

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Dedication

Para mi madre Yolima Escobar Henao, fuente de inspiración en este proyecto. Me enseñaste a cumplir todas mis metas en vida. Mamá, finalmente cumplimos nuestro sueño de ser doctor.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The "racial" worldview was invented to assign some groups to perpetual low status, while others were permitted access to privilege, power, and wealth. The tragedy in the United States has been that the policies and practices stemming from this worldview succeeded all too well in constructing unequal populations (American Anthropological Association, 1998).

Hobby (1988) expertly argues, “One is always lost when traversing new territory; being lost is where the new story begins” (p. 207). For me, the new story begins with my arrival in the United States.

I came to the United States (U.S.) in the year 2000, as a political refugee from the Republic of Colombia. While specific circumstances and personal details of our journey will remain solely with me, the events mark a time of significance and new beginnings for my family and myself.

As we expected, our transition to the U.S. was difficult, especially as we left everything we knew behind, without notice, and we never looked back. We arrived in a new country that felt like an entire new world, with different languages, new people of all colors and shapes, and a startling new scenery. The landscape was especially jarring coming from Medellin, the second largest city in Colombia, to a little rural town located in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina. Everything was brand new to us, even the weather, which included a newfound wonder: snow. What a joyful moment the first time that I played in the snow!

I distinctly remember a profound sense of being lost in this new world, but I was cautiously excited about the new experiences and discoveries we would encounter. Things

that most people take for granted, such as freedom and being in a peaceful environment, had become the comforts we longed for most. Added little luxuries like having clean and gently-used blankets to cover us during the cold nights of October were more than enough. I was grateful for just being warm and not scared any longer. I excitedly proclaimed, “We are free at last!”

Our family settled in but had our fair share of changes, communication issues, and misunderstandings; however, we worked to perfect the use of gestures, sounds, symbols, and signs to make a point. Eventually, it got easier to understand and be understood as our family became aware of the best ways to navigate and survive while adjusting to the our new home and learning English.

Shortly after our arrival, I enrolled in a local high school in Western North Carolina. Schools are often referred to as the first site of systemic contact with the new culture (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) for many newcomers, and it was so in my family. We took several assessments and provided our educational transcripts along with our health records. I was automatically enrolled in courses specifically for English as a Second Language (ESL), known today as English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In these classes, I was introduced to the English language, grammar, cultural customs, and Southern quirks and slang. Simultaneously, this was also where I occupied the same physical space with so many other people from different cultural backgrounds, customs, and languages. Further, it was a time when people showed curiosity about my own country of origin. I was often asked, “Where are you from?” I usually answered simply, “I am from the Republic of Colombia.” And there was always a follow-up explication about its location and famous artists, and we even chatted about perceived assumptions of what they knew about Colombia. It also became

a new way that other students would refer to me; instead of my name, they would casually say, “Hey, Colombia!” This point in my life became the crucial moment I realized that I belonged to a new group: the Latinx¹ community.

Through observations and my own experiences, I quickly discovered many contradictions and ambiguities that are attached to certain groups in the United States, including the Latinx community. These included assumptions about my immigration status, skin color, educational level, the involvement of my parents in my life, as well as my family background and which particular community they felt I belonged. I heard comments such as, “You are too good to be Mexican,” or “You should hang your citizenship certificate, so people know you are legal.” People even said, “You are too white to be Latino.” They made assumptions on the involvement, or lack thereof, of my parents. All of this served as very real reminders that my name, ethnicity, skin color, and native language were prominent players in my relationships, opportunities, and interactions. I knew without being told which high school halls I was allowed to hang out in, and which halls were off-limits to me based solely on my ethnicity. I carried the heavy weight of all my books day by day – the physical consequences and pain of which I currently still suffer – just because my high school locker was located on the wrong hall.

To add to the complexity of the situation, I was questioned if I were Brown enough to be in certain social groups while at the same time I was made to feel like an outcast because others believed that I acted too White. According to Carrillo and Rodriguez (2016), to be considered smart within school settings, one must conform to identities that meet Whiteness

¹ Non-binary gender determinable term to refer to commonly use of Latino/a, Hispanic or Latin@ in the U.S. The term is modernizing the idea of inclusivity of all people of Latin American descent, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.

and middle-class capitalist standards. Being in this in-between-space was extremely confusing, uncomfortable, and physically and externally too draining throughout my high school years. It was a space that I've tried to eliminate from my memories as though it's the blank space that was necessary to traverse in order to enter college. I wanted to move fast forward though those years as quickly as possible.

Going to college was an extremely important part of being in high school for me, and for my parents. It was what I was expected to do without questioning it. However, by my association with certain groups, I found that opportunities for the "good classes" were not available to all students. ESL learners like me stayed in English as a Second Language courses regardless of their advancement and mastery of language skills. This translated to not being able to take higher-level English, including honors and advanced placement courses, which were necessary for competitive four-year school applications. Regardless of our progress, my classmates and I felt we were running behind our peers and unable to catch up (Early, 2000). This observation became very real when, at graduation time for the previous class, only two Latinx, out of a class with at least thirty students, planned to go on to a four-year institution, and only a few others were considering enrolling at the local community college. This was a disheartening picture, especially when I learned that many of that group were first-generation U.S. born Latinxs.

In the same way that I had to face my hardships, my parents endured their own experiences and struggles navigating educational spaces and a new way of life. My mother has always been a role model, not only regarding my formal education, but also as a cultural guardian who keeps our family grounded to our home culture, language, and traditions. It is

through the connections to our beginnings, along with embracing the new customs and traditions, that we have been able to navigate this new land and be less lost.

It is not surprising then that my family speaks Spanglish, is bilingual and multicultural, likes to tell *cuentos*, or stories, and I rely on their timely *consejos*, or advice, to keep me grounded and be a *buen hombre*, a good man. My parents have connected me to my past and made me who I am today. However, they would often wonder why the U.S. educational system promotes students' autonomy, particularly in high school, with little to no consideration of the parents beyond parent-teacher conferences, attending PTA meetings, or signing forms. They often discussed being left out, not considered, and overall not welcome. They felt many times they were merely our chauffeurs, with their role being to drop in and out without ever feeling like a meaningful participant in the educational experience with abundance of knowledge of their children, As Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti (2005) referred to this dynamic relationship, my parents didn't feel seen as funds of knowledge.

This project has been constructed under the premise that the standard discourse and practices in the educational system silence Latinx parents' experiences and the wealth of cultural capital (Yosso, 2006) that they bring to educational spaces. In turn, this limits fruitful conversations that may lead to more people in the Latinx community attaining higher degrees.

In my case, my mother's involvement in my educational journey is the reason that I was afforded the opportunity to graduate from high school, finish college, complete a master's degree and educational specialist degree, and finally be here to the complete this doctoral degree. Her teachings of being a *buen hombre*, and her involvement in my education

and *educación*,² are still a heavy influence on me. As a member of the Latinx community, who is also an educator and a role model to two younger brothers and one sister, three nephews, and to many others in the community who seek my assistance to navigate educational practices, I bear the responsibility to challenge the hegemonic constructs that exclude and silence my story and the voices of many others.

Thus, the purpose of this project is to provide a critical space, via *pláticas*,³ to think with Latinx parents about their involvement in post-secondary⁴ educational spaces while supporting their children's attainment of a baccalaureate degree within the region of Western North Carolina. Secondly, this study disrupts the deficit thinking that permeates educational research while it highlights the formidable cultural wealth that parents employ to foster success. Finally, this study advocates for opening up collaborative spaces that may inform practice and laws in an unwavering commitment to moving the needle forward in educational attainment for everyone, including members of the Latinx community.

I unloaded the heavy burden of telling my own story to displace comfortable self-serving majority truths for several reasons. First, the privilege of my positionality allows me to do my work from within institutional structures where I have been a receiver and a provider of educational experiences for over a decade. Jackson and Mazzei (2012), citing Spivak (1993), referred to this unique space as the “impossible no” (p. 39), a space where the insider access allows a critical examination of the structure in which I inhabit. In short, I

² *Educación* encompasses the education of the child holistically, to include their well-being, manners and moral values (Valdes, 1996).

³ Informal conversations or discussions that take place in one-on-one or groups spaces as a way to gather cultural knowledge through communication of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations (Gonzalez, 1998).

⁴ Education that takes place after secondary school or high school which includes universities and community colleges.

am a part of the system I am critiquing. It is my outside, inside, and in-between access that provides clarity and complexity of insight. I also present my “unique voice of color” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.10) to humanize the vivid experiences of people of color and legitimize them as critical to the understanding of those experiences in a racialized society. I am exposing counter stories⁵ that reconstruct the dominant narrative. This fundamental tenet from Critical Race Theory, explained in detail in the theoretical framework section of this project, serves as the theoretical and methodological lens in which this project is outlined. I utilize my story to remind others to be proud of their culture, language, and customs; we can learn so much from each other. Finally, I extend solidarity with the many Latinxs for whom post-secondary education remains, so far, only a dream.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the ever-growing presence of Latinxs in the United States, recent studies show “Hispanic men and women had the lowest levels of educational attainment” among major racial and ethnic groups in the United States (Espinosa, Turk, Taylor & Chessman, 2019, p. xiii). In 2017 for example, 12.2% of Latinx adults ages 25 and older had attained a four-year degree, compared to a 23.7% attainment rate in their White counterparts. In other words, Whites attained four-year degrees at almost twice the rate as Latinxs while more than 60% of Latinxs ages 25 or older have no more than a high school education.

In North Carolina, a state with a long history of educational disparities for communities of color, the numbers are not any more encouraging. According to

⁵ Critical Race Theory (CRT) counter storytelling is a method of recounting the experiences and perspectives of racially and socially marginalized people. CRT recognizes these stories and knowledge as valid and a valuable source of data (Yosso, 2006).

North Carolina's Leaky Educational Pipeline and Pathways to 60% attainment (2019), compared with other groups, "Hispanic adults reported the lowest level of educational attainment in 2016" (Tippett & Standford, 2019, p.12). The data demonstrated that the share of adult Latinxs ages 25-64 with an associate degree or higher was 20.6%, the lowest across all racial and ethnic groups in North Carolina. Moreover, The Educational Testing Service (ETS) already has projected as far out as 2060 to continue to fall short in North Carolina's attainment goals for Latinxs. The consequences can be catastrophic, especially as educational attainment is closely related numerous other advantages and privileges (Lynch & Baker, 2005), such as the possibility of higher earnings, lower unemployment rates, and upward social mobility. Educating and preparing our citizenry and workforce to be a knowledge-based society is our responsibility as a state and as a nation.

A recent report by Tripplett and Ford (2019), entitled *E(race)ing Inequities: The State of Racial Equity in North Carolina Public Schools*, provided some clarity as to why students of color continue to stay behind their peers. Tripplett and Ford asked a simple and powerful question: Does race influence educational access and outcome? (p.4). In their findings, the authors reported that race alone is a determinant of certain outcomes for students of color in North Carolina. The report explains:

Our results confirm the existence of long-standing racial gaps in achievement, graduation/dropout, grade point average, SAT scores, and ACT scores...students of color have diminished access to the resources that affect success, including access to advanced coursework, experienced teachers, and racially/ethnically matched teachers (p.4-5).

The authors shared their points of concern, and, with great urgency, beseeched North Carolina to take a deeper examination into the systemic barriers that continue to affect students of color throughout the state.

From my own experiences as both a student and educator, I concur with their concerns, and I am surprised that the State of North Carolina has taken as long as it has to explore deeply educational equity. My personal observations in high school were that Brown students were not graduating at the same rate as our peers. Further, as I formally went through college to obtain a bachelor's, master's, educational specialist, and now a doctorate degree, I continue to be the exception - a rarity. The institutions that are supposed to have our best interests at heart continue to fail us, and we cannot rely on their intentions. Therefore, I deliberately raise my hand to think of ways to show "extraordinary attention and innovation," (Tippett & Standford, 2019, p.13), especially as we think about reaching our post-secondary attainment goals.

During my own journey through education, I've often thought of my success and failures and what allowed me to persist through degree attainment, and there is really only one common denominator: my parents. Their engagement, teachings, lessons and values, their overall cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006), played a crucial role in my education. Decades of well-documented research confirm parental engagement as a "key contributor to student success" (UnidosUS, 2017, p.1). In fact, analyses consistently show working with Latinx families and their connections with educational spaces as vital, both academically and in life. Culturally responsive literature has referred to parents as an important fund of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005), as partners or collaborators (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009), co-teachers (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991), *gran maestras* (Villenas & Moreno, 2001) and valuable key players (Behnke & Kelly, 2011). However, our practices, and even laws, discard them as an unimportant piece of the educational experience and enterprise. It is noticeable as we watch students progress through the educational pipeline, that the role of parents is often

undervalued and underutilized. Critical Race Theory/LatCrit provide us with an important reality: racism has been embedded in our structures, discourses, and practices and continues to govern outcomes for students of color in the United States. Therefore, it is not surprising that supposed color-blindness has served as a smokescreen to hide behind while skirting responsibilities to students of color.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this project is to provide a space via *pláticas* to think with Latinx parents about their involvement in post-secondary educational spaces while supporting their children's attainment of a baccalaureate degree within the region of Western North Carolina. Secondly, to disrupt the deficit thinking that permeates within educational research and overshadows the formidable cultural wealth that parents employ to foster success. Finally, this study embodies a commitment to move the needle forward in degree attainment, using the following questions as a guide and framework for the study:

- How do Latinx parents leverage cultural wealth in post-secondary educational spaces in the region of Western North Carolina?
- How does Latinx parents' involvement diverge from dominant discourse regarding educational attainment?
- How does this study embody the social justice commitment to move the needle forward in educational attainment?

Significance of Study

Sharma (2018) stated that internalized deficit attitudes continue to permeate our educational spaces. Those practices and assumptions, usually with negative intentions, have

been generally accepted and embraced with a neoliberal agenda in holding a status quo to benefit those who are already privileged in society. Calderon and Ledesma (2015) remind aspiring scholars that the “context, history and sociocultural realities” are essential components of promoting equitable educational practices and social justice, a core commitment of Critical Race Theory (p. 125).

In the spirit of advancing the conversations of educational justice, this project embraces the challenge to revisit (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) the interpretations of Latinx parental engagement to provide a “balanced critical analysis” (Yosso, 2006, p. xi) of the experiences and struggles of Latinx parents in educational spaces. Furthermore, this work contributes to the dearth of research (Carrillo & Rodríguez, 2016) focused on the “new Latinx diaspora” (Hamann & Harklau, 2010, p.157), specifically in the region of rural Western North Carolina. In that pursuit, I utilize *pláticas* of two Latinx families in their quest for their children’s attainment of a baccalaureate degree in the New Latino South⁶.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into six chapters. The first provides the rationale for engaging in this project, including its significance, the research problem, assumptions, as well as the research questions that guided this study. The second chapter provides the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological underpinnings of this study informed by Critical Race Theory (CRT) and a LatCrit consciousness (Yosso, 2006). Further, it includes CRT/LatCrit guiding tenets, connections to scholarly inquiry and practice, and implications.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) provided five guiding tenets as they apply to education:

⁶ Increasing number of Latinxs settling in areas that have not traditionally been home to Latinxs (Hamann & Harklau, 2010, p.157).

- Centralization of race and racism as central constructs that intersect with other dimensions of one's identity;
- Race as social constructs to justify superiority and dominance;
- Racism will persist by pure group self-interest;
- Lived experiences of people of color are crucial to the understanding of their experiences in a racialized society; and the utmost
- A commitment to social justice endeavors.

The literature review in the third chapter of this study is organized under Yosso's cultural wealth Capital Model (2006), which capitalizes on the talents, strengths, and experiences that communities of color display throughout their experiences. In the literature, Latinx parents were re-centered as Community Wealth Capital, Cultural Guardians of *La Familia*, and as Agents of Social Justice. The fourth chapter reports on the research design and methods used while conducting the project, including: CRT/LatCrit connection to research design and method, *pláticas* as a space of liberation, the positionality of the researcher and participants as co-constructors, employing *pláticas* in education, data collection procedures, and an introduction to the co-participants of the study, The Rodríguez and Pérez families. The fifth chapter provides Thinking with CRT/LatCrit with the co-participants in the study including while the final chapter provides tentative reflections, implications, and concluding thoughts.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Critical Race Theory (CRT) with a Latinx Critical Race (LatCrit) consciousness (Yosso, 2006), referred to in this study as CRT/LatCrit, provides an appropriate and dedicated framework that attends to the perspectives of Latinx parents' involvement in educational spaces while supporting their children's attainment of a baccalaureate degree.

Theory Foundations

Critical Race Theory initially was developed by scholars of color,⁷ whose radicalized collective experiences defined their social reality (Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002). It emerged in the 1970s, known then as Critical Legal Studies (CLS), to take a critical stand towards dominant ideologies while being strongly influenced by the underlying sentiment of the civil rights movement, women's rights, the anti-war protests, and other so-called radical politics of the period (Clark, 1994). In an interview with Duncan Kennedy, a key figure in the critical legal movement, Clark stated that CLS was a scholarly network of people thinking of themselves as activists questioning the legitimization discourse of the political system, legal reasoning, and the implications for others as well as the contradictions and ambiguities of decision-making by judges (pp. 1-6). Up until this point there was not much attention given to the idea that a lot of the production of legal discourse, legal doctrine, and legal scholarship favored a sharp change in the system on behalf of the people who were being scrutinized by the system (Clark, 1994). CLS provided a framework for the analysis of meritocracy, color blindness, and other ideological principles of law including the concept of legal

⁷ In this study, people, scholars, and students of color are defined as “non-White.” People have the right to choose how others refer to them at personal and the collective levels (Jensen, 2005). Each descriptor contains a political dimension not discussed in this project.

indeterminacy, or the idea that not every legal case has one right outcome. Instead, one can decide most cases for either party by way of emphasizing one line of authority over another or simply interpreting one fact differently (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Furthermore, CLS challenged the concept of universal ideology as “a valid one, the truth-what everyone knows” (p. 90). This reveals an essential focus on positionality and the sociopolitical dimensions of legal judgment reasoning but also the very set of values, ideas, and meaning that we rely on to construct, order, and understand the world (Delgado, 1995).

Early writers of CRT, such as Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, asserted that CLS could not offer strategies for social transformation because the framework’s primary focus was on material inequality and class relationships, but it failed to incorporate race and racism (Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Additionally, CLS offered no language in which to embark on a race-based system-wide critique of legal reasoning and legal institutions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), including the analysis of social and racial injustice (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

Critical Race Theory

The genesis of CLS expanded on these limitations and borrowed from other traditions like ethnic studies, radical feminism, and other social movements (Matsunda, 1993). Such an origin brought to life a new way of thinking that brought race to forefront of theory and practice in the legal canon. This transformation known as Critical Race Theory (CRT) provided a critical space in which the relationship between race, racism, and power was

central to the understanding of the social and racial reality in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000).

CRT re-centers the views of policies, practices, and laws within a proper historical and cultural context to deconstruct their racialized meanings (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), CRT dares to look beyond the traditional belief that getting rid of racism is merely getting rid of ignorance, or encouraging everyone to get along. Instead, they claim that racism is part of the structure of legal institutions (p. xviii). Critical Race Theory scholars, also known as Crits, argue that positionality and ideology of neutrality and color blindness have served as drivers of self-interest, power, and privilege of the most dominant groups in American society (Delgado, 1995a; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2003; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001).

Guiding tenants of critical race theory. Critical Race Theory is characterized by five principles, propositions or tenets that govern the assumptions and practices of this theory. Delgado and Stefancic (2012) offer us the following:

Centralization of race. First, the discussion of race and racism is centralized. Racism is seen as the usual way society does business and is part of the everyday experiences of most people of color in this country. CRT centralizes race and racism as constructs that intersect with other the many dimensions of one's identity such as language, gender, sexuality, and social class (Crenshaw, 1995). Therefore, each of these aspects of one's identity can potentially elicit multiple forms of subordination (Montoya, 1994) and subject one to various kinds of oppression. In this approach, color-blindness and meritocracy are seen as endemic to

American society, a way to camouflage the responsibility for any hardships to people of color while perpetuating the status quo and racial subordination (Lopez, 2003).

Crenshaw (2011), suggests that formal equality did little to disrupt ongoing patterns of institutional power and the reproduction of differential privileges and burdens across race, in much the same way that the collapse of segregation did not dismantle racial dominance in the mid-20th century (p. 1312). The relevance of this brings us to contemporary times, often referred as post-racial after the election of President Barak Obama, to affirm the claim that race does not matter. Paradoxically, the reason President Obama's election mattered so much was his race. Crenshaw argues the emergence of post-racialism discourse is a threat to the de-historicization of race in America while it also becomes a vehicle for a colorblind agenda (p. 1327).

Colorblindness is a salient enemy of communities of color, especially since racist manifestations are not as explicit as in historic times. While we can argue that social media has been a vehicle to document and make the public aware of incidents towards communities of color, it is the ingrained attitudes, behaviors, and stereotypes that make racism a real enemy towards people of color. Critics argue that racism is (re)produced in many forms, ranging from systemic to microaggressions, or manifestations that might be verbal or nonverbal and are often carried out in subtle, automatic, or unconscious forms (Huber & Solorzano, 2015). Therefore, racism is hard to address or cure because it is not formally acknowledged (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.8).

Social construction of race. Race as a social construct constitutes the second tenet of CRT. This principle is also known as the “social construction thesis” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p.8), referring to race and races as products of social thoughts and relations. According

to Yosso (2006), a race is a socially constructed category, created to differentiate groups primarily on skin color, phenotype, ethnicity, and culture. It is through the social construction of race, otherwise systematically known as racism, that we find the various constructs of race and what they represent. Delgado (1995) refers to this racial reality in terms of taste. He indicates that “tastes are created, but also the same goes for distastes” (p. 41). However, a race is conceptually no different than taste and preferences based on our exposures, experiences, and for what they represent. For example, Mexicans in the U.S. were counted as White from 1930 until 1970, at which time they re-entered the United States census as Hispanic origin or descent. This blatant example demonstrates the subject as the same, but the subject position is structured according to the society.

Nealon and Giroux (2012) expand the conversations on race by suggesting that race is both practically empty and simultaneously too full. Conceptually speaking, a race is no more than a natural difference, just as potentially benign as any other indicator of difference. However, race can “chameleonicly adapt itself to society’s prevailing notions of truth, drawing legitimation from them and changing as they change” (p. 190). Therefore, race becomes crucial to the understanding in the context of the profoundly real consequences and effects that permeate American culture.

Through the examination of race, Critics question the developments of race throughout society and therefore expose differences between the standards of living, levels of employment, infant mortalities, and educational attainment among many other inequities (Delgado, 1995). It is through seeing race as a social construct that we find the complexity of racial and ethnic relations in the United States, including the historical precedence to justify inherent superiority of one race and thereby the right to dominance (Lorde, 1992).

According to Jensen (2005), putting “White” at the center, claims that the United States of America is a White-supremacist society. He calls the U.S., “A society whose founding is based on the ideology of the inherent superiority of White Europeans over non-Whites...that is used to this day to rationalize the racialized disparities in the distribution of wealth and well-being in society” (p. 4). Then, if race relays some advantages for some, we can deduce that there are privileges attached to the construction of race.

Interest convergence. The third tenet expands on the view of the institutionalization of racism. Critics argue that racism would persist by pure group self-interest (Delgado, 1995), often referred to as Interest Convergence (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012). Bell’s theory of interest convergence assumes that racial justice will be supported to the extent that there is a benefit between the interests. He argues that civil rights advances for Blacks always seemed to coincide with the changing economic conditions and self-interest of elite Whites (p. 22). For example, the construction of an image of Blacks as inferior, unintelligent, not very ambitious and so on initially served to quite clearly justify slavery (Delgado, 1995). However, Black slaves were not the only people to be subjugated by White Europeans, and the United States has a multitude of examples regarding the targeting of groups to serve the majoritarian purpose. Native American and Indigenous tribes were colonized, acculturated, and displaced from their lands, almost resulting in physical and cultural extinction. As Native peoples have never fully recovered, the Black and African-American community still feel the ripple effect of the denigration and legalization of slavery, ripples that are currently being reinforced to maintain White racial superiority.

While racism in America is not new, recent developments have shifted to closing the borders to individual people, as well as entire migrant communities, south of the U.S. border. The claim to protect the nation from foreign terrorists has been the rhetoric used to justify racist actions and has provided significant fuel to the success of the current president of the United States. The president's demand to erect a wall between Mexico and the United States seeks to justify an anti-immigrant discourse as it increases deportations, but it's about more than policy. *The Huffington Post* has reported President Trump as saying:

When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending their best... They're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people". His statement was later broadened to include immigrants from South and Latin America (Moreno, 2016, para. 3).

It is hard to reconcile the idea in living in a post-racial nation when the rhetoric used to warrant the proposed wall portrays the Latinx community as rapists, criminals, and drug dealers.

History is repeating itself. Previously, race was used to justify the welcoming of migrant workers to fulfill labor shortages with agreements such as the Bracero Program in 1942 (Macdonald & Carrillo, 2008), and race was the deciding factor in massive deportations when the demand for Mexican workers decreased. Hernandez-Truyol (1998) summarizes interest convergence practices asserting, "When we need cheap labor our borders open up; when jobs are short of supply, we want to shut them closed, we want to ship the others home (p. 130)". In 1954, following the Bracero Program, Operation Wetback returned hundreds of thousands of undocumented workers. This is the same time that Civil Rights era ushered in the political and legal context in which new Mexican residents or Mexican-American citizens

were no longer willing to tolerate unjust and discriminatory practices (Macdonald & Carrillo, 2008, p.16).

Unique voice of color. The fourth tenet relates to the lived experiences of people of color in which their unique voices of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) are legitimate and critical to the understanding of their realities and experiences in a racialized society. According to Delgado (1995), stories throughout history, especially from often silenced groups have been used to “test and challenge reality, to construct a counter-reality to hearten and support each other, and to probe, mock, displace, jar, or reconstruct the dominant tale or narrative (p. xviii).” Those experiences, represented in an array of historical narrative methodologies are found in storytelling, family history, biographies, scenarios, parables, *cuentos*, chronicles, and stories (Yosso, 2006). No matter the medium, these voices humanize the experiences of people of color as they expose and challenge the majoritarian stories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).

The internalization of a dominant culture’s images and experiences creates a paradox of what Du Bois referred to a “double consciousness,” that refutes the “devalued, objectified stereotyped visions of herself or himself” (Young, 2011, p.60). According to Young (2011), “Members of such groups express their specific group experiences and interpretations of the world to one another, developing and perpetuating their own culture... [and] often to maintain a sense of positive subjectivity” (p. 60). CRT embraces the creation of a safe space to reclaim those stories that challenge the a-historicism and undisciplined focus of most analysts in research (Parker, 2015). Further, it provides the opportunity to revisit historical records and interpretations from events with more minorities’ experiences (Delgado and Stefancic, 2012).

Commitment to social justice. The fifth and final tenet refers to the promise of CRT to maintain a social justice agenda ingrained throughout the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological framework of the theory. According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the aim of CRT is both to critique and transform the “social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender structures that constrain and exploit humankind” (p.113). Therefore, it is impossible to separate the critique that CRT provides to the advancement of a more active and participatory agenda, one which offers advancements towards social change.

The history of the United States, from its founding through present day, provides an extensive foundation for analysis with vivid examples of the disadvantages, injustices, and suffering of people of color. Young (2011) argues that while some practices have been from absolute powers being used to slight people, this mainly occurs in the everyday actions of well-intentioned society. Therefore, rather than isolated injuries that are peppered in and throughout society in the U.S., it is the long-standing structural forces of racism that provide the most congenial conditions for injustice to people of color. These systemic injustices and inequalities are continuously perpetuated and (re)produced by the media, stereotypes, and structures, allowing them to permeate into all types of systems including economic, political and cultural (Young, 2011).

CRT establishes both a new arena of contestation as well as new possibilities to question everyday patterns and practices of a racial reality or informed consciousness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). It extends to topics such as universalistic naturalized conceptions of meritocracy, the school-to-prison pipeline, the disproportionate impact of the mortgage foreclosure crisis on certain communities, standardized tests, and material disparities that

limit both the quality and length of life such as the wealth gap and the health gap (Crenshaw, 2011).

It is through the centralization of race that CRT expands the analysis for the transformation of the relationships among race, racism, and power in various social, economic, political, and educational contexts (Crenshaw et al., 1995). CRT provides a “balanced critical analysis” (Yosso, 2006, p. xi) with the images of the actual lived experiences and struggles of communities of color who must navigate the complexities of structural barriers and majority tales.

CRT as methodology provides people of color a safe space to be heard and an opportunity to give feedback. Moreover, CRT encourages the reflection of individuals, communities, and institutions to examine their histories, realities, and privileges to critically reflect on their world and their experiences with and within social contexts. Finally, CRT makes a fundamental commitment to engage in social justice endeavors to eliminate all forms of racial, gender, language, sexuality and class subordination (Matsunda, 1993). Social justice is the very core of CRT.

Latinx Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

The Latinx Critical Race Theory, known as the LatCrit movement, emerged from the necessity to move beyond the Black/White binary that has historically defined racial and power relationships in the United States. LatCrit follows the same tenets and same philosophical, theoretical and methodological standards. However, LatCrit provides a pathway to discuss important issues, such as language and immigration, which are relevant to the Latinx community (Elenes & Bernal, 2010).

This project employs CRT principles as the dedicated theoretical framework with which it is constructed and analyzed. However, it is recognized that a LatCrit consciousness (Yosso, 2006) re-centers and re-inscribes the Latinx experience, portraying the people as “agents of their destinies” (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2008, p.9). In this project I will refer to Critical Race Theory with a Latinx focus as CRT/LatCrit.

An important concept that permeates from the CRT/LatCrit is the necessity to bring forward more voices to open up our understandings of the lived experiences of people of color in the United States. LatCrit calls upon Latinx communities to name their own worlds from their own frame of understanding. Therefore, this project responds to that call and embraces methodologies that rewrites their experiences and voices, such as the use of *pláticas*.

Fierros and Dolores-Bernal (2016), describe *pláticas* as a “relational practice that develops from a goal to honor research participants’ epistemological position” (p. 116). In other words, the lines of researcher/researched are blurred to intentionally move away from research that sees the participant as a subject. As a result, this project benefits from the wealth that the participants bring to this arrangement. The rationale for utilizing *pláticas*, the role of the researcher and participants as well as its utility in educational spaces is expanded in the Research Design and Methods in Chapter Three.

Latinx critical race theory to educational inquiry. Racism and racial capitalism have been and continue to be embedded within the structures, discourses and policies that guide the daily practices of schools and universities (Parker, 2015 p.1999). Institutions such as schools are the primary site of contact for most individuals, becoming a principal place of contestation as well as a place full of opportunities.

According to Rist (1973), the purpose of schools is to “serve as selection and certification agencies, whose job is to measure people” (p. 249). Rist’s statement cannot be negated, especially as we observed No Child Left Behind mandates on high-stakes testing and its consequences for districts, schools, teachers, and students. The emphasis is placed on numbers, with the experiences of many students bound around tests, test preparation, and test scores. As Taubman (2009) explains, “In quantifying our existence we, as flesh and blood creatures, disappear into a nether world: who am I other than test scores? And yet, I know I am here-alone, anonymous” (p. 53).

At the same time, we hold that education is a practice of freedom (Freire, 2000) which is a moral and political practice in which everyone is invited to critically advocate and participate in the process of which they are a part. Education shifts the traditional paradigm and conveys power, making it a fruitful site of exploration for CRT/LatCrit.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) first introduced the study of CRT to the K-12 arena, before it was expanded by Solorzano (1998) to higher education. According to Ladson-Billings and Tate, “If racism were merely isolated, unrelated, individual acts, we would expect to see at least a few examples of educational excellence and equity together in the nation's public schools. Instead, those places where African Americans do experience success tend to be outside public schools” (p. 55). While Ladson-Billings and Tate looked at Black communities, Yosso (2006) extends the educational inequalities, or what she referred to *serious leaks*, to Latinx communities’ educational pipeline. She states, “No matter how one measures educational outcomes, Chicanas/os do not perform as well as Whites and attain less than other racial or ethnic groups in the United States” (p. 4). Yosso’s claims are backed by the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), which confirms that the Latinxs have consistently been

reported to have the lowest percentage of educational attainment at every level from high school to advanced degrees.

CRT/LatCrit theory to practice in education. Critical Race Theory has been a practical toolkit for practitioners to have while analyzing educational contexts from K-12 to postsecondary education within historical and modern times. As Lynn and Parker (2006) point out:

Critical Race studies in Education could be defined as a critique of racism as a system of oppression and exploitation that explores the historic and contemporary constructions and manifestations of race in our society with particular attention to how these issues are manifested at school. (p. 282)

Furthermore, situating education in the context of Latinx students, we are called to pay attention to the intersections of the Latinx experience in educational systems, including the relationships with parents, students, and community as sources of knowledge, the unique interpretation of education, as well as community building and empowerment through spaces of *confianza*⁸.

The literature provides several examples of the Latinx experience through CRT/LatCrit in education spaces while noting primarily those of Mexican descent, specifically Mexican-Americans and Chicanos, have led the way for a broader understanding of the Latinx experience in the United States. However, there is plenty of room at the table for representation among a diverse people. Due to the complexity of the pan-ethnicity of Latinxs, including multiple races, it is an area of opportunity for discovery.

⁸ *Confianza* or trust is a relationship building that reinforces mutuality and reciprocity (Valle, 1982, p.116)

Calderon and Ledesma (2015) separate the advancements of CRT/LatCrit in education into some well-defined parameters such as curriculum and pedagogy, teaching and learning, schooling in general, and policy and community engagement. Through curriculum and pedagogical framing, the use of funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et. al., 2005) acknowledges the family as partners or collaborators (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009), co-teachers (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991), *gran maestras* (Villenas & Moreno, 2001) active and valuable key players (Behnke & Kelly, 2011) and a collaborative enterprise where power and responsibility are shared (Allen, 2009). The lived experiences and voices incorporated into pedagogical approaches are used to re-center their agency and to provide a way that the curriculum becomes meaningful to them. It is through pedagogy and curriculum that students have the opportunity to be agents in the understanding of their world as well as the opportunity to “identify, analyze, and transform the structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom” (Solorzano & Yosso, 2000, p. 63). It is a way to become less lost.

When it comes to teaching and learning, Villenas and Deyhle (1999) argued that CRT provides a powerful tool to understand how subordination and marginalization of people of color are created and maintained in the United States. They add, “studies have documented the incessant ways in which schools fail to capitalize on the culture, knowledge, and language of these families and how Latino/a youth are systematically pushed out by being tracked into low-level classes and by receiving remedial type instruction” (p. 441). It is the incompleteness of the majority definition of what education means that calls for new understandings of how teaching and learning occur in some communities of color and brings to light a different perspective with a holistic view of schooling.

Valdes (1996) describes the difference succinctly: “What English speakers call ‘education’ is school or book learning. What Spanish speakers call ‘*educación*’ has a much broader meaning and includes both manners” (p. 125). Therefore, it is not surprising when Latinx parents were asked to define parental involvement, they concentrated on a holistic view that integrated life education such as good morals, encouragement, attendance, advice, trust, and discipline more frequently than activities associated with academic involvement such as academic performance, signing homework, attending open houses, etc. (Zarate, 2007).

Finally, CRT/LatCrit is a valuable tool to analyze policy and community engagement encounters that Latinx parents use to reclaim their agency, resist oppressive policies and practices, navigate structural barriers, and have a voice of their own. According to De La Vega (2007), *confianza* is central to working with the Latinx community. It is through social networks that one develops confidence with parents. Trust leads to a sense of *confianza* which is critical to the foundation for community building and empowerment.

Delgado-Gaitan (1991) observed through her study in Carpinteria, empowerment occurs when parents identify and confront beliefs about schools and themselves that prevent them from participating in the educational experience of their children entirely. She expands, “[families] empower themselves, employing tools like their shared language and history. Systematically, the leaders work with principals and teachers in each school to organize parents- one school at a time” (p. 31). It is through localized coalitions or those spaces of *confianza* that parents can start building bridges to connect with their communities. Hence, by default of shared experiences, dynamic connections result in systemic changes in their communities. Similarly, Fitts and McClure (2015) found “the knowledge, agency, and

confianza that participants developed through their social networks, specifically in the women's groups, supported them in defining their own goals and engaging with public institutions on their own terms” (p. 309). In summary, *confianza* is a key concept in opening up spaces to engage with Latinx parents and families to think with about their experiences.

Chapter 3: Latinx Parental Involvement Review of Literature

The literature review is organized into four parts. First, there is an analysis of demographic, historical, and current context to situate the conversation of Latinx parental involvement and educational attainment. This is followed by a review of the (re)interpretation of capital exhibited by communities of color through their daily lives, specifically organized utilizing Tara Yosso's Community Wealth Capital Model. The third section offers the presentation of literature shortcomings and implications proposing the limited view towards education from mainstream culture as well as the limitation of the voices to encapsulate the complexity of the Latinx educational experience in the United States. Finally, the conclusion proposes a further exploration of family participatory education and cultivating strengths of parents as potential ways to promote degree attainment among Latinx communities. To begin, I will present the demographic, historical, and current developments to understand the Latinx experience in the United States in context.

Context of the Latinx Experience in the United States

The anticipation of Latinxs becoming the largest minority-majority is now the reality. Despite efforts of preparation to serve the fastest growing minority-majority group, Latinxs are the least educated group of all major ethnic groups in the United States (Arellano & Padilla, 1996). According to Ryan and Bauman (2015), Hispanics have consistently been reported as the lowest percentage of educational attainment at every level from high school (66.7%), Associate's degree (22.70%), Bachelor's degree (15.5%), to advanced degrees (4.7%). Furthermore, demographic information of population growth and immigration patterns indicates that the offspring of Latinx American immigrants will continue to be the

fastest-growing segment in U.S. schools (Tienda, 2009). The U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2025, nearly three-tenths of children in this country will be of Latinx ancestry (Frye & Passel, 2009).

The long and rich history of Latinxs in the United States has been in existence since before the conquest of the Americas. The flux of immigration and natural population growth from many immigrants, including Latinxs, made their presence noted in their ongoing relationships with the United States.

While the U.S. Census Bureau reports this group as Hispanics, it is of importance for this project to clarify the widespread confusion surrounding the terms “Latino” and “Hispanic.” Officially, the U.S. federal government uses both terms interchangeably to describe a population with origins from Latin America and Spain. However, we must keep in mind that the terms refer to regions of origin and not a person's race. Latinxs is a homogenous term used to express a pan-ethnic group of over 20 countries with many languages, races, traditions, and cultures (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2008).

Based on a survey of 1,200 registered voters, people that prefer the term “Hispanic” are more assimilated, conservative, and young while those who that prefer “Latino” tend to be more liberal, older, and radical (Granados, 2000). According to Granados (2000) choosing one term over the other means taking a political, social, and even a generational stand. However, selecting one over the other term depends on personal preference. For this study, the non-gender binary term Latinx is used throughout to indicate any person of Hispanic or Latino descent of any race (U.S. Office of Management & Budget, 1997), while including the non-gender binary community and gender-queer that have been missing in the community narratives.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), 57 million Latinxs were living in the United States in 2015. This constituted approximately 17% of the nation's total population in 2014. By the year 2060, Latinxs are projected to represent 28.6% of the total U.S. population. The largest metropolitan cities with Latinxs can be found in Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and Houston (Pew Research Center, 2016). In regards to Latinx origin, the percentage of Latinx background in the U.S. are as follows: 63% Mexican, 9.5% Puerto Rican, 3.7% Cuban, 3.7% Salvadoran, 3.3% Dominican and 2.4% Guatemalan and almost 2% Colombian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

Historical and current context. The history of the United States provides an overwhelming number of examples of institutionalized racialization of different minority groups at various times. Its genesis as a country has been dominated by the premises of superiority and meritocracy that exonerate responsibility for the hardships suffered by minority communities. MacDonald and Carillo (2008), captures the production of those interactions with the Latinx community as a “pendulum that swings between welcome and rejection from authorities and informal voice of the White Majority” (p. 9). Suro (2006) further explains this paradox: “The true character of the Hispanic (Latinx) people can only become clear if you hold these two ideas in focus at the same time: a population of newcomers and a population with a long history in this country (p. xi).”

The Mexican-American community, also known as Chicanos⁹, had deep connections to the United States, even before the U.S. border crossed over them, leading to the Mexican-American War and its conclusion with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of 1848.

⁹ Chosen identity of some Mexican Americans in the United States. The term Chicano is sometimes used interchangeably with Mexican-American.

(MacDonald & Carrillo, 2008). The Republic of Mexico, with its strategic location and border with the United States has been a site of contestation and an ally, depending on the United States' needs and attitudes at any given time. Most recently, during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, the Republican candidate, Donald Trump, contributed to anti-Mexican rhetoric by portraying immigrants as rapists, drug-dealers, and people with a lot of problems (Moreno, 2016). Furthermore, another comment was made alluding to bilingualism as “un-American” (Delgado-Bernal et al., 2012). These claims are concerning to many Latinxs since the Spanish language binds the pan-ethnic Latinx community with each other and their mother countries (Macdonald and Carrillo, 2008). Language serves as a powerful tool of communication but also a potentially dangerous weapon that has many consequences that permeate from our attitudes and behaviors in day-by-day life. Furthermore, language provides the structure of our economic, political, cultural, and educational life (Jensen, 2005).

Role of education. The link between educational attainment and Latinxs is both salient and complex, especially as Latinxs struggle against injustices and structural inequalities. Those claims couple with current political views and demands to promote perpetual low status, marginalization, and (mis)interpretation of their experiences in the United States. According to Yosso (2006), there are “serious leaks” in the Latinx educational pipeline (p. 4). Education has been referred to as the “great equalizer” (Davila & de Bradley, 2009, p.40), and the consequences of lower rates of attainment usually translates to the inability to compete in the same terms as others classes for educational advantages, and derivatively for the benefits and privileges that accrue from education (Lynch & Baker,

2005). Most members of the Latinx community profoundly value education (Delgado-Gaitan 1991; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009; Early, 2010). Education has even been noted in parents' discussions as one reason for either coming to or staying in the U.S. (Fitts & McClure, 2015). However, many Latinxs do not receive the same benefits as their counterparts.

According to Ray Rist (1973), in reviewing *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*, "Schools are not created to be agents of social change. [Instead] schools serve primarily as selection and certification agencies, whose job is to measure and label people, and only secondarily as socialization agencies, whose job is to change people" (p. 249). This view, while limited by the complexity of educational systems, resonates to some extent with the structural and institutional limitations that affect Latinx degree attainment. It is a call to engage practitioners in exploring in-depth the message that accompanies many Latinx students throughout elementary, middle, high school, and college years that, regardless of what they do, all they are doing is running to catch up (Early, 2010).

Contrarily, Freire (2000) invites us to think about the education process as a political and moral practice in which people are encouraged to advocate and participate and construct their realities critically. He refers to education as a "practice of freedom" (p. 34), of which people's possibilities are explored to expand and deepen their participation in the "emergence of consciousness and critical intervention of reality" (p. 81). In other words, parents become "owner of one's own labor" and active participants in the ongoing process of "becoming"¹⁰ (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.53).

¹⁰ Active process of taking up certain subject positions in an ongoing process - rather than merely "being"- in the world (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.53).

Parents as Cultural Guardians of *La Familia*

Latinx parents, as cultural guardians of *La Familia* (MacDonald & Carrillo, 2008), play a crucial role in all aspects of their children's lives, including education. Parents occupy an intimate space in which the understandings of the same structures also are limited by their existence.

It is through an insider's lens that parents have the opportunity to bring to light the ways in which they are engaged or involved in post-secondary educational spaces. This view moves away from deficit thinking that silences, limits, and incompletes the understanding of Latinx parental involvement in the United States (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Trueba, 2001; Yosso, 2006; Zarate, 2007). Instead, their *pláticas* are used to re-center the Latinx experience to think differently about parental involvement in post-secondary educational spaces without stabilizing categories that “attempt to normalize and regulate people, and accentuates a process of repetition that produces subjectivity” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.72).

Jupp et al., (2017) adds, “U.S.- based testimonios...denounces White supremacy and deficit thinking within the U.S. Whitestream social and educational contexts and firmly pushes back, resists, and reclaims Latinx identity complexities” (p. 6). Disruption becomes an important space of new possibilities.

Parents as community cultural wealth. Community cultural wealth is defined as the “array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts of communities of color utilized to survive and resist the macro and micro-forms of oppression” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). The use of this model has been helpful to the organization of themes that came to light during the review of the literature and will be explored throughout this document. Latinx parents nurture

cultural wealth through at least six forms of capital including Aspirational, Linguistic, Familial, Social, Navigational, and Resistant (Yosso, 2006).

Aspirational. It is through Aspirational Capital that we find determination as well as resiliency as essential themes that emerged from the literature. In an ethnographic study in Carpinteria, a small community in the central California coast, Delgado-Gaitan (2001), provides insights into involvement in the community: “When I began working with the Latinos, I observed their efforts to integrate their Latino identity as Spanish speakers with new cultural identity as immigrants with dreams and hopes for their children” (p. 23). The consensus was that Latinx parents face particular barriers, such as familiarity with the U.S. system of education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001), limited English language (Ceballo, 2004), and not feeling welcome or valued in the schools (Tinkler, 2002; Lefevre & Shaw, 2012; Ceballo, 2004). And yet, Latinx parents and their children show determination “to succeed no matter how high the obstacles” (Blake, 1985, p.21). According to Carreon et al. (2005), “[parents’] optimism, determination, a strong sense of self, and goal-oriented practices serve as powerful counter forces in less than optimal circumstances” (p. 471). On the other hand, a deficit view leaves parents as invisible or silent and is often accompanied by devaluation or condemnation (Lynch & Baker, 2005). Statements such as, “collectively we can learn what we need to help our children” echoed their aspiration to put aside fears, misunderstandings, and other barriers for their sake of their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, p.23).

Linguistic. Linguistic capital plays an integral role in passing culture, social and intellectual skills. According to Delgado (1995), storytelling is built on the legacy of those before us who passed their stories and realities as well as their culture to current times. Those stories were used to “test and challenge reality, to construct a counter-reality, to hearten and support each other, and to probe, mock, displace, jar, or construct the dominant tale or narrative (p. xviii). Through Linguistic capital, Latinx parents pass information to their children through *consejos* or *relatos* (advice or stories) to gain a deeper appreciation of the past, present, and future. Those *consejos* or advice are “*no son una ventana que nos permita asomarnos al pasado y conocer lo que realmente sucedió*” (are not a window in which we peeked to the past to know what really happened) (Ramos, 2003, p. 199); instead, they are “something that has been filtered, processed and already interpreted” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.3).

It is through *consejos* and *relatos* that we can learn about narratives on education in and outside the United States. For example, an ethnographic study with Mexican families of working class in the *Estado de México*, parents narrated their *consejos* about the value of school. Mr. Jesús, one of the participants, stated, “*Yo les digo que estudien, para que el día de mañana no sean unos ignorantes cómo sus padres, para que tengan lo que yo no tuve, si se les antoja algo digan: mi trabajo me lo da, con eso lo compro. Siempre les digo: estudia para que no te pase lo que a mí*” (I tell them [the children] to study so that tomorrow they are not ignorant like their parents, to have everything that I did not have if you want something: to say I can pay for that through my work. I always tell them: Study, so you don't have to go through what happened to me) (Ramos, 2003, p. 208).

Latinx parents also use *cuentos*, *consejos* and *pláticas* to pass on values, commitment, and support to children. In a qualitative study with students from Yale University, Ceballo (2004) explored the interconnection between home or family processes and the academic success of Latinx students. She found that verbal and non-verbal support consistently displayed by parents and related to the unconditional commitment to education (p. 176). Antonio, a 21-year-old Mexican-American student from Texas, portrayed his mother's fervent belief in education as a guiding force in his life. Antonio shares his mother's *consejos* to "just study because if you wanted to succeed, you have to study." Further, he adds, "My main motivation through my years in school was, you know, I kept her in mind...I was going to do this for her, to make her proud of me...I sort of directed all my talents to the memory of my mother" (p. 177-178).

Along with these words of wisdom, non-verbal support was also expressed for their commitment and support for education. Another student, José, expressed the non-verbal commitment of his mother towards his educational endeavors. José stated, "She [mother] would come by and hug me and say, don't worry too hard and go to bed." Or she would say, "Let me do this for you or tell me what you are doing, maybe I can give you some ideas" (p. 180). Anita said of her mother, "School work could be an excuse for almost anything...that is one of the few excuses that she would accept" (p. 181).

While the literature is limited in making the distinction between fathers and mothers, it is noted as one of the limitations on the topic. Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, and Golberg, (1995), in a longitudinal study focusing on children's literacy development from ages five to nine in a predominant Latinx district in Los Angeles, found "father participation distinguishes families of high and low achievement children may relate to an adaptation of

educación (explored in the familial section of the model)--related emphasis on family and family unity” (p. 75). Across their sample of 121 Spanish-speaking Latinx families, “mothers [were] the ones who carry the heaviest domestic, childcare workload, including participating in and assisting the children with learning and school activities” (p. 75). I will explore the cultural tensions on gender roles of being a *mujer de hogar* (woman of the home), and to *valerse por sí misma* (to be self-reliant) as a way of resistance capital.

Familial. The concept of *La Familia* is vital to the understanding of their involvement with school systems. *La Familia* provides the individual a sense of belonging and interdependence, and it also requires loyalty and obligation (Rodríguez-Brown, 2010). Furthermore, this partnership not only includes parents and children but the extended family and their networks (p. 351). Literature supports the critical role that the family has in the education of their children as well as the view of education that differs from a mainstream definition. According to Valdes (1996), for Latinxs, education is not merely about academics; *educación* encompasses the education of the child holistically to include their well-being, manners, and moral values (Valdes, 1996). The difference between education and *educación* is well documented in literature (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Reese et al., 1995; Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009; Valdes, 1996; Zarate, 2007).

The term *educación* appears to derive etymologically from the same place as education; however, their meanings and constructions deviate from each other. A deconstruction of the word education brings to light the destabilization of what we take for granted or to expose the absent present (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). It is through the understanding of the incompleteness that the word signifies; we can engage with the

“tensions and omissions in such a way as to see how the orthodox, received, dominant interpretation has been produced without interrogation” (p. 15).

One multidimensional study by Zarate (2007) consulted parents of middle school and high school students, teachers, counselors, administrators, and coordinators of parental involvement organizations among three metropolitan sites with a large population of Latinxs (30% in the United States): Miami, New York, and Los Angeles. Zarate (2007) reported that “Latinx parents equate involvement in their child's education with involvement in their lives: participation in their children’s lives ensures that their formal schooling is complemented with educación taught in the home” (p. 9). When Latinx parents were asked to define parental involvement, they mentioned the holistic integration of participation engagement into their children’s lives at school, which included a desire to teach good morals, offer encouragement, monitor attendance, give advice, facilitate trust, and provide discipline among others. They spoke of these goals more frequently than academic involvement – activities associated with homework, educational enrichment, and academic performance, such as attending parent-teacher conference, signing homework, visiting classrooms during open houses, and picking up report cards (Zarate, 2007).

The finding that is consistent with a strength-based view that sees parents as funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et.al., 2005) and acknowledges parents as partners or collaborators (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009), co-teachers (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991), *gran maestros* (Villenas & Moreno, 2001) active and valuable key players (Behnke & Kelly, 2011) and a collaborative enterprise (Allen, 2009) where power and responsibility are shared. These designations run contrary to the statutory definition of parental involvement provided by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, which defines parental involvement as “the

participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication involving student academic learning and other school activities” (p. 3).

It is a broader definition of Latinx parental involvement that provides a new interpretation of the holistic view of Latinx parents’ views towards education, where the “division-of-labor-approach” (Zarate, 2007), such as relieving students from working (Ramos, 2003), house chores (Ceballo, 2004), setting firm limits on parental authority (Early, 2010), eliminating distractions to focus on school (Lefvre & Shaw, 2012), and providing tools and materials necessary to be successful at school including a safe environment (Early, 2010) are seen as valid and appropriate ways that portray the parents’ commitment towards education morally and academically.

Social. Extending from the concept of La Familia, from a very early age Latinxs develop deep bonds of loyalty and obligation (Rodríguez-Brown, 2010), commitment, respect, and mutual trust or *confianza* (Fitts & McClure, 2015) to help one another and succeed. This trait is not only portrayed at home but also as a principle that is heavily ingrained in their relationships with others. According to De La Vega (2007), *confianza* is central to working with the Latinx community. It is through social networks that one develops trust with parents. Trust leads to a sense of *confianza*, which allows for better communication between parents and teachers (Rodríguez- Brown, 2010). The literature provides a multitude of examples that exemplify the importance of *confianza*.

During a study of two Latina women’s groups in Northwestern Carolina, Fitts and McClure (2015) found that *confianza* “was a key concept to the understanding of how social capital was developed and utilized by Latina Immigrants” (p. 308). In the study, the

researchers noted that *mujerista*, or spaces specifically for Latina women, are fruitful educational spaces for women, made possible through the exchange and analysis of personal experiences. Also, the groups provide support and guidance concerning education and socialization of children (p. 300). The authors conclude, “The knowledge, agency, and *confianza* that participants developed through their social networks, specifically in the women's groups, supported them in defining their own goals and engaging with public institutions on their own terms” (p. 309).

Delgado-Gaitan (1991) also discusses the role of building coalitions to empower parents' involvement regarding social capital. In her study in Carpinteria, through a “collective critical reflection” (p. 35), parents identified and confronted some beliefs about themselves that preventing them from advocating for their children at school and realized that the knowledge required to participate was acquired in a social context. Through social context, parents were able to discuss their understanding of the U.S. educational systems (Benhke & Kelly, 2011; Ceballo, 2004; Tinkler, 2002), navigating through invisible codes (Carreon et al., 2005), as well as the unspoken expectations of parental involvement (Riojas-Cortez & Flores, 2009). Furthermore, Delgado-Gaitan (2001) asserts there is a crucial role of a “cultural broker” (p. 16), or someone who knows the rough parts of the road, in helping immigrants to facilitate the appropriate knowledge and means that will allow them to become more involved in their new community. This is especially useful for newcomers to adapt to their new environments.

Extending the role of cultural brokers to others areas, such as Latinx student enrollment in advanced placement (AP) courses, Walker and Pearsall (2012) found that “external support through parents, friends, role models, teachers, and colleges were identified

as primary factors that encourage Latino students enrollment in AP coursework” (p. 18). Consistently, other studies, such as Martinez (2003), identified role models as an essential variable. She shared that none of the participants had a particular person whom they considered a model or mentor throughout their K-12 education. It was the collective influence of individuals along the way, such as teachers or mentors, that provided a positive impact on their lives. Simultaneously, it was found that the absence of these types of connections or relationships were a factor that prevented students from accessing relevant information (Martinez, 2003).

Latinx parents exhibit social capital through the strong bonds of *confianza* that are developed with each other, and with the community as a whole, to find their way within the different structures to gain tools, advice, and confidence to empower each other to navigate the system. With this view, we can expand on the traditional definition of the teacher-student relationship to a holistic perspective that sees “students who have many teachers and know them in different contexts” (Allen, 2009). Mata, one of the participants in Carpinteria, summarizes the spirit of this trait from her perspective. She states, “We get to open doors and see possibility of solutions by reaching out and finding our way to those resources that lead us to new opportunities. That means we get to have more and more love within our families and communities” (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, p.54).

Navigational. According to LeCompte and Bennett (1988), parents are not the problem, nor should they be blamed for not participating; instead, the problem is structural. A deficit view blames parents for lacking specific skills or traits which limit their involvement in the school system (Yosso, 2005). However, the different forms of capital,

including navigational capital, demonstrate the resiliency and determination of Latinx parents to navigate complex structures.

In education for instance, the defined constructs of parental involvement differ in terms of behavior, actions and even expectations. Latinxs see *educación* holistically, integrating their children's lives in and outside of school (Zarate, 2007). On the contrary, the definition of parental involvement provided by the No Child Left Behind Act focuses on academic involvement and school activities (NCLB, 2001). Regardless of the obstacles, Latinx parents were able to mobilize efforts to articulate their collective needs (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). Jasis (2013) expands on the sentiment of navigation through these complexities by sharing an observation from Mr. Sotelo, a participant in a parent group. As Sotelo states, "We are much stronger together; now we ask the teachers for information as a group, and it is much harder to ignore us. I think it is also better for the teachers because they see our interest and can explain their ideas to us at once" (p. 121). Mr. Sotelo's example demonstrates that educational endeavors are a collective enterprise (Allen, 2009), very much like the concept of *La Familia* that bounds a mutual sense of responsibility and commitment, crucial ingredients of *confianza*.

Jasis and Ordonez-Jasis (2012), refer to this collective commitment as *Tequio*. This tradition, which is more prevalent in Southeastern states of Mexico, is an "honor-bound, unpaid communal work performed with the sole intent of improving the life and future of the community and future generations" (p. 80). Therefore, being part of *La Familia* implies both an honor and a responsibility to help in a wide variety of ways (Fitts & McClure, 2015). Parents, grandparents, elders, friends and other relatives are part of a common network of active participants in the construction of the self, a construct that is never separate from the

context (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001). The authors add, “Identities resist closure because they are complicated, shifting and assume new and multiple facets in the process of living” (p. 73). Therefore, regardless of the difficulties encountered inside and outside of the educational system, community participants expanded their potential by working together as they maintained their optimism in the midst of challenges, reached out to each other for support, enhanced their perception of their lives as meaningful, and fomented the creation of spaces and sponsorship opportunities to expand their outreach (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001).

This *terquedad* keeps Latinxs hopeful of the future while developing new identities to cope with the daily struggles for equity as genuine Latinxs, regardless of their ethnic identity, and genuine Americans who are competent and equal players in the American political, economic, and educational systems (Trueba, 2001). According to O'Brien and Arce (2009), CNN correspondent and author of *Latinos in America*, “Latino” is an American identity that begins when we set foot on U.S. soil. United by their experiences in the U.S., Latinxs are people who celebrate the new culture they created in the United States while struggling each day with whether there is a need to assimilate or integrate into this new society (O'Brien & Arce, 2009). Navigational Capital reveals that, while there are perceived and real barriers to educational attainment, navigating through the “Latino experience” as referred by O'Brien and Arce is not linear, nor directional; instead, it is ever-changing, evolving, and renewing.

Resistance. Resistance Capital becomes an essential piece in the process of becoming. The transformative process of resistance allows the separation of Latinx parents from the world which they objectify. According to Freire (2000), “Each individual wins back the right to his or her own word to name the world” (p. 33). Throughout each tenet presented

earlier, we can appreciate the Latinx experience moving away from deficit views that limit the understanding of the complexities of being Latinx and a parent in the United States while embracing strengths that may be cultivated for higher rates of academic success.

Villenas and Moreno (2001) explore the evocation of patriarchal ideologies about being *mujer de hogar* (woman of the home) while navigating the discourses about knowing to how to *valerse por sí misma* (be self-reliant). Their accounts provide testimonies about the tensions and contractions of Latina mother-daughter pedagogies in central rural North Carolina. This lens can capture, “Latina mothers [being] victims and victimizers, colonized and colonizers vis-a-vis their daughters and daughters-in-law; relentlessly reifying patriarchy on the one hand - *tienes que ser mujer del hogar* (you have to be a woman of home) and on the contrary, teaching *amor propio* (self-love)” (p. 675). One example of this juxtaposition is the case of Marisela, a Mayan refugee from Guatemala. Her mother encouraged her formal schooling and activism by taking up the economic and housework burden of sustaining *el hogar*. Marisela was reminded of the traditional roles of Latinas when her mother wanted Marisela to do some housework instead of schoolwork: “*De esa edad yo no te ponía a trabajar, acuérdate que cuando estudiastes no me lavabas ni los trastes, yo te perdonaba, hacía el oficio contal de que estudiaras*” (At that age, I didn't get you out to work, remember that when you studied, you didn't even wash the dishes for me, I would forgive you [the work], I would do the housework so that you could study) (p. 684). It is through such reminders that parents place great emphasis on strict discipline and completion of homework and respect of attributes such as leadership and self-initiative (Carreon et al., 2005).

Latinx Parents as Agents of Social Justice

Throughout, I have reviewed literature that demonstrates different ways parents participate and engage in educational practices with the objective to motivate, assist, communicate, and navigate through the institutional structures with their children's success as the primary beneficiaries in their journey of educational attainment. Undoubtedly, a journey that can be complex for anyone, but render communities of color most vulnerable as they navigate through the complex definitions, invisible codes, expectations, and barriers which have far-reaching implications in their collective experience towards educational attainment.

Delgado-Gaitan (2001) reminds us that the construction of the self is never separate from context. With this idea, context allows us to recognize the racialization of Latinxs and the purposes that racism serves at particular times. MacDonald and Carrillo (2008) referred to the interaction of Latinxs in the United States as a "pendulum that swings between welcome and rejection" (p. 9). Furthermore, we are invited to recognize the juncture of Latinxs as "a population of newcomers and a population with a long history in this country" (Suro, 2006, p.xi). The strength of the pan-ethnic group referred to as Latinxs comes from the rich diversity of races, cultures, languages, origins, and traditions that collectively form new identities that are crucial to the understanding of their experiences in the United States.

Yosso (2006) provides a helpful framework found in the literature that capitalizes on the strengths displayed and utilized by Latinxs to survive and resist macro and micro forms of oppression. Through Aspirational Capital, Yosso concludes that the sentiment of optimism and hope is crucial to put aside fears and misunderstandings for the sake of their children. We find, through the use Linguistic Capital, the importance of appropriate cultural traditions

such a verbal and nonverbal communication ways to express absolute commitment and support towards education. The essential concept of *La Familia* is highlighted in Familial Capital. It is through Familial Capital that we appreciate the holistic approach to education that extends beyond academic-related matters, to the development of a well-rounded person. Through Social Capital, the concept of *confianza* becomes crucial to the understanding of the commitment, not only to themselves but to the well-being of the community as a whole, where the overarching concept is the understanding of the use of relationships and connections as an arena for teaching and learning to occur. Expanding on the idea of *La Familia* with Navigational Capital allows the understanding of *terquedad*, where new identities are formed to navigate the system while being genuine Latinxs, regardless of their ethnic identity, and genuine Americans (Trueba, 2001).

Literature Shortcomings and Implications

Parental involvement is a particular concern since research has provided evidence that there is a link between parent involvement and academic achievement. However, this comes with disparities of definitions, concepts, values, and variables that make it challenging to provide a holistic view of *educación* that is more appropriate in the discussion of the contributions of Latinx parents. Noticeable in the literature is the focus on a deficit view of what parents lack, instead of discussing education regarding the cultural strengths that parents already have or strengths that can be cultivated. Through a deficit view, parents are unconnected, uninvolved, and unknowledgeable. For example, my parents never had the opportunity to be included in the conversations about my college career. The system was not

created for them; nevertheless, they were involved in every single aspect of my *educación*. However, institutions have an opportunity to look into their policies and practices to examine their definitions and values of parent involvement and align these to serve their students better. Parents in a strength-based model are seen as funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) who may be valuable, vital players to the relationships with institutions (Behnke & Kelly, 2011). Starting this process requires honest dialogue and conversations with parents in spaces of *confianza* that can mutually benefit the parents as well as the other key partners.

The literature on Latinx parental involvement also is limited in addressing race questions because, as a pan-ethnic group, Latinxs come from many races, origins, and traditions. Encapsulating these unique characteristics into one category provides an incomplete understanding of their experiences. The research found Latinx parental involvement is primarily dedicated to the largest Latinx group, labeled Mexican, Mexican-American or Chicana/o, and experiences focused on urban areas predominantly in the Southwestern states. However, the Latinx diaspora extends from these traditional locations to other hubs, with concentration in cities like Miami, New York and Los Angeles constituting about 30% of the Latinx population in the United States (Zarate, 2007). Additionally, there is a need to extend the analysis to rural communities, primarily in the New Latino South (Fitts & McClure, 2015), which usually has limitations of resources in schools and other institutions. This gap in the representation of experiences of other Latinx groups can present itself to new studies that encapsulate the Latinx experience in the United States, and there is room for specific studies that bring forward the voices of other Latinxs. This includes understanding the complexity of identity based on race as well as realizing the role of native

and foreign-born Latinx and the unique opportunities and challenges presented as they remain longer in the United States.

In my case, I relate to many aspects of the shared Latinx experience. However, there were more intersects, and an incompleteness that did not provide a platform to understand in my being a foreign-born, White, Colombian-American in Western North Carolina.

Finally, an apparent limitation in the literature is the distinction of parental involvement concerning the protagonists of participation as mothers and fathers. One speculation could be cultural *machismo* that permeates Latinx American traditions. Most research alludes to the mother figure in activities related to the relationship with schools. It is noted in the literature that for Latinxs, *La Familia* extends to a communal definition including parents, children, extended family and networks (Rodríguez-Brown, 2010). However, it would be essential to a better overall understanding to discuss the implications of gender roles that traditionally have existed in Latinx communities and contribute to the cultural conflict of being a *mujer de hogar* (woman of the home), and knowing to how to *valerse por sí misma* (to be self-reliant) (Villenas & Moreno, 2001), concepts that permeate all aspects of the day-to-day activities and attitudes, including educational endeavors.

Chapter 4: Research Design and Methods

The presentation of truth in new forms provokes resistance, confounding those committed to accepted measures for determining the quality and validity of statements made and conclusions reached, and making it difficult for them to respond and adjudge what is acceptable (Bell, 2008, p.143).

This chapter reports on the research design and methods used while conducting this project, including research questions, CRT/LatCrit methodology, including limitations as well as the ethical issues encountered throughout the study.

This project was selected with the purpose to provide a critical space via *pláticas* to think with Latinx parents about their involvement in post-secondary educational spaces while supporting their children's attainment of a baccalaureate degree within the region of Western North Carolina. As the literature identified, there are a formidable set of talents, strengths, skills and knowledge, or cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006) that parents employ to foster success. However, this view is often overshadowed by a deficit-view that permeates in educational research. This project builds upon the cultural wealth of Latinxs parents and advocates for opening up collaborative spaces that may inform practice and laws in an unwavering commitment to moving the needle forward in educational attainment. The following research questions guide the purpose of my study:

- How do Latinx parents leverage cultural wealth in their involvement in postsecondary educational spaces?
- How does Latinx parents' involvement diverge from dominant discourse regarding educational attainment?

- How can this study help to move the needle forward in educational attainment?

Theoretical Connection to Research Design & Method

Critical Race Theory and LatCrit “put lights around” (Santana & Bratt, 2017) race, and argue that racism has been normalized and entrenched in the everydayness of most people of color in the United States (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). Further, Marable (1992) asserts that people of color, including Latinxs, have been oppressed, ignored, exploited “on the basis of their ethnicity, culture, mannerism, and color” (p. 5). Rather than isolated incidents, racism is at the very core of institutions that made those conditions possible. In the words of Parker Palmer (2007), “[institutions] are neither other than us nor alien to us: institutions are us” (p. 9). One may wonder, if institutions are us, then who decides what counts as knowledge? Moreover, whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is discounted? (Delgado-Bernal, 2002; Yosso, 2005)

CRT/LatCrit offers an insightful sensitivity and awareness that invites a critical consideration to those questions. The following guiding tenets assist in connecting educational inquiry to the research design and methods employed in this project: Race as socially constructed to justify superiority and dominance, the lived experiences of people of color are crucial to the understanding of their experiences in a racialized society, and CRT/LatCrit utmost commitment to Social Justice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

First, CRT/LatCrit challenges dominant ideology that has been used to justify superiority and dominance. Jensen (2005) suggests that the genesis of the United States as a country is founded under the inherent superiority of White Europeans over non-Whites.

Therefore, CRT/LatCrit challenges conventional¹¹ approaches and methodologies that subverts the experience of Latinxs in the United States. CRT/LatCrit theories argue that color-blindness and meritocratic principles act to camouflage responsibility for hardships to the community of color and serve to fuel self-interest and privilege of dominant groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Lopez, 2003). This mentality has fueled a distorted image of inferiority, deficit thinking, and cultural deprivation that discounts the wealth that communities of color bring to different spaces including education (Valencia & Solorzano, 1997).

Secondly, CRT/LatCrit claims an essential space for those who have been discounted and argues that utilizing their unique voice of color, or the knowledge of those that have been marginalized, is critical to the understanding of their experiences in a racialized society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). This fundamental tenet of CRT/LatCrit includes the rich legacy and traditions of the cultural-linguistic wealth (Yosso, 2006) exhibited by communities of color to bridge gaps in imagination and conception (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), construct a counter-reality (Delgado, 1995), and build coalitions (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991) to promote social justice and change. This project re-centers parents as an essential fund of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) and recognizes the reciprocity of respect and mutual *confianza* (Fitts & McClure, 2015) that is pivotal to working with Latinx families (De La Vega, 2007). Through this study, I engaged in a “space of liberation” (Freire, 2000, p. 103), using *pláticas*, explained later in this chapter, as a critical space where “knowledge can be shared, constructed, and theorized” (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016).

¹¹ Methodologies and approaches such as positivism argue for value-free and objective social research (Esterberg, 2002). Simultaneously, this project will refer to conventional qualitative methodology referring to the need to avoid fixed meaning and simplification to produce something new (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012).

The final tenet to connect scholarly inquiry to the research design and method employed in this project is the CRT/LatCrit commitment towards transformative advancements that lead to social justice and change. Guba and Lincoln (1994) remind us that the purpose of CRT/LatCrit is both to critique and transform the structures that “constrain and exploit humankind” (p. 113). Similarly, thinking about who decides what counts as knowledge, and whose knowledge counts and whose knowledge is discounted, I deliberately acknowledge and trouble my positionality and how my experiences limit, shape, and contribute to what is being produced. Moreover, the participants as co-constructors provide us with a multiplicity of experiences that disrupts notions of parental engagement and education. In other words, our stories are “intertwined, interwoven into who we are and are becoming” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 22). In the following section, *pláticas* are described as a space of liberation.

Pláticas as a space of liberation. Paulo Freire (2000), reminds us that freedom comes from the participatory process of creating our own realities. He adds, “Thinking occurs only in and among people seeking reality. I cannot think for others or without others, nor can others think for me” (p.108). Furthermore, Gloria Anzaldúa (1990), pleads for new theories. In her words, “*Necesitamos teorías* [We need theories] that will rewrite history using race, class, gender, and ethnicity as categories of analysis, theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods” (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv). This project intersects with both calls from Freire and Anzaldúa to be attentive to the participatory process of theory production, and to resist closure of the complex Latinx identity.

The use of *pláticas* was best suited to illuminate new ways of social transformation because of its cultural appropriateness in working with Latinx communities (Valle & Mendoza, 1978). It allows for the participatory engagement of the researcher and participants, as well as for the potential that could be incited in this critical space. According to Gonzalez (1998), *pláticas* are “informal conversations that take place in one-on-one or group spaces, and are a “way to gather family and cultural knowledge through communication of thoughts, memories, ambiguities, and new interpretations” (p. 647). These conversations or dialogues capitalize on the linguistic wealth exhibited by Latinxs, explained in detail in chapter two. Perhaps more importantly, it also provides a shared framework of meaning.

Pláticas have a deep connection with Latinx methodology. A strength of CRT/LatCrit is the recognition of the many perspectives and approaches to thinking (Somekh & Lewin, 2011). Chicana/Latina scholars (Anzaldúa, 1987; Pérez, 1993; Saldivar-Hull, 1993; Sandoval, 1998) disrupt the assumptions that scholarship needs to be neutral or bias, and instead evoke critique and resistance to domination and power (Bernal & Elenes, 2010). To this end, I draw from principles of Chicana/Latina Scholarship to *pláticas*, the contributions of CRT/LatCrit and thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) to situate my positionality as a unique voice of color as the researcher (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). I also recognize the participants of the project as co-constructors of knowledge (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016) and use the analysis of this project to think with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) about newness that may be incited within a critical space which supports “critical reflection, healing, and collective memory” (Huber & Cueva, 2012).

My unique voice of color. In chapter one, I shared my story with the reader to show my positionality and the many “impossible no” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) spaces in which I both work-with and work-against and in-between, a position that provides clarity and complexity of insight. I have served as both a community outreach worker at a local organization serving Latinx, and I have worked as an administrator/manager of post-secondary education programs for more than a decade to promote outreach and access to baccalaureate completion programs. In these roles, I have had the privilege to work with students and families to provide information and resources to plan pathways to make higher education a reality. I have also been on the other side, as a newcomer migrant child, a son, and as a student who has benefited from and because of the educational opportunities that I have been afforded. This unique space alleviates some of the difficulties to gain insider access (Esterberg, 2002) into the lives of the people of the study. Instead, the privilege of presence that this space provides allows us to submerge in a context that honors standard practices and settings of Latinx parents. This project engages with the participants in a way that honors their lived experiences including honoring the native language and/or preferred language of communication of the participants, maintaining a cultural sensibility to norms and customs both foreign and in the United States, as well as having an acute self-awareness of my personal and professional experiences, which presents a unique opportunity through our *pláticas* to learn from and learn with the participants.

Participants as co-constructors of knowledge. The use of *pláticas* involves a participatory and dynamic engagement between the participants and the researcher. This collaborative process builds upon the everydayness of spoken discourses already familiar to Latinx communities. *Pláticas* are representative of actual conversations or discussions that encompass aspects of the day-to-day life as well as shared experiences that connect us to the collective experiences while also acknowledging a multiplicity of realities and vulnerabilities (Burciaga & Tavares, 2006, p. 805). Under this collaborative enterprise, the participants are viewed as crucial contributors and co-constructors of the meaning-making process (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016), themselves unveiling and reclaiming new ways to think about new experiences and understandings of Latinx parental involvement.

Tara Yosso (2006) reminds us to build upon the cultural wealth exhibited by communities of color through social, familial, and linguistic capital – explained in the literature review of this project – and about the deep bonds of commitment and reciprocity ingrained in the relationships and social interactions with others. Yosso adds, “We are not alone in our struggles. We develop social spaces rich in resources” (p. 45). Yosso expands on the importance of creating social spaces to share information along with the ability to help each other navigate complex systems. *Pláticas* provide such a space to situate both the researcher and the participant in a reciprocal relationship where genuine connections are made (Delgado-Bernal, Burciaga, Carmona, 2012). While developing these authentic connections, De La Vega (2007), shares that *confianza*, or trust, is of utmost importance while working with Latinx communities. Fitts and McClure (2015) add *confianza* is a key concept in understanding how capital is developed and utilized as a fruitful space to exchange and analyze personal experiences. The authors add that this liberating space is

promoted by “reciprocity, confidence, trust and respect,” (p. 308) concepts that are deeply ingrained in *confianza*.

Nurturing *confianza* through *pláticas*. Over the years, as a community member and as a university-level administrator and manager, I have come across many students, parents, and families that want to talk, or *platicar*, about higher education. Usually, our conversations revolve around the most pressing issues of post-secondary education such as access, affordability, and financial aid. However, most of the times our *pláticas* take us to unknown and essential places that intersect with other important issues such as adulthood, gender and sexuality, academics, race and ethnicity, and language, just to name a few. I have often asked myself, how did we end up *platicando*¹² about this or that? However, the spontaneity occurs when mutual respect, confidence, and *confianza* are at the forefront and presents an opportunistic space to think-with and think-about our worlds, daily lives, and struggles. According to Bracero (1998), as he discusses therapeutic relationships with Latinx clients, *confianza* is the “quality of optimal relatedness” (p.271) in which all social relationships are developed. Therefore, *confianza* is not something that one can possess. Instead, *confianza* is an ongoing process of relationship development that the author calls the “Latinx form of mutuality”.

Pláticas take many forms and occur everywhere. Many start at kitchen-tables and extend to *pláticas* at work with colleagues or at home with family. Most recently, I had a *plática* with my dissertation advisor about a controversial article we saw on social media about cultural appropriation and stereotypes. *Pláticas* allow spontaneity and reciprocity to coexist (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2008), ingredients that are necessary for teaching/learning to

¹² Present progressive of *Plática*.

occur organically within this very space. In other words, *pláticas* nurture *confianza*, and this space always proves to be a fruitful and productive space for learning. Fierro and Delgado-Bernal (2016) remind us that, regardless of the who, where, and about of *pláticas*, “something is always learned” (p, 98). Along with these personal experiences, *pláticas* have also been utilized in education.

Employing *Pláticas* in Education

Pláticas have been employed in many contexts including the field of education. Godinez (2006) engages in *pláticas* to gain insight into the issues of Chicana/Mexican youth in K-12 schools. She refers to the young Chicana active thinkers as *Pensadoras* (p. 2) to bring to light the complexity of grand narratives and ideologies that intersect and braid with theories, identities, and practices, or as the author calls it, *Trenzas y Mestizaje*,¹³ for new understandings theorized as *haciendo que hacer*.¹⁴ Godinez concludes that this arrangement offers new ways to think about “tasks, the developments of the mind, intelligence, advanced placement, and leadership” (p. 33).

Similarly, Francisca Gonzalez (1998) employs *pláticas* and *encuentros* (group *pláticas*) to gain insight into the issues of Mexicana first and second-year high school students and to look at how the identities of Mexicanas were created, shaped and developed. Gonzalez situates her research in a multi-methodological approach which incorporated Critical Race Theory, *Trenzas*, intuition, the researcher, and the participants into a complex multi-identity formation. The author uses information from the *pláticas* and *encuentros* as

¹³ The braiding of theory, qualitative research strategies, and sociopolitical consciousness for interacting with and gathering knowledge (Gonzalez, 2001, p. 643).

¹⁴ “Daily and ongoing cultural practices are what the young Mexicanas called *haciendo que hacer*”. The author also refers to a theory that emerged from the flesh (Gonzalez, 2001, p. 643).

the “actual data” (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016, p, 98). Gonzalez (1998) explains, “From our *pláticas*, young Mexicanas asserted agency to create subversive narratives to challenge the representations that render Mexicanas as vulnerable and dismissed from U.S. civic life and public education” (p. 96). She is not alone in these pursuits.

Espino, Muñoz, and Kiyama (2010) use *pláticas* to theorize about their experiences as doctoral students and examine their lived experiences, successes, and challenges in academia. Their *pláticas* allowed them to weave theory and methods to disrupt scholarship that simplified the complexities, experiences, and lives of doctoral students. *Pláticas* were used to form bonds and a collective experience as a “sisterhood pedagogy” (p. 805) that offers a testimony to both support and critique assumptions regarding doctoral students. Through their *pláticas*, the scholars are able to “unpack multiple identities by contesting, redefining, and forming strands of identity in different locations and spaces” (p. 813). Moreover, *pláticas* allowed them to think about creating intentional spaces to support and embrace students’ complex identities.

Juan Carlos Gonzalez and Edwardo Portillos (2012), professors in the Department of Educational Research and Administration at California State University at Fresno and the Department of Sociology at University of Colorado-Colorado Springs respectively, interweave *pláticas* to think about their understanding, practice, and the advancement of Chicana/o pedagogy. They use *pláticas* to “unbury and advance Chicana/o intellectual knowledge on theory and methods, cultural knowledge, civic participation, and the effects of the schooling process” (p. 19).

Through their *pláticas*, they were able to think with each other and think about their journeys into professorship including their assumptions, concerns, and attitudes in

predominantly White institutions. Additionally, they emphasized the importance of reflection and the troubling areas of expertise and gaps. Gonzalez and Portillos (2012) add, “Conflict is a natural part of learning because it is at the crossroads of contradiction where knowledge building begins” (p. 23). Concluding, the authors invite faculty of color and other Chicanas/os to carve spaces for *pláticas* including all voices, while at the same time asserting the Chicana/o experience to be present in the conversations, particularly on issues of “race, racism, class, classism, justice, and equity” (p. 31). CRT/LatCrit, as a lens in which this project is grounded, calls upon honoring the lived experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) of neglected voices, including our own, not with the intention of essentializing experiences, but to attend and demand new possibilities. *Pláticas* present such opportunity.

The details of how to employ such *pláticas* in my research is presented next, as I will provide a summary of data collection procedures that include the selection of participants, the collection of *pláticas*, confidentiality and informed consent.

Data Collection Procedures

Selecting participants. This project was developed with the purpose to provide a critical space via *pláticas* to think with Latinx parents about their involvement in post-secondary educational spaces while supporting their children’s attainment of a baccalaureate degree within the region of Western North Carolina. Secondly, I present this study to disrupt deficit thinking that permeates educational research and overshadows the formidable cultural wealth that parents employ to foster success. Finally, I advocate for collaborative spaces that may inform practice and laws in an unwavering commitment to moving the needle forward in educational attainment. In this quest, I use a convenient and purposeful sampling (Somek &

Lewin, 2011) of Latinx student participants and parents across the region of Western North Carolina. In particular, two families were identified.

Table 1

Identifier	Graduation from Public vs. Private	Major	Country
Family 1 Valerie Pérez: Student-Participant Sofia Pérez: Mother Luis Pérez: Father	Private	Business	Mexico
Family 2 Ana Rodríguez: Student-Participant Victoria Rodríguez: Mother José Rodríguez (Pepe): Father	Public	Education	Caribbean

Table 1

The student-participants criterion was to be of Latinx/Hispanic ancestry or origin, to have graduated from a post-secondary institution, private or public, with a baccalaureate degree obtained in the Western region of North Carolina, to be geographically located within the region of Western North Carolina, and finally, to have the support and willingness of parents to participate in the study.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), the percentage of the population in North Carolina aged 18 years old and above with at least a bachelor degree is less than 29 percent. For Latinxs, the rates are even more concerning: less than 14 percent. Latinxs in North Carolina remain among the lowest group in educational attainment compared to the major ethnic groups. By focusing on parents that have children who have graduated with a baccalaureate degree, I can provide a threshold of success such as completion of a degree. As the researcher, I intentionally chose not to include community college graduates currently enrolled in the baccalaureate program. While parents from this group could also provide rich experiences, there is no guarantee that they would complete a baccalaureate degree.

Throughout my journey as a member of the community and university-level administrator/manager, I have encountered individuals who have provided me with insights that have been very helpful in my understanding of Latinx parental involvement. While I did not know all of the participants directly, paths either with the student or/and the parent have crossed at one time or another prior to the study. Before selecting the participants, I expected to quickly find and identify a diverse group of parents and experiences; however, the task required much persistence to find participants who met all the requirements and stipulations outlined in the study (Appendix D). One, I was not able to identify as many students both with Latinx/Hispanic ancestry and had attained a minimum of a bachelor degree. Secondly, from the small sample that I had available, the majority was of Mexican origin, which is representative of the population of the United States and in North Carolina, where 57% of the Latinx population are from Mexican origin or ancestry (Carolina Population Center, 2017). Other creative combinations that remained faithful to the criteria were also kept in mind, so I eliminated individuals who live in Western North Carolina but were completing degrees

online (outside of the boundaries of the region) as well as individuals who live in Western North Carolina but completed degrees abroad (outside of the United States). For the intention of the study, I narrowed participants down to the Rodríguez and the Pérez families to concentrate on the depth of our conversations, which included *pláticas* with both the students and parents.

Data collection. Earlier in this section, I discussed in detail the use of *pláticas* and provided examples of how they have been employed in educational research. *Pláticas* are representative of actual conversations that take in place in one-on-one or groups (Gonzalez, 1998). For this collaborative effort, I intentionally selected to use *pláticas* as a conversation or dialogue intervention (Reinharz, 1992) and employed open-ended questions to think with the participants and think about the topic of this study. This strategy aligns with *plática* as a methodology as explained earlier, capitalizing on the strengths of the lived experience of the parents, blurring the boundaries between the researcher and the participant, while promoting a space of *confianza* to convey the “open-endedness” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 229) of this arrangement.

During the spring semester of 2019, I contacted the student participants via social media to share the progress of the project and asked for their willingness to have a *plática* with me about education. I shared the participation criteria with them (See Appendix D), and after a few interactions via emails and text messages, we finally agreed on a convenient day, time, and location to meet.

Ana assisted me in arranging a day and time to see her family. With Valerie’s family, since her parents are divorced, I found most appropriate to contact them individually via social media. Without hesitation both parents and the student-participants demonstrated great

interest in the project and verbally provided their support. Each *plática* took about one hour and was completed in the language of preference of the co-participant, which for the parents was Spanish and for the student-participant English, and some parts switching between Spanish and English. First, I individually met with each member of the Pérez family at different days and times, and with the Rodríguez family I met individually with each member the same day. Our *pláticas* embraced the everydayness of the participant's lives, including: a *plática* at my own home, a *plática* in a coffee shop, a *plática* inside a community organization, *pláticas* at the participant's kitchen table, and even a *plática* inside the kitchen while the participant cooked dinner.

Confidentiality and informed consent. Every step of the study was conducted to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. This project required clearance from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) from Appalachian State University and exempt status was granted since the research project involved commonly accepted educational settings for research involving minimal risk to the participants. (See Appendix A.)

Parents and the student participants were provided with a consent form to participate in the study. The consent form was translated to Spanish and English and stated the purpose of the study, minimal risks, as well as indications of how confidentiality will be maintained by using pseudonyms and changing direct or indirect identifiers that could be linked to the participants. Further, *pláticas* were recorded and transcribed in order to provide rich and thick descriptions (Esterberg, 2002). After the recordings were transcribed, the recordings were permanently deleted from my personal computer, and the transcripts were protected using secure password. Importantly, the consent to participate provided information about the voluntary nature of this participation. The participants had the right to participate or not, to

leave at any moment, and the right to not respond during our *plática*. A copy of the Consent to Participate is available in Appendices B and C.

Trustworthiness. In the pursuit of a trustworthy study, I relied on Guba's (1981) criteria for assessing trustworthiness in qualitative research projects using such elements as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Shento, 2004). To establish credibility, *pláticas* were recorded and transcribed in order to ensure proper capturing of articulations from both the participant and the researcher. Additionally, the participants had the opportunity to review the information as well as the opportunity to provide feedback.

Concerning transferability, this project does not intend to offer causal-effect of a phenomenon or to be used for conventional generalizability. Instead, the study intends to document the process defined in this particular arrangement and within its own set of parameters. Again, in that effort, rich and "thick descriptions" (Shento, 2004, p. 70) and extensive quotations in both Spanish and English were utilized to make an explicit and robust connection to the cultural and social context of the data. Further, as the researcher, I confronted my own privileges and deliberately acknowledged that my experiences limit and shape this study. Simultaneously, I actively participated in the arrangement of this study which created the conditions that made it possible.

To address dependability and confirmability, Shento (2004) adds the importance "to report in detail" the processes within the study (p. 71). To accomplish this, I used a reflexive/research journal, and video journal recordings of my own experience as a way to reflect, document, and tentatively think-with and think about the data (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). As discussed earlier, I also embraced a key ingredient of *pláticas*, which is trust, referred to in this project as *confianza*. This key principle relies on cultivating a relationship

that is bound by reciprocity, vulnerability, and researcher reflexivity. Fierros and Delgado (2016) explain, “The space we create with *pláticas* requires that we, too, be open to sharing our own stories and be vulnerable as we are asking of contributors” (p. 115). This study strived to provide such a collaborative space. Now that their roles and protections in this study have been established, let me introduce you to the Rodríguez and the Pérez families.

Meeting *las Familias* Rodríguez and Pérez

Familia Rodríguez

Ana Rodríguez. Ana fills the room with her charm and a great smile that makes you immediately notice her. She is assertive, knowledgeable, and always on a mission. Ana was born in the Caribbean region of the Americas and brought to the United States as a young child. She stated that the reason for coming to the U.S. was for a better life for her and her sibling. Ana and her older sister, Andrea, completed most of their formal schooling in the United States. Both Ana and Andrea attained a bachelor’s degree in the region of Western North Carolina.

Ana attributes her success to her parents for planting the seeds for education, and she recognizes that her parents’ involvement looked very different than that her classmates. Ana stated, “When even helping with a project, I never had that help from my parents. When I had my other classmates that parents, like, helped them pretty much do their projects, you know, and I think that helped me positively because that was more independent.” Ana also recognizes part of her success to her older sister Andrea for opening the pathway to college. Both Ana and her sister have continued their educational paths by earning a master’s degree.

José Rodríguez. José, also known as Pepe, is Ana's father. Pepe is charming, hospitable, a master of all trades and fixer of all things, with much love for the land and a desire to be part of it. Pepe is a self-proclaimed "redneck" and claims, "*Mi vida no ha sido fácil, pero no cambiaria nada*" (My life has not been easy, but I would not change anything about it). Pepe is practical on his parenting advice to give "*darles la libertad para que sepan a defenderse en la vida*" (freedom for them to know how to defend themselves in life physically and otherwise). Pepe shares that "*la educación comienza desde la cuna*" (education starts from the cradle), and "*la responsabilidad de la [educación] es tanto de los padres que complementan el trabajo de los maestros*" (the responsibility of [education] is both the work of the parents who complement the teachers).

Victoria Rodríguez. Victoria is Ana's mother. Victoria is energetic, charming, and a strong matriarchal figure. In the few hours I spent in the Rodríguez's home, Victoria cleaned, moved things outside, cooked an entire meal for her family, and added me as a guest. Victoria embodies the role of being a mother, and a working *mujer de la casa* (housewife) while advocating, "*Dejar los prejuicios al lado y apoyar a los hijos que hagan lo que quieran ser*" (Leave prejudices aside and support children who do what they want to be). Further, Victoria sees the socio-economic aspect of education as a mean to "*hacer más dinero*" (make more money) and "*tener más independencia*" (be more independent) while indicating the importance of "*la honradez y la humildad*" (honesty and humility).

Familia Pérez

Valerie Pérez. Valerie is the youngest daughter of the Pérez' family. Valerie comes across as educated, well-dressed, confident, and eager to help. Valerie loves learning,

studying, and traveling. She was born in Western North Carolina and is extremely proud of her Mexican heritage. However, she recognizes that she is different because she is Brown. Despite her success in every aspect of her life, Valerie deals with a constant battle with racism in her personal and professional life. She states, “I have always been scared because, I’m like, I’m Brown, Mexican girl, young. Like, they are not gonna want me to do business with me.” She laments, “It is so sad. I love where I was born. I grew up here. It is sad to see racism here, so sad.” Valerie attributes much of her success to her own determination and drive to succeed, however, she recognizes the important role of her parents in both her and her sister’s degree attainment. She says, “They’ve worked very, very hard to get us where we’re at. To have a home and cars and clothes and food. And, you know, we got to make them proud for all their hard work.”

Luis Pérez. Luis is Valerie’s father. Luis was born in rural Mexico and has been in Western North Carolina for more than 25 years. Luis was very well dressed, thoughtful, and eager to get started. Luis shared his observations about the differences between living in rural Mexico versus residing in rural Western North Carolina. He pointed out that there is not a specific path for being a parent, but a set of strategies that can be learned. Luis stated, “*Vengo de una cultura de mucha ignorancia de mis padres, no me mandaban a la escuela*” (I come from a culture of much [educational] ignorance of my parents, they did not send me to school). He acknowledges that while he did not have the opportunity to go to school, he values education to the point of making it a priority in his family. Luis adds, “*Lo que ves en el espejo, es tu reflejo*” (what you see on the mirror is your reflection). This father believes in positive reinforcement, being a good example, having high expectations for your children, “*darles seguridad y apoyo*” (give them security and support), and “*ser fuerte en ciertas cosas*

y en otras acceder” (be strong in certain things, but also in other ones being lenient), and most importantly “*darles confianza*” (give them trust).

Sofia Pérez. Sofia is Valerie’s mother. Sofia embodies a calm energy. She is approachable, with a down-to-earth confidence which transmits a motherly affection and love. Sofia speaks of the challenges of growing up in rural Mexico and also being a divorced parent while “*estar pendiente*” (keeping an eye) in their children. She advocates for parents to “*educarnos nosotros primero*” (educate ourselves first). For Sofia, this was done through reading and finding information for different people and sources. Sofia claimed, “*Es bonito saber y platicar*” (Is nice to know and to be able to have conversation about things). She utilized the space created in the *plática* to think about her life and her accomplishments, and challenges, as a parent. Furthermore, she explains that she had no doubt her children had the capacity to complete a degree, but financially, “*la vimos difícil*” (we saw it as difficult). Sofia stated her primary motivation: “*no quería que fueran igual que nosotros*” (did not want them to be like us). As she explained, “*No las quiero ver trabajar en una factoría, con mal salario, y que te hagan mala cara*” (I don’t want to see them working in a factory, with low pay and people looking down on them).

Chapter 5: Funds of Knowledge and Thinking *with* Critical Race Theory/LatCrit

Theory, then, is a set of knowledges. Some of these knowledges have been kept from us - entry into some professions and academia denied us. Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital that we occupy a theorizing space, that we not allow White men and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv).

Race and ethnicity continue to be determinants of outcomes and dictates the experiences and opportunities for most communities of color in the United States.

Unfortunately, most times, with adverse consequences, that fuels an image that justifies control and privilege. In the case of this project, Latinx parents and families seen in educational spaces as invisible, and not involved. This view is hard to address because it is often unchallenged and embraced by those that are privileged already in society. Thus, this study provided a space via *pláticas* to think with parents, families, and theory about ways to leverage the formidable cultural wealth that parents and families bring to educational spaces and the overall educational enterprise. The ultimate implication of this project is to move the needle forward in educational attainment.

At the juncture of having too much data and no data at all, coupled with the overwhelming number of possibilities, I purposefully present the data representations and interpretations as vital funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) that claimed their own space before a theoretical CRT/LatCrit analysis, to present to the reader the complicated situation of separating lived experiences/theory. As both the co-participants and I embraced the *pláticas*, there were a multitude of concepts that shined through that made it impossible to separate research from human relations, in fact, we were embodying and complicating our methods, theories and analysis. Several concepts emerged to me, such as racialization,

pedagogies of the home¹⁵, individual and institutionalized responsibility, and oppression. However, I hope that different things will shine or glow for you, the reader, as you see the *pláticas* through your own filters of experiences, theories, and eyes.

As a strategy to organize and bind the experiences and concepts, I presented excerpts directly from the co-participants voices as headings. Moreover, I complicated them and even “contaminated” them (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014) as my theoretical analysis by exposing them to think with Critical Race Theory/LatCrit as an attempt to discuss my two research questions, and the final implication, the commitment to move the needle forward in educational attainment. To begin, I present the multiplicity of experiences that disrupt the notion of invisibility to another dimension and flavor of Latinx parental involvement within the region of Western North Carolina.

“I have always been scared because I’m like, I’m a Brown, Mexican young girl”-Valerie

Latinx families have challenges regardless of languages and immigration status. Even with native proficiency in English and Spanish, being highly educated, and being citizen of the United States born locally in Western North Carolina, Valerie experiences the world as a Brown, Mexican girl.

Valerie Pérez is the youngest daughter of Luis and Sofia Pérez and also one of the student-participants of this project. I met Valerie in a local non-profit organization right after both of our work duties. Valerie arrived in an elegant colorful dress and with an eager

¹⁵ “Communication, practices, and learning that occur at the home and community...and serve as the cultural knowledge base that helps Chicana college students negotiate daily experiences of sexist, racist, and classist microaggressions” (Delgado-Bernal, 2001, p. 624).

attitude to get started. We sat in a well-decorated office that I was given permission to use, with my research tools: a computer for voice recording, paper and a pen for notes, and our open hearts. I have known Valerie since an early age, and as adults our paths have crossed a few times related to education. We barely see each other in person, but when we do, we always have *pláticas* about our love for learning and traveling and always conclude with our admiration for each other and our upcoming adventures. I consider Valerie to be inquisitive, inspiring, curious, and always on a mission for a good adventure.

I always enjoy my conversations with Valerie. This time, our *plática* was purposeful and more in-depth than any other time. I could see and feel with Valerie the same spirit of openness that we used in our other conversations; however, her body language and moments of silence gave me cues that she was pensive. I allowed the silence to speak for itself, and together we engaged in a powerful space to think about her life, and the involvement of her parents in her education. I felt honored to be part of this arrangement.

With much preamble Valerie expanded on her life experiences as a Brown, Mexican girl, as she referred to herself. Valerie shared, “There is so much racism...and it’s sad.” She provided several examples at her workplace where people refuse her assistance because they didn’t want to speak with the Brown kid. She also relayed direct comments she’d heard while shopping. “Build the wall” made her shopping experiences quite different. Even while recognizing her successes in both her personal and professional career, she is constantly also caught in a limbo, or what I refer to an in-between space. Valerie mentioned, “I have always been scared because I am a Brown, Mexican young girl, like they are not gonna want to [do business with me].” Simultaneously, by recognizing that she is indeed different, she uses that

discourse to think about the other side of the situation: “You know, maybe me being unique will make them all like maybe [work with me].”

This precise moment became a point of discovery as Valerie utilizes a situation that has affected her deeply to become a situation of healing, a source of strength in the service of others. By amplifying her strengths, Valerie has been able to think through her experiences and use them in ways that provide encouragement to others.

Valerie’s life philosophy is “You should want to keep wanting to improve yourself,” and that is exactly what her plan has been. She provided several specific examples of some of her clients, family and friends who want and hope to do more, but are not able, because the laws in the state of North Carolina discards undocumented immigrants as citizens of the state. Therefore, undocumented immigrants, or those without proper documentation to be in the country, are denied access to Identification (ID) cards along with obtaining a driver license and the privileges that come with it. Valerie adds, “There are hard-working people, but they are scared to be deported, that limits them a lot.” A simple trip to the grocery store, to the doctor, or even to school could jeopardize them and their families.

Valerie recognizes the systemic vulnerability and paradox that leaves parents few options but to concentrate in providing for their families in creative ways and limiting other important areas such as taking English classes. Valerie encourages them; “There is nothing wrong with wanting to do more. The sky is the limit.” One particular example she shared was about her mother, Sofia. “If my mom would know more English, she could become a supervisor at their job or have a higher position, but she can’t communicate in English with others. You know, that is a struggle.” Valerie strongly recommended English language classes as a way to improve quality of life, “If more parents would at least maybe even take

afternoon classes, small one-hour class to learn English, this can make a huge impact in your child's and personal life. You know, for sure, I think so.”

Sofia and I shared a *plática* about this very same topic, and she acknowledged that this is something she struggles with because she is always putting the needs of others before her own. She stated that she comes home exhausted from working from eight to twelve-hour shifts in a factory job. While she stated that English classes would be helpful to her, she enjoys utilizing her time being present as a mother. She adds, “*Creer en Dios, creer en alguien grande es algo que al ser humano le hace falta*” (Believing in God, believing in a higher being is something that humans lack). Therefore, Sofia cultivates her spiritual side by going to church and bible study classes to learn and fellowship with others.

Valerie, Ana, and I ended up making a personal commitment and responsibility to assist our communities in any way possible. We do not have many other examples within our communities, and inherently end up taking a guiding role by sharing our own stories. Valerie said, “I love when their eyes brighten up, and they are like, you know what, I could do that too.”

Ana Rodríguez also comments on the power of her presence as a racialized being and leveraging that identity to the benefit of others. She shared, “I knew I was going to go to college, I just didn't really think I was ever going to masters. And now, I am thinking getting a Ph.D. someday.” When she shares this with families, friends and other members of the community, she gets comments like, “Wow, you are so awesome. I want my son or daughter to be like you.” Ana has been supported, and now she supports and encourages young people to follow their dreams. She said, “I want to be that support for them, kind of big sister or brother that they may or may not have.” Ana's big sister, Andrea, helped to navigate the

application process and Free Application for Federal Aid, known as FAFSA; however, she mentioned she had a lot in her plate finishing her own degree, with getting engaged and having a full-time job. Each individual exists in our own world, and from time to time there are people that we meet along the way to help us to fill some gaps.

Ana is an advocate for education and also a concerned citizen about Latinx degree attainment. I asked Ana what we (me personally, society, institutions) could do to assist more Latinxs to finish a four-year degree? Ana shared some nuggets of wisdom, “Talking to families is really important.” She recognizes the diversity within our Latinx communities where we have a mix of experiences and backgrounds and not all of them understand the value and investment of education.

In my *pláticas* with the Pérez family, both Luis and Sofia spoke about the challenges and difficulties of formal education while living in rural Mexico.

“Valerie, go to school, or you are going to end like us”- Sofia

Luis is from rural Mexico and recognizes that his best life teacher has been observing the mistakes of others, and trying not to make the same mistakes. He adds, “*Mis padres no me mandaron a la escuela... estudie hasta el grado cinco de primaria... Mi padre siempre me decia: no necesitas el estudio ¿Para que vas a estudiar? no es necesario*” (My parents did not send me to school... I studied up to fifth grade of elementary school... My dad always said, you don’t need to study. Why do you want to go to school? It is not necessary). Further, he experienced many “*golpes*” (physically beaten), and he decided that it would be up to him to close that cycle with his daughters. Luis said, “*Para mi, no está bien eso*” (To me, this is not right). Luis shared his lack of knowledge on how to be a parent, but he found

people and information along the way to help him fill those gaps. He concluded, “*Tomé clases que me ayudaron mucho, bastante. Fue para bien para mi y mis hijas; no hubo golpes*” (I took some classes that helped me much, a lot. They were good to me and to my daughters; no more beatings).

Luis provided numerous examples of his parenting, especially as he recognized the ripple effects of his decisions on his daughters. One particular was when he was approached by one of his daughters to stay overnight at a friend’s birthday party. He recalls negotiating the return time, but a clear no to staying overnight. Luis shared, “*Simplemente digo no. Porque nuestra cultura no nos permite que se anden quedando en otras casas*” (Simply no. Our culture does not allow us to allow them to stay over in other homes). Later that week, another daughter, Laura, brought home a birthday invitation, and she recited the rule for staying over at other people’s homes because culturally this is not appropriate. Luis mentioned the importance to be very deliberate and specific to avoid any possible misunderstanding, including colliding cultural teachings. Simultaneously, he shared a profound lesson that his daughters gave him, “*No llevar las cosas al extremo. Tiene uno que acceder a ciertas cosas y dárle confianza a tus hijos*” (Not to take things to the extremes. Being flexible in certain things and trust your children), especially as they navigate with both being Mexicans and Americans.

Sofia Pérez is Valerie’s mother. Sofia is also from a rural town in Mexico and had a marriage of more than 18 years with Luis. However, priorities changed, and they eventually grew apart. Sofia shared that the one thing that bonded them was their daughters and their utmost commitment to education. Sofia adds while physically showing the scars of her demanding factory job:

“Yo no pude estudiar, si yo no tuve esa oportunidad, no tengo por que quitarles esa oportunidad a mis hijas. Y más si están en un país donde si pueden, si se puede. Hay sacrificios, hay luchas, hay retos. Pero de poder se puede... Yo no quiero ver a mis hijas trabajando en una factoria, ganando el mínimo y todavía malas caras” (I could not go to school, and because I did not have that opportunity, I can't take away the opportunity from my daughters, and especially since we are in a country where they can, yes they can. There are sacrifices, there are struggles, there are challenges, but there are ways... I don't want to see them [my daughters] working in a factory, earning a minimum wage, and people looking down on them).

Sofia makes a bold claim that *“Tenemos que cambiar de mentalidad machista¹⁶”* (We must change [our cultural] *machista* mentality). *A las mujeres les dicen, ¿para qué van a la escuela si es que se van a casar? A los jóvenes, a muchos los sacan de la escuela, apenas en primaria para llevárselos al campo a trabajar* (To the girls they [people] say, why you go to school since you are going to get married? To the young [men], many, they take them out of school, even as early as elementary school to take them to the countryside to work).

Sofia recognizes that *machista* mentality has affected her life, and she has intentionally made choices to disrupt it. She elaborates, *“A mí me gusta leer, me gusta informarme, me gusta leer todo lo que sea bueno y me eduque, yo lo leo”* (I love reading, I love to be informed, I love to read everything that is good and everything that I can learn, I read it). Furthermore, when it came to the home decisions, including the language to be spoken at home, Sofia took charge to teach her children Spanish since early age. She mentioned, *“Para mí es muy importante el no perder tus raíces, saber de dónde eres te hace superarte. Es más, ellas siempre dicen, Soy Mexicana. Soy Mexicana con orgullo”* (For me is very important to not lose your roots, knowing where you come from makes you better. It is so that they even [daughters] always say, I am Mexican. I am a proud Mexican). In addition,

¹⁶ Cultural domination of women, who are viewed as responsible for raising children and serving men (Mayo & Resnick, 1996)

once Valerie attended pre-school, Sofia went to work third shift to stay at home during the day to attend to the daughters, so she could go to work at night while the children slept. As the daughters came of age, she stated the importance of providing information about topics considered cultural taboo. Sofia added,

“No queríamos que fueran igual que nosotros, que se quedaran igual que nosotros. Ellas iban a ser madres y esposas en un futuro. Yo les metía mucho, te encuentras un marido que sea machista y si te deja dos o tres hijos ¿Qué vas a hacer? Aguantar toda tu vida porque tú no puedes mantenerlos, por que tienes miedo de salir adelante sola. Ya con una carrera, pues, sales adelante con tus hijos” (We did not want them to be like us, to stay the same as us. They [daughters] were going to be mothers and wives in the future. I would often tell them, you find a husband that is *machista*, and leave you with two or three children. What are you going to do? Endure all your life because you can’t take care of them, because you are afraid to get ahead alone? With a career [university degree] you can get ahead with your children).

Sofia claims that learning *“abren más las mentes, porque uno sólo piensa en trabajar, trabajar y trabajar, y muchas veces uno se olvida de los hijos. Pero yo creo que en éste caso, Luis y yo creó que fuimos muy buenos padres”* (opens minds more, because you only think about working, working, and working and many times forget about your children. But I think that in this case, Luis and I think that we were very good parents).

“College...Wow, this is really my crowd”- Ana

The family unit is a vital characteristic of the Latinx community. However, the sense of responsibility and burden manifest differently. According to Ana, the close bonds within the families makes them “overprotective”. She explains, “They want you to stay home and take care of you until you are like 40, 50, 70 [years old]”. Therefore, the traditional idea of going away to a residential college challenges the concept of the family unit for most families, especially as they have come to rely on each other for certain roles and tasks. Ana

rejected this assumption, “Going to college is not going to break the bond of the family; in fact, it is strengthened by growing individually and professionally.” Ana concludes, “They are [in college] to better themselves.” Ana advocates for having spaces of conversations in which families can have real and honest conversations, where both parties understand clearly expectations and are able to move forward together. Ana shares how she uses the telephone for this purpose, “I call my mom at least five times throughout the day, and that is the type of relationship we have.” While it may prove to be a small learning curve for some families, technology provides many other venues such as web-conferencing, social media, texting, and telephone to shorten distances and open up spaces for conversations. Ana wholeheartedly advocates that, for her at least, college was an important stage that she needed in order to develop in all different areas in her life.

Ana emphasized that depending on the high school; many students may or may not be getting the important information, crucial details they need to go to college. Ana’s experience in high school was bounded by her context. Ana explained, “The only Latinxs that were there, none of them wanting to go to college. And I wanted to go to college. So I wasn't really involved in that crowd. I was involved with the smart White people that wanted to go to college”. I asked Ana to provide me some examples of how she knows they were not interested in going to college. She elaborated, “They would miss school, have really bad grades, did not take honors and AP classes”. Therefore, since Ana did not have representation of Latinx students in AP and honor curriculum, she started associating with the smart White students. That was not without its own set of repercussions. “I got made fun of my accent, and because of that, I tried to speak better...to fit in... I followed the Hollister

and Abercrombie trends, ...and played sports...I had to act a certain way,” she said. In other words, Ana had to perform Whiteness to meet White, middle-class standards.

There are so many commonalities with Ana’s and Valerie’s stories and my own. I wondered if those were separate relatable stories, or if institutionalized racism is in fact the norm. I can only speak from my perception, where I see my culture constantly misrepresented in the media, not many individuals of color in positions of power, my parents relying on low-paying jobs regardless of their skills. Even after more than a decade of increased experiences, responsibilities, and formal education, I continue to constantly receive great performance reviews year after year, but no promotion. Are those subtle acts perpetuating racism?

Ana had an experience in college, which opened her eyes to see that there were many other smart Latinxs with ambitious goals to change their lives and be of service to others. She said, “It was not until I came to college that I saw that they were other [Latinxs] smart people, and I was like, Wow, this is really my crowd.”

Ana shared that this was one of the few times since her arrival to the United States that she started to be proud of her heritage, her culture, and her language. Once in college, Ana joined cultural clubs and Greek Life, which she said can assist with the identity development and involvement of ethnic and racial minority students. Ana explained that she was inspired the first time she saw a person of color in a leadership role. “I want to be that person,” she shared.

Ana’s mom, Victoria, highlighted that it’s very important for students to be involved on campus. Victoria concluded, “*Es muy importante por que si se sienten solos, a lo mejor empiezan a meterse en drogas, por la falta de cariño*” (Is very important because if they feel

alone, maybe they start to get into drugs for lack of affection). Further, Victoria stated that organizations and clubs were crucial to the parents' experiences while their child is in college. In one way, it bound them to Ana's activities and overall college experience while on another level, Victoria mentioned that she was able to experience firsthand Ana's friends. She learned about their habits, and Victoria was even able to provide Ana and her friends with advice about relationships, sex, and life in general.

Victoria encapsulated campus organizations and clubs as a space where they learn to be "*mejores personas*" (better individuals). She adds, "*Una de las enseñanzas que les dan, es que tienen que ser buenas hijas, hermanas, buenas personas. Ayudarse entre ellas, y yo creo que sí es muy bonito*" (one of the teachings that they are given is that they have to be good daughters, good sisters, good people. They have to help each other, and I think this is indeed very beautiful). Victoria is utilizing her skills and abilities, traditions and experiences not only to benefit her daughter, but also to the benefit of others. Victoria is indeed a fund of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005). Are we as a society choosing to ignore the role of Latinx parental engagement in the educational enterprise to advance the idea of superiority?

"They supported as much as they could. And for me, that was enough"- Ana

Ana is Pepe and Victoria's daughter. I met Ana in her place of employment for our *plática*. I arrived at a business-like environment greeted by the front desk person located in the middle of what resembled a furniture showroom. Ana came out to greet me and took me to her office. I entered a room with two desks back to back, and a chair waiting for me. I thought the lighting was low; two desk lamps were the only source of light, and through my

mind I was thinking about workers and space, working conditions, space as a commodity, and space as a symbol of power. We passed a long hall full of people's offices and noticed the corner office with big windows for the boss while others looked like closet spaces. I wondered: How are offices selected? Who selects them? I asked Ana, and she was told that offices were assigned by seniority. However, some recent hires under Ana's ranking were provided an office to themselves. Ana shared that this remains a mystery to her.

Regardless of the office itself, Ana's conditions were above average, and she seemed to be thriving in this space. The only unpredicted situation was not knowing the office arrangement for our *plática*. Upon arriving to Ana's office, I greeted her office mate that happened to be right across from Ana. I did not want to disturb their normal operations, but she greeted me back and continued working on what seemed a normal part of her day. I discussed with Ana briefly the situation, especially since this could compromise our confidentiality. Ana shared with me that this was her reality, and she was comfortable, indicating no concern at all. Our *plática* continued, and the other person was completely forgotten.

Ana moved to the United States from the Caribbean at the start of secondary education, equivalent to middle school in the United States. She indicated that her parents were very involved in her schooling endeavors in her home country, "[My parents] were able to be more involved like with my teachers, and going to school, and those kind of things because of the [English] language. When we moved here, they try to be involved, but there was just only so much they could do." Ana embodied the difficulties of many newcomers, especially with the English Language; however, our *plática* also provided the opportunity for Ana to confront her own thoughts. Ana told me:

Anything that my mom knew was because I told her or my dad, like, the information that they knew about school and even the parent teacher conferences, it was me translating for my parents. So I never really felt a lot of support, because they just couldn't. They supported as much as they could. And for me, that was enough. Like, I knew that there was a barrier. And I knew that there's only so much we can do, but everything that they could do, they did.

A piece of Ana's story reminded me about my own experience upon arriving in the United States. Even for Valerie, who was herself born in the United States, her mother, Sofia, shared about the importance of Spanish to be the spoken language at home. I documented in chapter one some of the struggles for newly arrived migrant families; however, being able to communicate and being understood seemed to connect all our stories.

Ana shared, "When we moved here, they tried to be involved, but there was just only so much they could do. Where I went to high school, they were really no teachers that spoke Spanish, there was no administrators that spoke Spanish." Is it an institutional responsibility to be equipped to communicate efficiently and effectively with *all* parents and students?

Ana recalled exhaustively having to fill different roles to close the gap to cater to her parents. She remembered being used as interpreter, translator, parent, daughter, and student. She stated:

"They [parents] would come to my sporting events, but with education was just harder because it just they didn't understand. I mean, even helping with a project like I never had that help from my parents, when I had other classmate parents helped them pretty much do their projects."

Ana internalized this information by being more independent. "When I went to college, I was not shocked. I was doing some of my own [chores and school work] anyways, and I didn't really have like homesickness," she said. Ana shared that her parents did not visit her a lot in college, but from home they supported her even more. Ana added,

“When I went home, I would always come back with food. I love homegrown tomatoes. I would come home with a whole bag of tomatoes”. [Financially], “ I never reached out, like asking for money. I did not have the money to pay for myself [college and everyday expenses] and that is why I had to take a lot of loans out because I didn’t have the money to pay myself, and also I didn’t want to put that pressure on my parents.”

Ana pointed out, “Education always being very important... school was always my number one priority, and their [her parents] number one priority...if I could not come home, they understood.” Ana’s comments captured the spirit of her parents recognizing she was doing something important, even though they may not have understood themselves. “They don’t know what I was doing, because they don’t know. But, they knew I was busy doing what I have to do to graduate.”

José Rodríguez goes by Pepe and is Ana’s father. I visited Ana’s parents at their home in rural Western North Carolina. I documented in my personal journal about my experience as I entered their home.

“The Rodríguez family home was extremely welcoming, lived-in, and full of photos and mementos that decorated the cabin looking walls. The living room, dining room, and kitchen were directly connected to enjoy each other presence entertaining. A full exposure bar seemed ready to start the festivities at any moment. Ana showed me around the property and I was amazed to see so many acres of land, with chickens, roosters, and dogs running around, pile of materials for projects, and odd/ends things that seem like little projects to me (lawnmower, windows, wood, etc.). I felt the nostalgia of being transported into my aunt’s *finca* (farm house) in Colombia. Additionally, two loose guard dogs lounged outside, not even moving when I approached the home. The inside smaller dog smelled me, greeted me, and continued napping.”

Pepe greeted me by hug and with a warm smile. I was more intimidated to meet Pepe than anyone else. I think Pepe, being the father figure of the home, brought memories of my own father, and I very seldom remembered him in anything related to my formal and

informal education. Nevertheless, in both participating families, the father had an active role in education.

My uneasiness with meeting with Pepe quickly dissipated with his attention, hospitality and charm. Pepe made me super comfortable, and even asked me to have a specialty drink popular from his homeland. We started our *plática* while Pepe was cutting the chicken his wife asked him to cut for lunch, and I received a quick lesson of cutting chicken using a clever technique of a box made out of wood with a sharp knife to consistently get the chicken breast the same size each time. After Pepe finished cutting the chicken breasts, we moved the *plática* to the kitchen table.

Pepe started the *plática*, by saying, “*Soy un libro abierto*” (I am an open book), indicating to me his open-ness to be part of this arrangement. I started with the open-ended question, *¿Que piensa usted, cuándo yo le mencionó la palabra educación?* (What comes to mind when I mention the word educación?). He responded,

“Para mí, la educación es todo. Y pienso que la educación empieza desde la cuna. La mayor educación que puede recibir un niño es la casa. Sus padres, esos son los mejores educadores del mundo cuando se lo proponen” (For me, education is everything. And I think that education starts from the cradle. The greatest education a child can receive is the home. Parents are the best educators in the world when they propose it).

Pepe lost his mother when he was an infant, and he stated that he did not have clear paternal patterns to guide him. However, he internalized, “*Yo tengo que ser un buen papá*” (I have to be a good father). Pepe worked many jobs, including as a teacher, accountant, mechanic, farmer, pilot, among many other trades. Pepe shared, “*Empecé a luchar, seguir trabajando y seguir luchando para echar para adelante*” (I started to fight, keep working, and keep fighting to move forward). He added:

“No hay un patrón para ser padre y yo tampoco lo tuve; pero traté de educar a mis hijas, de darles educación por etapas. La niñez es una educación, la adolescencia es otra educación y la adultez es otra educación” (there is no a pattern to being a father and I did not have it either, but I tried to educate my daughters, to give them education in different stages. Childhood is an education, adolescence is another education, and adulthood is another education).

He is proud to say that he gave his daughters what they needed at different times including trust, authority, and freedom to not fear reaching their goals. *“La autoestima es todo en el ser humano. Si tú tienes una autoestima alta, tu logras todo lo que te propongas”* (Self-esteem is everything for human beings. If you have high self-esteem, you achieve everything you set out to do). Pepe took a long sip of his specialty drink, cleared his throat and said *“Nunca dejan de ser niñas y siempre están contando con nosotros para lo que sea”* (They never stop being [our little] girls and they are always counting on us for whatever).

Victoria Rodríguez is Ana’s mother. Victoria embodied a strong matriarchal spirit that I have been so accustomed seeing in my own family. Victoria welcomed me with a hug and broom in hand as she continued sweeping the living room floor. After cleaning, we moved to the kitchen, where Victoria started to prepare a meal and the place where our *plática* occurred. As I stood up on the other side of the stove with my note-pad, and my watery eyes from the steam of garlic and onions, I was completely seduced by the smells coming out of that kitchen. The spices used were so different, but yet brought a familiarity that I am still pondering about. Perhaps it was the use of *comino*, or cumin, an ingredient heavily used in Colombian cuisine, or maybe it was the comfort of speaking to Victoria very much like a conversation I would have with my own mother while she cooked. Between the familiar and the new, chopping of onions, grinding garlic, and grilling the perfectly cut chicken breasts, and deer meat, our *plática* embodied a celebratory Sunday at the

Rodríguez's household. Victoria shared that when Ana comes home, she loves to prepare her favorite meal of rice and beans, grilled chicken, and fresh homegrown tomatoes. As I reminded Victoria of how proud I was of Ana and all her accomplishments, I posed the question on what could be done to encourage parental support in education.

Victoria confidently and without hesitation claimed that we come from a culture of many prejudices and traditions. She added, "*Cómo que la hembra fuese criada cómo para qué cocine, para que lave, cómo ama de casa...las mujeres sí podemos hacer otra cosa, no sólo amas de casa*" (As the females were raised to cook, to clean, as housewives...women can do other things, no just being housewives). Victoria commented that there are prejudices towards females, but men on the other hand, can do whatever they want. Victoria suggested that, "[*debemos*] *darle confianza y libertad y decirles, ¡mira! Hay métodos anticonceptivos para qué no te embaraces ¡estudia! ¡trabaja! El futuro está en tús manos*" ([We must] give them the confidence and freedom and tell them, look! there are contraceptive methods, so you don't get pregnant study! work! the future is in your hands).

Victoria shared that she often thinks about this topic. Adding, "*Estamos en un país de desarrollo, qué las mujeres se defienden, trabajan, estudian y pueden hacer todo lo se propongan*" (We are in a developing country where women defend themselves, work, study and can do whatever they proposed). Victoria explains that in the U.S, "*El estudio es dinero*" (To study is money). Further, she commented, "*Yo trabajo en una factoria por el Inglés, porque soy contadora. Yo estudié, y trabajé en una oficina porque mi papá igual me impulso mucho a estudiar*" (I work in factory because of [lack] English. I am an accountant, I studied, I worked in an office because my dad pushed me a lot to study). Victoria and her brothers fulfilled the goal of their dad. "*Mis hijos van a estudiar*" (My children will study). Proudly,

Victoria shared that one of her brothers is a medicine doctor and the rest have at least a technical degree.

Victoria as well as her siblings benefited from the resilience of her own father and commitment to education, regardless of the challenges and obstacles. Immigrant families come to their spaces with great abilities, skills, and wealth referred as cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006). Deficit-models eliminate, silence, and assume that people of color lack certain capital. However, this project crafted carefully from a strength-based leverages the wealth that Latinx parents and families bring to educational spaces, and plows a space in which conversations are welcomed, and encouraged. This study focused on just two families plus my own. Yet, the *pláticas* surpassed any formal educational experience that I have ever being part of. The wealth of experiences expanded my own interrogations of Latinx engagement in educational spaces in Western North Carolina, and demonstrated the necessity to collaborate especially in post-secondary education because after all education and *educación* starts at home.

“The greatest education a child can receive is from home”- Pepe

Pepe Rodríguez, Ana’s father, spoke about his hardships of losing his mom as an infant and his father during his adolescence. He had the challenge of being a provider and caregiver to for his siblings from early age. He recognized that even though he did not have specific set of patterns to replicate or a blueprint to follow, he learned about responsibility, and being open to new opportunities. These set of experiences, of being responsible for others such a young age, gave him a clear goal of “*ser un buen padre*” (being a good father) when he had his own children. Pepe gave most of the credit to the educational and life

experiences he had along the way and he shared that parent and families must look inward first, the home.

Pepe found it helpful to think of *educación* in terms of different stages that correlate to the development of the person. He said, “*La educación yo creo que tiene etapas. La niñez es una educación, la adolescencia es otra educación y la adultez es otra educación*” (I think education has different stages. Childhood is an education, adolescence is another education and adulthood is other type of education). Nevertheless, he added a never-ending aspect of being a parent, “*Nunca dejan de ser niñas y siempre le digo, cuenten con nosotros para lo que sea*” (they never stop being our little girls and I always tell them that they can count on us for whatever). Pepe said one of the most beneficial things that he promoted since early age on his daughters was nurturing their self-esteem through confidence and *confianza*. Pepe explains,

“Siempre quise que mis hijas tuvieran la autoestima bien alta por que la autoestima es todo para el ser humano. Si tienes una autoestima alta, tu lograrás todo lo que te propongas” (I always wanted my daughters to have high self-esteem because self-esteem for me is everything to human beings. If you have high self-esteem, you can achieve anything you set out to do).

Pepe shared that his daughters had their parents’ trust to be independent, to make their own decisions, and to defend themselves mentally and physically. Ana traveled to many countries across the world, played sports, and continues to be a confident person that takes charge of her life. However, he comments that much of this success has been seeing his role as a complement of the teacher.

Pepe not only follows this same approach with his daughters, but also in the early stages of dating Victoria. One example was making sure Victoria completed all her

assignments before visiting with her. Pepe shared, “*Yo quiero que tú estes bien. Porque ese es tú futuro*” (I want you to be all right. Because this is your future). Victoria would ask him, “Are you my boyfriend or my teacher?” Pepe would seriously respond, “*Yo soy las dos cosas*” (I am both).

Pepe shared that it has been crucial for him and Victoria to “*estar pendiente*” (keep an eye) on school and personal endeavors. This helped them in keeping a culture of honoring both family and academics responsibilities while providing a space for learning and grow.

Ana’s mom, Victoria, spoke about the early memories of *confianza* provided by her own father and how those lessons transcended generations to now benefiting her daughters.

Victoria shared:

“*Mi mamá no me hablaba de nada, sin embargo mi papá me hablaba de todo, de todo, y que podía hacer y que no podía hacer. El tuvo mucha confianza conmigo y esa misma confianza yo se la inculque a mis hijas*” (My mom did not talk to me about anything, nevertheless, my dad talked to me about everything, everything, what could I do and what I could not do. He had a lot of trust with me and that is the same I instilled to my daughters).

Her father, “*un hombre analfabeto*” (an illiterate man), did not have the opportunity to formally study much; nevertheless, Victoria said he was “*muy sabio*” (very wise). She added, “*Mi papá era muy sabio. Aprendió a arreglar radios y televisores y todo lo que tiene que ver con ingeniería electrónica sólo. El sólo, viendo a otros*” (My father was very wise. He learned to fix radios and televisions and everything related with electric engineering. He learned by himself just watching others). She described him as someone with “*luz larga*” (long light), or a man with a long vision specifically, as she spoke of some of the things he did that were outside of the cultural norms at that time. One of those memorable times included walking

with her older father from home to the adult school during the evenings as he was working towards earning a high school diploma. Victoria shared, “*el terminó sexto grado por las noches y yo lo acompañaba*” (he finished sixth grade during the evenings and I would go with him). As her father embarked on this journey every evening, it gave a clear and impactful message that education was extremely high important to his home. However, the response was not always a positive one, especially for Victoria’s father’s siblings.

Victoria remembers the constant “*guerra*” (war) of her father with his own siblings, defending education and refusing anything that would keep them from accomplishing that goal, such as selling peanuts or cold popsicles around town. She believes that her father purpose for them to formal education and resilience are some of the reasons that Victoria and her siblings have obtained at least a technical degree of university preparation, opposite of her cousins none of whom entered post-secondary education. With much gratitude Victoria exclaimed, “*Que Dios lo tenga en su gloria porque la verdad es que nos enseñó mucho a todos, incluyendo a mis hijas*” (May god have him in his glory because the truth is that he taught us a lot to everyone, including my daughters). Many of those teachings continue to be passed to the daughters and one day to grandchildren.

In my *plática* with Ana, her grandfather’s wishes of education were clear to me. For Ana, Pepe, and Victoria education was their number one priority, and every action was focused on Ana obtaining a degree. She added,

“I feel like [my undergraduate degree] was for my parents...they have encouraged me so much to go to college and get a degree. But now that I am in graduate school...this is for me. It was my own choice, my own decision.”

Ana told me that she had the confidence and *confianza* to make important decisions along the way, she used her parents to consult with, and up until today, she speaks to her mother several times during the day. Ana described her father as the enforcer, while her father described himself as her light and guide. Simultaneously, Ana described her mom as supporter especially as day-by-day activities occur and many times just to survive through the day. Victoria referred herself as a supporter. She stated that she gave her daughters the independence and freedom to be happy and free to choose whatever they wanted to do or be. Victoria added, “*Dejarlos vivir su vida, su historia. Ya tú viviste la tuya. Lo qué nos toca, es apoyarlos*” (Let them live their lives, their history. You already had yours. Now, what we do is support them).

The Pérez family members echoed the sentiment that education starts at home. In fact, regardless of the lack of opportunity that both Sofia and Luis experienced in their hometown in rural Mexico, they embraced education by educating themselves first. Sofia declares, “*tenemos qué educarnos*” (We must educate ourselves), and she does this by reading and staying informed. She adds, “*Yo no fui a una universidad, ni siquiera preparatoria pero me gusta leer, me gusta informarme. Siempre que sea bueno y me eduque yo lo leo*” (I did not go to university, not even high school but I like to read, I like to be informed. As long as it is good and educational I read it). Sofia explained about a common mentality, what she referred as *machista* mentality, in her hometown of not spending money in educating girls since they get married and leave the home, nor on young men who go to work on the countryside. Sofia shared, “*en mi pueblo a muchos [jóvenes] los sacan de la escuela. A penas en primaria los sacan para llevarselos al campo*” (in my town many [young people] are taken out of school. Even in primary school, to take them to the

countryside). Women are used for domestic activities such as taking care of the home, and the men perform the heavy work and countryside workforce. Sofia added that marrying within the same people reinforces constantly this mentality.

Sofia remembers when they came to the United States things looked similar, Luis worked and Sofia attended the home. However, she intentionally started disrupting the pattern by working during the evening while the girls slept and during the day keeping them busy by teaching them Spanish. Sofia added, “*Yo les enseñe español porque yo sabía que en la escuela iban a enseñar en Inglés*” (I taught them Spanish because I knew that at school they would learn English). Sofia recalls her approach paying off, because her daughters were polite, and brought home good grades. Furthermore, she remembers being involved in any way possible to keep an eye on what was occurring in the school. Sofia added, “*Si se trataba de cooperación, voluntaria, yo estaba metida ahí*” (If related to volunteering, or cooperating, I was there). She assisted in whatever way was possible. She shared one of the reasons for being involved was “*conocer quiénes son los maestros, conocer quiénes son sus amigos y amigas*” (To get to know teachers, to get to know their friends).

Luis, Valerie’s father, shared about the many lessons and experiences he obtained by observing other parents, and also by actively engaging in parenting classes. Luis adds, “*A mí me ayudaron bastante*” (to me [the parenting classes] were very helpful). Luis’s awareness grew as he recognized that he grew up differently and felt inadequate in many situations to support his family. Nevertheless, he engaged actively in learning from others with the best intentions to benefit his daughters. Valerie shared that she noticed big changes in the interactions with them, and situations at home were handled in a more thoughtful way. Luis said for the first time he took ownership and responsibility in being a parent.

Luis noticed that there is much blame in the teachers, blame in the police, and blame on others, but he believes that children are a reflection of the parents. He commented, “*¿ si ustedes se ven en un espejo, qué van a ver? Su reflejo...Y cómo tú eres, así son tus hijos*” (if you look in a mirror, what do you see? Your own reflection...and as you are, so are your children). Luis expanded:

“*Desde chiquitos tú tienes que motivarlos...o sea apoyándolas y apoyándolas y dándoles ánimo pero también celebrarles sus triunfos*” (Since they are little you have to motivate them... you know, support them, support them and give them encouragement and also celebrate their triumphs).

Valerie discussed with me, while not always in agreement with her parents’ actions, one of the things that she was grateful was their support and encouragement. She added, “My parents never humiliated us.” Valerie explained, “They made sure to tell everybody ‘my kids are smart, my kids are going to be something one day;’ they always showed us off to everybody.” Luis recalls one of his daughters constantly sharing that she was going to be the first lady, wife of the president and Luis would respond, of course, yes you will be one day, absolutely. In contrast, Valerie recalls other parents, sometimes even relatives, who would make comments such as, “You are stupid.” Valerie noted, “Maybe joking around, but deep down I know that probably hurt their feelings.” Valerie shared that negative communication has terrible effects. She said, “I am sure they think they are not smart enough or good enough.”

At the start of my *plática* with Valerie, I asked her, “When you think about your success in education, and being able to graduate and finish, to what do you attribute that success? To whom? Or something?” Without hesitation, Valerie responded,

“Determination of **me** always having a goal. Since I was younger, I knew I was going to get my master’s, I knew I was gonna get my bachelor’s, I’m going to do this. I don’t know what it’s going to be. Because I don’t know. I don’t know what I was going to do. Yeah, but whatever it is, I’m going to get these degrees. And I knew that probably since sixth grade.”

After my *pláticas* with Valerie, Ana, and their parents, I was reminded that the seed of education is planted early on. Nevertheless, the seed does not grow without being properly sewn, and attended while it is being cultivated. It is a great honor to be part of the harvest.

Contaminating data by thinking *with* Critical Race Theory/LatCrit

We can no longer bear to think of education in the same old ways. Rather, I join the many other voices that demand inclusivity of our lived experiences and transformation. I recognize that I am no longer comfortable hearing and reading about how Latinx parental involvement is often portrayed in educational space, especially as deficit-driven perspectives embedded in our structures and systems continue to inform our practices and laws. Instead, I brought to attention the multi-layered, complex, and unique journeys of my participants – the Rodríguez and Pérez families – and myself, as we engaged in *pláticas* about education, life, and their involvement in educational spaces as an attempt to progress in educational attainment in the Western region of North Carolina. To begin, let me share how I came in contact with theory or theory came in contact with me.

I was first introduced to Thinking with Theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) during an advanced qualitative research methods course facilitated by Dr. Alecia Jackson at Appalachian State University. The purpose of this course was to engage in advanced qualitative methods of research, philosophy, and thinking. I remember reading, re-reading,

and co-reading *Thinking with Theory in Qualitative Research: Viewing data across multiple perspectives* (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) while grappling with my epistemology, subjectivity, identity, and the limitations of my knowing.

Thinking with Theory helped me to move beyond limitations, name my worlds, and to open up things that I had not necessarily put together. I documented my thoughts and what I produced, and I constantly reflected about what theory was producing in me, to me, and for me. I documented the ups and downs, the conversations that I had with colleagues, thoughts about myself, and thoughts about my life. The following passage is an excerpt from my journal that provided many ideas to this project and has been directly transcribed:

*Education was not a new concept for him or his family. In fact, it was not really a choice but an expectation that was inculcated since early years. A paradox of **indoctrination filled with common assumptions and realities** of what an educated being entitles. Some of the early experiences transports him back to his high school years where acculturation and assimilation were the big topics at that time. He quickly discovered that the **structures created for new comers** had the ultimate goal of keeping them in school, avoid teen pregnancy and graduation, but not necessarily being college ready.*

*He choose with **resistance** from the school system to reject to participate in the English as a Second Language program, since the **students involved appeared to stay behind** instead of advancing to the courses needed to enroll in college. Most students did not have the math, science and English skills needed to graduate. Interesting enough, many of them were US-born with foreign backgrounds. This phenomenon held to be true at graduation, when out of 30 students with Latino background only two were accepted to four-year universities.*

*Many of them had no desire to go to college, but some others that did, were not fully prepared to embrace a higher education journey. For the walker, it was not really a choice, it was his reality. In his homeland for example, **education meant the conservation of an elite status while for others meant freedom.***

*In other societies, this might not be important, however, as we explore the Colombian structures of power and the different views of the political, and social climate that the country holds, one might understand **the role of education as a denunciation of oppressive systems that criticizes a system.** Therefore, to the point of Foucault,*

knowledge and power cannot be separated, in fact, the relationship reinforces one another.

In my Thinking with Theory journey, I was introduced to incredible authors, philosophers, colleagues, and theories that added not only the language but also the courage to navigate, confront, and learn within the complexity of my worlds. In other words, I moved from being an observant and referring to myself in third person in my own story, to an active participant in my own story. Along the way, I was introduced to Critical Race Theory and LatCrit, which provided me with historical and current context of race relationships in the United States. This is most relevant and of the most importance because race continues to be a determinant of outcomes and dictates the experiences for most communities of color, including my own.

With the intention to keep learning, I embraced Thinking with Theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012) as an analytic tool in this project to “think with theory or the theory to think with data” (p. ii). This process-oriented methodology calls upon a disruption of theory and practice binary and offers a transparency and straightforwardness of what is occurring, along with an intentional desire to interrogate what we already know, in order to open up new approaches to thinking.

As Mazzei and Jackson (2012) expanded, “voices (of data, of theory) make each other in the plugging-in and create new ways of thinking about both theory and data ... making new combinations to create new identities” (p. 747). So, rather than accepting grand narratives, the participatory process of thinking through our *pláticas* expanded our possibilities. In other words, the purpose here was not a final destination, but sharing the

journey that was assembled and produced by “arranging, organizing, fitting together” (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p.1) within this very space.

I started the process of *pláticas* with an open heart and open mind. I had in the back of my consciousness all those instances that as a society we seem to understand: the educational struggles of the most vulnerable populations. Despite their progress, my fellow members of the Latinx community continue to occupy the lowest levels in the educational attainment race. Thinking with CRT/LatCrit Theory, challenged me to be upfront and in-tune with what question emerged, – Are the educational struggles of people of color being manipulated for the convenience of some?

Throughout this study, I deliberately and intentionally made decisions to prepare the ground in which *pláticas* seeds could be sewn and cultivated. I worked to create a space that encapsulated a collaborative spirit in which *confianza* bonded us. I used the concepts of parents as fund of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) to indicate their importance in the education enterprise. Further, I utilized Tara Yosso’s (2006) cultural wealth to think about the formidable strengths that communities of color exhibit. I connected those frameworks as stepping-stones for a strength-based project that capitalizes on the many assets within our Latinx community. Finally, I organized literature review data utilizing Yosso’s (2006) cultural wealth model.

Due to the scope and purposes of the study, I eliminated the sentimentality toward my community who are striving to overcome obstacles, such as how my own life in the Western region of North Carolina has been informed by the barrier of learning English, adapting to a new culture, taking “good courses” and getting out of ESL, filling out a college application, applying for financial aid, explaining to my parents the dreadful FAFSA form, and the list

goes on. This does not mean that they are not barriers; rather, the purpose of this study was not to focus on these hindrances but to think about the strengths that communities of color bring to educational spaces, how to magnify them, and how to cultivate upon those skills, abilities, and knowledge. Moreover, I made clear that this was a space where all of us were teachers and learners.

I entered the *pláticas* with the complication of my own subjectivity, prejudices, biases understanding, or lack of understanding, in parental involvement. At the same time, I entered this space without a preconceived set of specific interview questions. I was interested in the fluid, dynamic, organic, and unique arrangement of being in the same space and time with the Rodríguez and the Pérez's families. I recorded and transcribed our arrangement. I shared pieces of the arrangement and described with extensive quotations to share with you, the reader, a small glimpse, and an incomplete glimpse of our *pláticas*. It was no small task, and I recognize the exhausting work of translating and my unjust attempt to capture the spirit of the conversation for mono-linguistic readers. Nevertheless, the attempt was made.

Race, and its multiple intersections and complications, shape my career and personal life as well as the lives of many individuals and families of color. I navigate, trouble, and embrace spaces and categories imposed in me, to me, and for me, as an educated member of the Latinx community. I am not Brown enough, or White enough, and I have a recognizable accent. I am a Colombian-American, Latino, bilingual, multicultural, homosexual man, living in rural Appalachian in Western of North Carolina, and working in higher education. While many would define me solely based on race or ethnicity, I am so much more.

I think of race and its intersections every day. I work with and from its effects on a daily basis, through my job and as I simply navigate through the world. Delgado and

Stefancic (2012) conclude, “Racism is ordinary, not aberrational---normal science, the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country” (p.7). However, most extraordinary, is the resiliency and tenacity to grasp those experiences as a source of healing and strength for the service of others. Therefore, it was appropriate to think with Critical Race Theory/LatCrit about this topic.

Jackson and Mazzei (2012) encouraged me to think about “what analytical questions are made possible by specific theoretical concepts” (p. 5). For the scope of this study, my analytical questions concentrated on three important key concepts from Critical Race Theory/LatCrit. I decided to think about race as a social construct, the inclusion of the lived experiences of communities of color as valid and important, and finally the commitment of CRT/LatCrit towards social justice and equity (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). My analytical questions took the following shape and form:

- How the lived experiences of parents help us leverage cultural wealth in their involvement in postsecondary education spaces?
- Utilizing race as a social construct, How Latinx parents’ involvement diverge from dominant discourse regarding educational attainment?
- How can this study embody the social justice commitment of CRT/LatCrit to move the needle forward in educational attainment?

How does Latinx parents’ involvement diverge from dominant discourses regarding educational attainment? I bring to this conversation foundational concepts of Critical Race Theory/LatCrit to centralize race and its constructions to the experience of communities of color in the United States. Color-blindness and meritocracy serve as a

camouflage to benefit those already privileged by society; thusly, in our times it serves as a mechanism of modern colonization. Valencia and Solarzano (1997) shared that such mentality fuels an image of deficit, depravation, and certain lacks that some groups possess to (re) produced and justify superiority and dominance. Who receives the blame for the lack of equitable opportunities?

Innumerable times, I have personally heard and experienced educators and other civilians blaming me and my home for not caring about education, for not being involved, and that something may be wrong with me being bilingual, even calling it a “handicap.” Even today as I write my concluding thoughts, my neighbor posted on his own social media his tiredness in worrying about whether we are offending an individual or a culture. He adds, “This country speaks English, and therefore immigrants, not Americans must adapt.” He concluded, “If you don’t like it, then LEAVE”.

Meritocracy, privilege, and color-blindness for communities of color are exhausting and dangerous. You feel unworthy; at one point in my life I blamed myself, and my parents for not speaking English well enough, for not knowing how to help me, for having a hefty accent, for not being White enough. I know better now. I can tell you that regardless of what my parents would have achieved, they would be vanquished. Their efforts would be discarded, eliminated, rejected, and silenced. However, I am not alone. My co-participants rendered testimony during our *pláticas* about their own challenges and those of their friends and family members.

Our *plática* provided a space for Valerie to unpack what is was for her to be Brown and Mexican in her community. She often gets caught in honoring the cultural values passed on to her from her family such as respecting others, concern for others, and improving

yourself, colliding with deficit-views that continue to permeate in our experiences in the United States. For example, she mentioned that some of her relatives don't have the proper documentation to be in the country, and the state of North Carolina disregards them as citizens of the state. Undocumented immigrants are denied driving privileges such as obtaining a driver license and are not even able to get an Identification Card. These families don't have the luxury of going to the bank to cash their check, go to the store to buy groceries, or drive their children to school. These families live in constant fear, and as Valerie concludes, "That limits them a lot." One may wonder by politicizing who belongs and who does not, are we creating an inferior cultural entity?

Valerie is a successful entrepreneur; however, experiencing this community as Brown, Female, and Mexican can be challenging in our current political and social times. She lamented, "I have always been scared because I am a Brown, Mexican young girl, like they are not gonna want to [do business with me]." Unfortunately, Valerie had plenty of vivid experiences that constantly made her question the teachings and values that her parents shared with her of being smart, kind, and important. Valerie shared, "there is so much racism [in this community]...and it's sad." Valerie shared several experiences with customers refusing her assistance because she was *not capable* to assist them or customers waiting for other workers for hours, all while she was available to assist them. She shared with me that it hurts her, she gets angry, and it can be a very violent situation, but she decides not to engage and just walks away.

Valerie is proud of her Mexican heritage. She is a Brown, Mexican, U.S. citizen, born in the community that she lives in and serves, refuses to be victimized, and through her actions she finds avenues to grasp those experiences and use them as source of strength and

healing for her and others. Valerie unknowingly is shifting from a deficit-view paradigm of lacks to leveraging cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006) to amplify her strengths and values and make a difference in her own life and the lives of others.

Valerie expanded on an interesting concept in the Latinx community about the extension of roles and cultural responsibilities that certain individuals end up taking by default in their communities. The literature refers to them as *Cultural Brokers* (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001), as individuals that facilitate knowledge and experience in their environments. Valerie vividly shared, “I love when their eyes brighten up, and they are like, you know what, I could do that too.” This was the same feeling I experienced while speaking with her mother Sofia. Are Sofia and Valerie unknowingly cultural brokers?

Sofia is always thinking of others. In fact, in our *plática*, she volunteered to pray for me, for my studies, and for the content of this manuscript to go well. Sofia met me at my home for our *plática*. I knew she was coming directly from work, so I made sure dinner was ready. It felt like having a conversation with my own parents during dinnertime.

Sofia was interested in how she could be of assistance to this project. She was eager to help. She told me “*es bonito saber. A mí me gusta platicar contigo por que fuiste parte de mi fuente de inspiración también*” (It is nice to know things. I like to talk with you because you were my inspiration too). I was grateful for her comment, because that was one of the purposes of the *plática*, to blur the researcher/participants roles as co-participants of the project. Sofia was empowered, she felt equal, and it was an honor to learn from her. Would Sofia feel empowered and equal in a conventional research/participant project?

Sofia shared the challenges of being a mother and a wife, especially from a rural town in Mexico. She did not have the opportunity to go formally to school; she blames her own

life circumstances, choices, and cultural *machismo*. In fact, the rhetoric she would often hear was that girls' roles were to tend to the children and the home while the men of the home were the financial providers. Is this the reason that by cultural default the mother figure is responsible for education? This was true in my case. But, is it true in Valerie and Ana's experiences?

Even with the restraints of a *machista* system, Sofia found subtle ways to disrupt that system, especially after her arrival in the United States. One of the ways was utilizing the time with her daughters as a precious time of teaching them about her own story, and encouraging them to not *end up like them*. Her aspirations for her daughters were to be more than a factory worker earning minimum wage. To learn about their roots, and to feel proud of whom they are. Sofia expanded, "*saber de dónde eres te hace superarte*" (knowing where you come from makes you better).

On the other hand, Luis, Valerie's father, was extremely vocal about the gaps in his parental experience. He pursued parenting classes to learn how to manage and discipline his own children. He recognized that "*golpes*," or hitting them, was not the best way to provide them with lessons. Luis shared, "*tomé clases que me ayudaron mucho, bastante. Fue bien para mí y mis hijas; no hubo más golpes*" (I took some classes that helped me much, a lot. They were good to me and to my daughters; no more hits). Luis demonstrated great care in recognizing that he had a need, and there were resources available to help him. He would have been regarded as a parent who does not care about school, especially because those parenting classes occupied his schedule after school. Nevertheless, the reason that he was missing from school activities was because he cared to learn about being a better parent. His daughters gave him many life lessons; Luis shared one that is dear to him, "*No llevar cosas*

al extremo. Tiene que ceder a ciertas cosas y darle confianza a tus hijos” (Not to take things to the extremes. You have to be flexible in certain things and trust your children).

Ana, Valerie, and I are extensions of the teachings from our parents and families; we use our racialized presence to the benefit of our communities. Ana sees her role as a big sister, encouraging others who may not have that experience as she did; she also is active in educational conversations since she sees them as timely and important.

Ana referred to Latinx parents as “overprotective” while explaining the paradox of parents wanting to take care of their children forever, and the traditional idea of going away to college. I was not familiar with going away to college until I arrived to the United States. Do we have spaces within formal education to explain the college process to parents? Are there places for parents to speak with each other about changes and roles produced by post-secondary education?

Ana’s father commented about a mystical aspect of being a parent, “*nunca dejan de ser nuestras niñas*” (they never stop being our little girls). Ana stated, “Going to college is not going to break the bond of the family; in fact, it is strengthened by growing personally and professionally.” Ana’s mother, Victoria, spoke about the teachings that she observed from college. Victoria commented, “*les enseñan a ser mejores personas*” (they teach them to be better individuals) “...*ser buenas hijas, hermanas, buenas personas*” (be good daughters, sisters, and good people). In many ways, college was a continuation of what they were taught at home. Furthermore, college was an important space for Ana to change her perception that she had to comply with White middle-class standards to fit in. As she explained, “It was not until I came to college that I saw that there were other smart people, and I was like, Wow this is my crowd.” Ana was pathologized to believe other Latinxs were

not *smart enough* or were *not interested* to go to college. She did not have many students that looked like her taking advanced placement classes and honors curriculum; therefore, she reinforced the stereotype by trying to fit in and hanging out with the smart White kids.

Ana and I are not U.S born citizens. We were both born in foreign countries and brought to the United States by our parents at a young age. Ana mentioned being made fun of because of her accent and her constant need to speak better to try to fit in. Just like Ana, I quickly learned English, and my parents depended on my language skills to understand and be understood. Ana mentioned the exhausting task of having to fill different roles including as an interpreter, and translator. This is even more problematic when conversations are important or when they are about you.

I uncomfortably remember going to doctor appointments and learning about procedures and diagnoses that were beyond my medical language or going to the bank to discuss aspects of amortization when I had no even idea of what that meant. Furthermore, there was nothing like going to teacher-parent conferences and deciding what was important or not for my parents to know. Nevertheless, there I was, trying to bridge the English communication barrier between my parents and the world. How do parents feel relying on inexpert translators and interpreters such as me? Is communication a basic right or a privilege? Who is responsible?

Ana mentioned her father being highly involved in her education until they came to the United States. She said, “[my parents] were able to be more involved like with my teachers, and going to school...when we moved here, they try to be involved, but there was just only so much they could do.” If schools were equipped with racially/ethnically matched teachers, would communication still be a barrier for parents?

For my *plática* with the Rodríguez family I visited their home in a small rural city in the Northwest in the region of Western North Carolina. I intentionally wanted to embody the experiences with the Rodríguez family in their home. I was welcomed and embraced as a new family friend. I wondered about the times an educator had stepped into their home to talk about their children and education. I got an answer. This was the first time.

Pepe not only gave me some great techniques on how to cut chicken consistently, but he also left a huge impression on me, especially as I was not used to having male role models in my education endeavors. Just like Valerie's father, Pepe also did not have a pattern for how to be a parent. He lost his parents at an early age and decided that it was his own responsibility to be both an educator and parent. Pepe added, "*La mayor educación que puede recibir un niño es la casa*" (The greatest education a child can receive is the home). For Pepe, education is provided in different stages based on the development of the person. He added, "*La niñez es una educación, la adolescencia es una educación, y la adultez es otra educación*" (Childhood is an education, adolescence is another education, and adulthood is another education). Pepe is proud to share that the relationship he had with his daughters was a partnership bounded by *confianza*, and freedom to follow their dreams. Since early age he encouraged them to believe and push themselves building up their self-esteem. Pepe comments, "*La autoestima es todo en el ser humano. Si tú tienes una autoestima alta, tú logras todo lo que te propongas*" (Self-esteem is everything for human beings. If you have high self-esteem, you can achieve everything you set out to do). Is the development of self-esteem possible when students and families are not included or respected?

Victoria, Ana's mom, shared that the Latinx culture is a place is a culture that thrives on both cultural prejudices and traditions. Just like Sofia shared her experience with cultural

machismo. Victoria shared with a broom on her hand, “*cómo que la hembra fuese criada para que cocine, para que lave, como ama de casa... las mujeres sí podemos hacer otras cosas*” (As females were raised to cook, to clean, as housewives...women can do other things”). Was I experiencing cultural *machismo* while Victoria was telling me about it?

Victoria frankly told me that she provided a lot of trust in her daughters to follow their dreams. However, she also had *practical* conversations with them about their future. Victoria explained, “*Debemos dárle confianza y libertad y decirles, mira, hay métodos anticonceptivos para que no te embaraces. ¡Estudia! ¡Trabaja! El futuro está en tus manos*” ([We must] give them the confidence and freedom and tell them, Look, there are contraceptive methods so you don’t get pregnant. Study. The future is in your hands).

Victoria explained to me that she was very lucky for having the opportunity to formally complete an equivalent to an associate’s degree in accounting in her country. However, when she came to the United States, she ended up not using her degree because of the difficulties with the English language. Victoria told me, “*Yo trabajo en una factoria por el Inglés, porque soy contadora. Yo estudié, y trabajé en una oficina por que mi papá igual me impulsó mucho a estudiar*” (I work in a factory because [lack] of English. I am an accountant, I studied. I worked in an office because my dad pushed me a lot to study). Even with mastery in the English language, would Victoria and many other immigrants with foreign degrees recognized the same way as in their home countries?

Deficit-models reinforced by meritocracy and color-blindness are endemic to the experience of individuals of color in the United States. This form of modern colonization overshadows the formidable abilities, skills, and cultural wealth (Yosso, 2006) that Latinx parents bring to educational spaces. Further, by disengaging parents and cultures as important

and necessary funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005). What message are we providing as a society to the present and future generation of leaders and citizens of this land?

How do Latinx parents leverage cultural wealth in post-secondary educational spaces in the region of Western North Carolina? To address my other research question, Critical Race Theory/LatCrit provided an important avenue to articulate the need for the lived experiences of individuals of color to be seen as *legitimate* and *crucial* to the understanding (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012) of their realities in a racist society. Solorzano and Yosso (2000) expand that humanizing the lived experiences of individuals of color *exposes* and *challenges* the tales as we experienced in the earlier question on how the involvement diverges from dominant discourses. This is of most significance due to the long historical educational disparities, unpromising attainment rates, as well as the dearth of research focused on Latinx parental engagement in post-secondary educational spaces in the region, the state of North Carolina, and in the nation. This project re-centered parents and families as important funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et.al. 2005) in the educational experience and enterprise. Moreover, this study provided via *pláticas* a space of liberation, an important space to name their worlds.

I entered the *pláticas* with an open heart and open mind. I troubled all of those instances as a society we seem to know the answers, and yet, we do not. I troubled my own thoughts, privileges, and understandings and yet, I needed to tag along in this study to share along with my co-participants observations, my own story. Our lived experiences, our stories with our own understandings, paradoxes, contradictions, and complications that have been filtered through so much, and yet, are still our own.

I discovered from very early stages of this project the magnitude of deficit-oriented research that currently informs our policies and laws. I read thousands of articles and dissertations and references to the deficiencies of the person, the culture, etc. This work needed to be different. I don't have the answers, but I do have high expectations for equitable educational experiences for *all* students. I purposefully, and thoughtfully changed from a paradigm of overcoming barriers – like a hamster on a wheel with no end – to amplifying and cultivating our strengths as people and as a culture. My life has been much richer by learning from my own and other cultures, being bilingual, multicultural, for being a Colombian-American, for living in-between, for honoring my past and present, and future in the New Latino South. I documented in my journal,

I am a proud Latino.

I am proud Colombian-American.

I am proud to be married to a Mexican national that extended my family beyond borders.

I love to travel, to explore the world, and eat amazing foods.

I love music; dance and I love my family and friends.

I love the impact that education has on people!

Sometimes we eat arepas and sometimes tortillas and other times pupusas.

My family belongs to many, many countries.

Sometimes we understand each other, and other times no coordinamos!

We speak Spanish and English. Most of the times we combine both.

Sometimes other languages are introduced and we embrace them all.

Sometimes we crave Pho, other times sopa de pollo o pozole.

I love Hickory, but also love Medellin.

I enjoy the beach in Cancún as much as I enjoy Clearwater.

Sometimes we make compromises on what part to travel since visiting one excludes the other one.

I love this country and all its beauty. But, I also appreciate the beauty that comes from elsewhere.

Sometimes I fit in, Most of the time I don't.

I love Colombian food– específicamente Bandeja Paisa but I also love tortas de milanesa.

Sometimes people say I am Brown. Sometimes White, sometimes don't know.

Most of the time I say, does it even matter?

I love being bilingual and multicultural.

Sometimes people ask me where I am from.
Sometimes I ask myself the same question?
I love my accent. It makes me unique and one of my life rules is to BE YOU!
Sometimes I pray to Virgen de Guadalupe and other times to Virgen María y Divino niño. Others times, I meditate directly to God.

To me Being Latino is honoring the past, your heritage, honoring your learning from each other, struggling together, succeeding together, and appreciating together.

We are of all shades and colors, languages and our stories are very different, but our struggles seem similar. We often celebrate Latinx heritage in a month, but I celebrate it every day. I am Latino and proud-Always.

Through this journey, I inquired about my own life, my parents, and had the immense privilege and pleasure to think with Valerie, Luis, and Sofia Pérez and Ana, Victoria, and Pepe Rodríguez. Their journeys in the United States are incredible and very useful in thinking about parental engagement in the region of Western North Carolina.

The Pérez and the Rodríguez parents are the cultural guardians of their families and have an important and simultaneously difficult job of raising their children, particularly in a foreign country full of possibilities and limitations. Nevertheless, their stories indicated that they were persisting and thriving. As parents they found the best ways to learn, grow and instill in their children values that will help them as they move along in their development. While I expected to see a clear separation in the educational experience (childhood, high school and college), my co-participants referred to them all as one and the same; education and *educación* could not be separated. In fact, it was complementary. We all agreed that education and *educación* starts at home. Pepe encapsulated the sentiment by sharing,

“La mayor educación que puede recibir un niño, es la casa. Sus padres son los mejores educadores del mundo cuando se lo proponen” (The greatest education that a child receives is from home. Parents are the greatest educators of the world when they propose it).

For Pepe Rodríguez, it was important to think of *educación* in different stages based on the development of the person. He shared, “*La niñez es una educación, la adolescencia es otra educación y la adultez es otra educación*” (Childhood is an education, adolescence is another education and adulthood is other type of education). I have not thought about parental engagement in that way before, but Pepe provided a helpful framework that may be of benefit to other people. For example, I can think of many examples where this is true in my own life. Clearly, the information that was beneficial for me as a child is very different to the conversations that I currently have with my parents as an adult. What information may be helpful for high school students and college students transitioning from adolescence to adulthood?

For Victoria Rodríguez, Ana’s mother, it was important to honor the memory of her deceased father, and through the many memories and life lessons her father inculcated a great value to education and trust that keeps his spirit alive. It is Victoria’s wishes that the same teachings will serve as legacy to her grandchildren one day. Victoria shared,

“*El [padre] tuvo mucha confianza conmigo y esa misma confianza yo se la inculque a mis hijas*” (He [father] had a lot of trust with me and that is the same I instilled to my daughters).

Sofía Pérez, Valerie’s mother, wholeheartedly believes in being proud of who you are and where you come from. She adds, “*Saber de dónde eres te hace superarte*” (knowing where you come from makes you better). For example, knowing the language of your parents and being able to communicate with them is one way to learn more about where you come from. Victoria utilizes food and fellowship to pass on values and stories. She shared with me

that Ana comes home on Sundays, and this day is a big celebration for the family to cook together, talk about their lives, and to experience fellowship. Since I first visited their home, I was invited to partake in the celebrations. Ana's favorite meal is rice, beans, grilled chicken breast, and homegrown tomatoes, and that is exactly the menu for the day. Curiously, one way that my mom asks to see me is by inviting me to eat some of her food. I do know that she does not enjoy cooking as much, but it gives me a cue that she wants to spend time with me.

Luis Pérez, on the other hand, concentrated on much of the work in the early years. He shared from his parenting classes that early years were crucial to the development of his daughters. Luis recognized that he had gaps on his parental knowledge and was determined to break a cycle of abuse by teaching his children without “*golpes*”. He added,

“Desde chiquitos tú tienes que motivarlos...o sea apoyándolas y apoyándolas y dándoles ánimo pero también celebrarles sus triunfos” (since they are little you have to motivate them... you know, support them, support them and given them encouragement and also celebrate their triumphs).

Valerie eloquently shared, “[my parents] made sure to tell everyone my kids are smart, my kids are going to be something one day, they always showed us off to everybody.” Valerie recalls some of her relatives who would make comments to their children even as a joke, “you are not smart, you are stupid.” She shared, “...deep down I know that probably that hurt their feelings... my parents never humiliated us.”

Luis commented, “*Si ustedes ven en un espejo, ¿qué van a ver? Su reflejo, y cómo eres tú, así son tus hijos* (if you look in a mirror, what do you see? Your own reflection. And as you are, so are your children). Luis had extremely high expectations of his daughters and always took time to encourage them and celebrate their accomplishments, big or small. He

mentioned even when they would bring a drawing; he would show excitement to know more about it. He was engaged, and present. When they would come home with challenges, he would motivate them to overcome those obstacles. He would cheer them, and tell them, “*tú puedes*” (you can do it). Therefore, not surprisingly when I first asked Valerie what attributed her success, she responded, “determination of *me* for always having a goal. Since I was younger, I knew I was going to get my masters, I knew I was gonna get my bachelors, I’m going to do this.” Valerie, Ana, and my parents believed we could do it, and so we did!”

In summary, the shift in focus from deficiencies to strengths has tremendous consequences for practitioners, educators, and policymakers. The funds of knowledge revealed in this project narrated a different story of Latinx parental involvement. For example, from the first fund of knowledge introduced by Valerie, “I have always been scared because I’m like a Brown, Mexican girl,” the co-participants discussed intimate issues that affect them and their families daily such as immigration, language, racialized presence, and advocacy. In the second fund of knowledge presented by Sofia, “Valerie, go to school, or you are going to end like us,” the co-participants conversed about educational challenges in rural Mexico, colliding cultural teaching, utilizing parenting classes to acknowledge parenting gaps, cultural domination of women through *machismo*, and small and meaningful disruptions. In the third fund of knowledge, Ana shared with enthusiasm, “College... Wow, this is really my crowd.” This fund centered on family, the performance of Whiteness to fit in, college campus as a source to fuel cultural wealth, and the importance of campus involvement. The fourth fund of knowledge, by Ana, “They supported as much as they could. And for me, that was enough,” presents the struggles of when you oppress people so much, that they end up believing the story. In this fund, there is an emphasis on challenges for new

immigrants, such as communication, role switching, self-esteem, and living amid prejudices and traditions. The final fund of knowledge presented by Pepe encapsulated the critical concept that “the greatest education a child can receive is from home.” In this fund, there is a focus on *educación* and education, *confianza*, self-education, and individual responsibilities.

Through our *pláticas*, we had the opportunity to confront deficit discourses that permeate in our educational spaces and provide a different picture of what occurs when you craft the opportunity to include people in their own lives, and in their questions. Could the voices of the parents be part of the solution in moving the needle forward in educational attainment and equity?

Chapter 6: Moving the Needle Forward- Reflections, Implications, and Conclusions

This chapter is not the beginning or a final conclusion; it is neither a hello nor a goodbye. This is a tentative and provisional space to provide some reflections and thoughts. This space neither departs nor imparts, but extends an invitation of possibilities and hopes that our journeys will cross in some shape and/or form. This is also a special request for you, the reader, to be thoughtful and intentional in providing platforms in which voices and ideas, from those that are often silenced and marginalized are allowed to emerge.

A famous popular quote by Zig Ziglar reminds us that we cannot change our beginning, but we can start where you are, and change the ending. This project is a social justice endeavor, a responsibility, a duty, and an important call to lift each other up by sharing our strengths, skills, and abilities. This invitation has been extended to you, the reader, to assist us in moving the needle forward in our efforts towards parity and equity.

The purposes of this project were to provide a space via *pláticas* to think with Latinx parents about their involvement in post-secondary educational spaces while supporting their children's attainment of a baccalaureate degree within the region of Western North Carolina. Secondly, to disrupt deficit thinking that permeates within educational research and continues to overshadow the formidable cultural wealth that Latinx parents employ to foster success. Finally, this study embodied a commitment to move the needle forward in degree attainment, educational parity and equity. The following animated the study:

- How Latinx parents leverage cultural wealth in post-secondary educational spaces in the region of Western North Carolina;

- How Latinx parents' involvement diverge from dominant discourse regarding educational attainment;
- How this study help to move the needle forward in educational attainment.

Why should you care?

This study began long before I started my doctoral studies in the fall of 2013. In fact, the seed of this study started upon my arrival to the United States in late October of 2000, more than 19 years ago. For the first time in my life, I was given an identity that I did not know much about. Literally overnight, I became part of the Latinx/Hispanic community in the United States.

During my early years growing up in Colombia, my familiarity with being Latin American was in terms of relating to someone located geographically within a Latin America region or country and bound together by our Latin origin languages. However, being Latinx in the United States was different. It had a bigger connotation that I could possibly describe; it had its own effects and affects, and it moved beyond a category of difference to indicate geographically the whereabouts of my country of birth, to an actual experience that leached in me, my parents, family, and others in my community. As early as high school, I observed that Latinx students were not entering post-secondary education.

High school graduation, a celebratory moment for many, became a place of warnings and sirens that would flash in my head like a scary movie. I needed a different plan. I wanted to go to college and fulfill the promise that my mom urged us to finish. I did not want to disappoint her. To be honest with you, I don't know if I would have persisted without the

advocacy, encouragement, and support of my mother to graduate from high school and obtain several other degrees afterwards.

The National Council on La Raza, known today as UnidosUS, concurs about the benefits of parental engagement from early educational experiences to high school for Latinx students. Things such as facilitating communication with families, incorporating cultural assets such as language, developing high expectations, building communities and supports, and partnership with higher institutions (NCLR, 2012) are of most important core qualities that will ensure that students and parents benefit and maximize from the engagement. Thusly, my mother's high expectations early on and during my studies, her vision for the future, and the encouragement to increase my knowledge and support networks have been a force crucial in my development. However, parental engagement did not end in high school for me.

A lot of things have changed since my arrival to the United States. My community has changed, my family has changed, my neighborhood has changed, and I have changed. What has not changed has been the contradictions, ambiguities, and the outcomes that continue to be based on someone's race or ethnicity. These conversations remain timely and important.

For all shades of Latinxs, going to college continues to be a rarity. Even as more conversations about post-secondary education are emerging and students and families indicate higher confidence in going post-secondary, the reality is a four-year degree remains a far-reaching dream. Espinosa et al. (2019) confirmed that 12.2% of Latinxs ages 25 and older in the United States had attained a four-year degree, while only 8% attained an associate degree. There are serious leaks in our educational pipeline that continue to make

our students and communities most vulnerable from graduating from high school to attaining advanced degrees.

Triplett and Ford (2019), in *E(race)ing Inequities: The State of Racial Equity in North Carolina Public Schools*, provided a comprehensive analysis of the racial conditions of the K-12 system in North Carolina public Schools. Since formal education in the United States is a pre-defined continuum, I closely monitor the K-12 system since its policies and initiatives directly affect graduation, and thus, post-secondary degree attainment. The authors' preamble this report, asserting the long history of racial disparities in North Carolina public schools. Therefore, centralizing race in the analysis provided important empirical data necessary to open up conversations around race and education. Their questions were simple and yet powerful: Does race influence access and outcomes for students of color?

In their findings, Triplett and Ford (2019) report, "Without exception...race functions to diminish both the access and the outcomes of students of color [in North Carolina]" (p. 4). The authors expanded, "Our results confirm the existence of long-standing racial gaps in achievement, graduation/dropout, grade point average, SAT scores, and ACT scores" (p. 4). Moreover, the authors confirm "students of color [in North Carolina] have diminished access to the resources that affect success, including access to advanced coursework, experienced teachers, and racially/ethnically matched teachers" (p.5). Are these systemic barriers perpetuating deficit thinking in our region, state and country? How can we transform our cultural landscapes to move the needle forward in equity and parity?

Implications for Literature

The literature on Latinx parental involvement in educational spaces comes with many disparities of values, concepts, and even definitions. However, it is noticeable that as the

students move through the education pipeline, the voices of parents diminish, whether intentionally or not, by systemic defaults. This is contrary to the ideas offered by co-participants of the project that challenged education as mere transactional to an all-encompassing holistic view of *educación* that is more appropriate in the discussion of the contributions of Latinx parents in educational enterprise. In other words, students, parents and families don't necessarily think of education as a transaction such as receiving a diploma or degree, but they are involved in professional and personal development experiences to better themselves and their lives. Could *pláticas* be a space appropriate to spark some of those conversations?

By moving away from cultural deficit views that render parents and families as unconnected, uninvolved, and ignorant, to strength-based conversations that assume that all lived experiences are valuable and considered as vital funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005), we can begin to tap into the cultural wealth of experiences that can be cultivated and amplified. This requires all of us to look inwards into our own biases, understandings, policies, and practices and carefully examine how we can better align them to serve our students.

The final implication for literature was the addition of new voices to the educational enterprise. We are thankful to our brothers and sisters from locations that have been traditional hubs for Latinxs in the United States because we have learned so much from their struggles and successes. However, the Latinx diaspora continues to extend to other areas such as rural communities in Western Carolina, adding another dimension of complexity to its intersection with other invisible and invisible identities.

Implications for Research & Practice

K-12 education. The participants of this project provided ample ideas with great utility for K-12 education. First, the parents and families delineated many ways in which they are involved in the education of their children. However, there was not one specific way to describe their involvement, but rather a set of home teachings and learned strategies that made it work for them. Teachers in the K-12 arena could benefit significantly by bringing into their classrooms curriculum, pedagogies, conversations, and lessons from home about *educación* and education, and actively collaborating in those exchanges to better serve their students. This project emerged from *pláticas* with only two families. What else could we learn if each K-12 educator would take the opportunity to engage with parents and families as a vitals fund of knowledge? For example, among the many other lessons learned from the co-participants of this project, Pepe taught us about promoting self-esteem from an early age. Luis shared high expectations and consistent positive encouragement. Sofia highlighted the importance of knowing your roots and language. From Victoria, we learned about confidence, independence, and freedom to follow our dreams.

Secondly, as the children progressed through the K-12 system pipeline, the voices of the parents were often overshadowed by dominant ideas of individual responsibility, accountability, and independence. Are these points of divergence in which families from this project challenged the view of parental involvement in educational spaces?

Ana, for example, mentioned the disheartening landscape of not having other students that looked like her in honors and advanced placement (AP) courses. Ana internalized this information by believing that students like her were not smart and did not necessarily want to go to college. Ana was conditioned to think about individual fault and the failure of the

student, not thinking about systemic constraints that allow for this to happen. Are parents active participants in the selection of courses? Are parents provided training to know how to guide and prepare their students? Who and how are students being tracked? Who decides who enters or not post-secondary education?

The co-participants of this project indicated their high respect of teachers, school counselors, and administrators as experts in their fields, but also recognized that parents are the experts in knowing their children. This relationship works because of the mutual commitment of better serving the students. What are we doing within our K-12 spaces to promote conversations between parents and teachers? Parents and administrators? Parents and school counselors?

Finally, Taubman (2009) offers an interesting perspective in justifying accountability in education, where students are being reduced to numbers, "...if tests tell us what is important to know as a teacher, and if these tests are fabricated by centers of control beyond the reach of teachers, then the teachers' passions, commitments, and wisdom count less and less" (p. 53). Therefore, if both K-12 system and parents have the same goals of serving their students, the intentionally willed and planned space between K-12 educators and parents could serve as a space of teaching/learning, a place for advocacy, and a place to build coalitions to transform K-12 education.

Post-secondary Education. This project was born out of the contest and struggle wherein my fellow members of the Latinx community continue to occupy the lowest levels of educational attainment in North Carolina and the United States. Particularly concerning are the post-secondary education numbers that continue to indicate that while the community college has become the opening door for many Latinxs into higher education, the reality tells

us a different story. Over 90% of Latinx students do not attain an associate degree or continue with their studies at a four-year institution.

The community college and university system could benefit from formalizing mentoring and sponsorship opportunities in which enrolled students and graduates from four-year institutions have opportunities to serve as college representatives and mentors. This would help prospective students to look up to them, and even rely on them for educational and cultural information. Several initiatives are well known throughout different spaces, such as minority mentoring programs, big brother/big sister, and even some programs that connect education with industries within the community at large. However, within post-secondary education, transitioning programming and support of this kind remains a possibility and a necessity. Could *pláticas* among representatives from both community colleges and universities be a starting point?

As the co-participants of this project alluded, representation of Latinxs in college plays a vital role in educational attainment. For example, Ana enthusiastically shared that college was a critical moment of realization that they were other smart Latinxs in college, “Wow, this is really my crowd.” Are advisors at the community colleges and universities prepared to work with students holistically, considering that education and *educación* require different skills, abilities, and mindsets? Are there spaces on campus in which students can have *pláticas* with others about their experiences, struggles, and successes?

Community colleges and four-year institutions have the opportunity to participate in the development of students not only academically, but also culturally. Ana indicated that college was a place for her to learn about her heritage, culture, and language. She felt proud! At the same time, Valerie presented a grueling reality of the experiences of people of color in

the United States, especially as she navigated spaces as a brown, Mexican, young girl. Are our institutions providing the necessary cultural development that our students need to be successful citizens in our communities? What could we learn by including the voices of parents in our different campus organizations, and even Greek life?

Victoria commented about her experiences attending activities invited during Ana's time in college. She added, with high praise, how being involved in college was very beneficial for Ana's development. Victoria commented, "*una de las enseñanzas Fque les dan, es que tienen que ser buenas hijas, hermanas, buenas personas. Ayudarse entre ellas, y yo creo que si es muy bonito*" (one of the teachings that they are given is that they have to be good daughters, good sisters, good people. They have to help each other, and I think this is indeed beautiful). Victoria included this was also a point of bonding, and an opportunity to learn first-hand who were Ana's friends and acquaintances in college. Victoria commented that her involvement with Ana in college gave her a chance not only assist Ana through her personal development, but gave her also the opportunity to be in the lives of other college students. Victoria enjoyed treating them as her children and gave them advice when asked about relationships, struggles, and life in general.

Lastly, all the implications presented earlier for our K-12 educators in moving the needle forward in educational attainment is echoed in post-secondary education — first, the use of home teachings about *educación* and education to inform our teaching and learning, and secondly, promoting the inclusion of the parents' voices into post-secondary educational environments. The cultural wealth and abundance of lived experiences of the parents can help institutions leverage positive experiences in college. Ana, Valerie, and I myself continue to experience our parents' involvement in our education and *educación* throughout our

lifespans. Finally, post-secondary educators are well-positioned to cultivate spaces in which staff, faculty, families, and students have the opportunity to think and engage in their lives, their interrogations, and their visions in the becoming of post-secondary education in the 21st century.

Cultivating Spaces via *Pláticas*. This study relied in the participatory process of creating our realities. Encouraged by Paulo Freire (2000), “...I cannot think for others or without others, nor can others think for me” (p. 108). I used *pláticas* or conversations as part of this arrangement.

During this project I had the opportunity to *platicar* with the Pérez and Rodríguez families about their unique journeys in the United States and their role in the educational enterprise. *Pláticas* provided an appropriate platform for this project, because of the deep connection with Latinx methodology, the role of participants as co-constructors, and the mutual respect and *confianza* that bounded us. Moreover, *pláticas* became an important space that served for reflection, healing, and building community.

Pláticas have a deep connection with Latinx methodologies and provided an important framework for shared meaning that builds upon the *everydayness* of our conversations. For example this project demonstrated the many forms that it may take shape, a *plática* in a coffee shop, a non-profit organization, my home, to the participant’s home, *plática* behind a stove while cooking, a *plática* with my dissertation advisor in a text message, *pláticas* with my dissertation committee over emails, and even having a *plática* with myself as I reflected on this project. This project supports the idea that teaching and learning can occur anywhere.

A *plática* involves a participatory and dynamic engagement where the participants of this project were seen as crucial contributors *or co-constructors* (Fierros & Delgado-Bernal, 2016). In other words, the research process was flattened and the roles were blurred to indicate the openness of the arrangement that required mutual care, vulnerability, and reciprocity or what Bracero (1998) called the “quality of optimal relatedness” (p. 271) in which social relationships are developed in the Latinx community, *confianza*. An example was observed when Sofia shared with me about her joy for learning “*qué bonito saber*” and feeling empowered to *platicar*. She felt listened to, important, and equal in this arrangement. Would a conventional research project have given Sofia the opportunity to feel empowered?

In my *pláticas* with both the Rodríguez and Pérez families over just a short time, I learned more than I have learned in my lifetime in formal education and yet, parents and families of color continue to be absent in the conversations about post-secondary education in the state and nation. Their voices and experiences more than ever remain important and necessary as we move the needle forward in educational attainment in Western North Carolina, in the State of North Carolina, and in the nation.

The parents’ and families’ lived experiences, lessons, struggles, and successes contribute to the disruption of the modern colonization that has caused deficit thinking to be normalized without question. Instead, we extend our efforts, with new methods, new information that Anzaldúa encouraged us about, “...theories that cross borders, that blur boundaries—new kinds of theories with new theorizing methods” (1990, p. xxv). In other words, we must create opportunities for people to reimagine themselves in possibilities instead of probabilities.

At the intersection of both calls from Freire and Anzaldúa, Thinking with Theory (Jackson and Mazzei, 2012) grabbed me and pulled me to “think with the theory or theory to think with the data” (p. ii). It gave me a platform to recognize that I too belonged in the educational enterprise, that my observations since my arrival to this country of Brown children not attaining degrees was not relevant to just my high school, and region, but is a concern that we share as a state and as a nation. Perhaps I was on to something believing that it was not a coincidence that my mother and I both decided to stay in education. We are visionaries, we saw a need and wanted to make a difference in our community.

Thinking with theory expanded my horizons, to meet new people to learn new things, to open up new alternatives including my own. I deliberately explained in details my choices; what I was learning, inquiring, and troubling. I had more questions than answers, and it is my hope that this manuscript will continue to produce even more. I was attuned to Mazzei and Jackson (2012), warning of “being seduced by the desire to create a coherent and interesting narrative” (p. 745). Especially as grand narratives are outdated, unwelcomed, and need to be revisited. There is a lot more that we need to learn. This work is messy, but nevertheless, I wanted to have a placeholder to check with you, the reader, about what is this producing in you, to you, and for you. Your voice is also important. I am grateful to share with you this space of learning, teaching, healing, and celebration.

Disrupting the Ground. This project was constructed from the mindset of providing a safe space via *pláticas* to think with parents and theory about their involvement in post-secondary spaces in the region of Western North Carolina which assumed that most of the preparation work was already completed. Nevertheless, through this project I discovered that,

by its mere presence, this very project is preparing, disrupting, and plowing the ground before the seeds can be sown and cultivated. I plead for more farmers.

Innovation as Social Justice. Systemic barriers both current and historic continue to shape the educational landscape in North Carolina, especially rural Western North Carolina. However, the good news is that more and more programs across the state of North Carolina are paying attention to the intersection of racial disparities and education. For example, for early childhood, the program *Pathways* serves students and families birth through eight years old. This program uses a racial equity lens, “Disaggregating data, ensuring people of color and white people work together, encouraging and supporting partner organizations to lead with a racial equity lens, and convening organizations so they can learn together, support each other, and partner” (NC Early Childhood Foundation, 2019, p. 16). Further benefiting some counties of the Western North Carolina Region, initiatives such as *Juntos*, led by North Carolina State University, encapsulate the spirit that post-secondary education is a collaboration and together students and parents form intentional and meaningful partnerships to incentivize a college going culture. Moreover, recent developments in the Fall 2019 semester, Appalachian State University has introduced the Appalachian College Advising Corps initiative to the Western North Carolina region whose aim is to assist underrepresented, low-income, and first-generation students to succeed in postsecondary education.

Are these the type of programs that Tippet and Standord (2019) referred as “extraordinary attention and innovation” (p. 13) in North Carolina to reach our post-secondary attainment goals? For instance, the program *Juntos* reported for the 2016-2017 cohort, 100% of students in the 12th grade graduated from high school, and 52% of the

seniors enrolled in college, 5% above the national average. Simultaneously, students that participated in those programs reported high rates of confidence about their education after high school, and high levels of confidence about graduating from high school (Juntos, 2017). Their progress is encouraging, especially as they work with limited resources and on a mostly volunteer basis; however, is it enough to reach our degree attainment goals? Could we replicate their success on a larger scale? What would be the conditions to make that occur? Where could we start?

A good starting point could be by supporting programs such as the Appalachian College Advising Corps, *Juntos*, and Pathways, among others. We could learn from their successes and failures to serve as an experiential place that is always providing us with new data points. Do these programs have commonalities? They do to me.

First, they bring to the table a cultural responsiveness that is carefully disseminated in the curriculum and practices. These programs are individualized, and there is an acute understanding that the same approach does not work for all students. Secondly, these programs are collaborative by default. All the programs shared a collaborative spirit that embraces each other and actively engages in partnerships to share information and resources to make things happen. They understand well that they cannot do this work alone. The final commonality of those programs is the perception of parents and families. These programs see parents as important collaborators and essential in the education experience. Their workshops and trainings usually have a family and parent engagement component that makes them participants and also accountable in the educational experiences of their children. Is the success of those programs due to the inclusion of parents and families as crucial to the

educational enterprise? In other words, could those programs be thinking of parents and families as important fund of knowledge?

Conclusion

Determinants of Latinx educational achievement are no different from other ethnic and racial marginalized groups. However, collectively, educational inequalities and leaks in the education pipeline (Yosso, 2006) render Latinxs more vulnerable to underachieve in the U.S. educational system. While progress has been made concerning educational attainment, Latinx attainment remains the lowest percentage compared to other major ethnic groups at every level from high school to higher education degrees. Advanced schooling is becoming even more critical for labor market success, and meaningful civic engagement and promoting Latinx student success represents a more stable future as the offspring of Latin American immigrants will continue to be the fastest-growing segment in the U.S. Schools (Tienda, 2009). The literature shows undoubtedly a link between parent involvement and personal and academic outcomes. Reinscribing the parents to the educational experience is even more relevant since the family approach is more culturally appropriate among Latinx communities (Hobbs, 2004). As presented in this project, Latinx parents value *educación* and the education that the United States offers. However, there was no evidence to indicate a separation; instead, the collaborative effort from early years to college and beyond is what made this arrangement work. One may be curious why our educational practices limits parental involvement and participation in the educational experience? The co-participants of this project shared through our *pláticas* important ideas that would have been discarded otherwise. Our success as a nation, state, and as a region will be dictated by the commitment

of institutions, individuals, and communities in providing equal opportunities for all students to succeed in education, in the workforce, and in their lives. *Seguimos en la lucha!*

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Appendix A: IRB Approval

To: JuanEs Ramirez
Distance Education Distance Education
CAMPUS EMAIL

From: Robin Tyndall, IRB Administrator
Date: 4/10/2019
RE: Notice of IRB Exemption

STUDY #: 18-0263

STUDY TITLE: LEVERAGING LATINX PARENTS' CULTURAL WEALTH: PLÁTICAS WITH PARENTS ABOUT THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL SPACES IN WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA

Exemption Category: (2) Anonymous Educational Tests, Surveys, Interviews or Observations

This study involves minimal risk and meets the exemption category cited above. In accordance with 45 CFR 46.101(b) and University policy and procedures, the research activities described in the study materials are exempt from further IRB review.

All approved documents for this study, including consent forms, can be accessed by logging into IRBIS. Use the following directions to access approved study documents.

1. Log into IRBIS
2. Click "Home" on the top toolbar
3. Click "My Studies" under the heading "All My Studies"
4. Click on the IRB number for the study you wish to access
5. Click on the reference ID for your submission
6. Click "Attachments" on the left-hand side toolbar
7. Click on the appropriate documents you wish to download

Study Change: Proposed changes to the study require further IRB review when the change involves:

- an external funding source,
- the potential for a conflict of interest,
- a change in location of the research (i.e., country, school system, off site location),
- the contact information for the Principal Investigator,
- the addition of non-Appalachian State University faculty, staff, or students to the research team, or
- the basis for the determination of exemption. Standard Operating Procedure #9 cites examples of changes which affect the basis of the determination of exemption on page 3.

Investigator Responsibilities: All individuals engaged in research with human participants are responsible for compliance with University policies and procedures, and IRB determinations. The Principal Investigator (PI), or Faculty Advisor if the PI is a student, is ultimately responsible for ensuring the protection of research participants; conducting sound ethical research that complies with federal regulations, University policy and procedures; and maintaining study records. The PI should review the IRB's list of PI responsibilities.

To Close the Study: When research procedures with human participants are completed, please send the Request for Closure of IRB Review form to irb@apostate.edu.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Protections Office at (828) 262-2692 (Robin).

Best wishes with your research.

Websites for Information Cited Above

Note: If the link does not work, please copy and paste into your browser, or visit <https://researchprotections.apostate.edu/human-subjects>.

1. Standard Operating Procedure #9: <http://researchprotections.apostate.edu/sites/researchprotections.apostate.edu/files/IRB20SOP920Exemptions20Review%20Determination.pdf>
2. PI responsibilities: <http://researchprotections.apostate.edu/sites/researchprotections.apostate.edu/files/PI20Responsibilities.pdf>
3. IRB forms: <http://researchprotections.apostate.edu/human-subjects/irb-forms>

Appendix B: Student Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Dear participant,

This letter invites you to participate in a research project that I will be conducting in order to complete my doctoral dissertation through Appalachian State University. The purpose of this project is to provide a critical space via *pláticas* to attend to the perspectives of Latinx parents' involvement in post-secondary educational spaces while supporting their children's attainment of a baccalaureate degree in the region of Western North Carolina.

Appalachian State University's Institutional Review Board has determined this study to be exempt from IRB oversight.

This project has no personal risks or benefits. Your experiences and opinions are very valuable and I seek to use them for scholarly purposes. If you accept to participate, our conversations will be recorded to capture your responses and later deleted after being transcribed. Our conversations will be kept confidential in my personal computer with a secure password to protect the information. In addition, the use of pseudonyms will be utilized to refer to participants in the reports. All the information provided will remain confidential at all times.

This project provides no compensation for your participation. Participants have the right to participate or no participate, to leave at any moment and the right to not respond during the interview.

I estimate that the interview will take about one to two hours of your time in a place that is convenient for you. If you are interested in participating, please sign this form in agreement to participate in this project.

I agree to the terms above, and give my voluntary consent to be part of this project.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you have questions about this project contact:

JuanEs Ramírez, ramirezje@appstate.edu or at 828.303.9635
Doctoral Student

Dr. Laurie A. Ramirez, ramirezla@appstate.edu or at 828-262-8008
Dissertation Chair

Appendix C: Parent Consent to Participate in a Research Study

English Version

Dear Parent,

This letter invites you to participate in a research project that I will be conducting in order to complete my doctoral dissertation through Appalachian State University. The purpose of this project is to provide a critical space via *pláticas* to attend to the perspectives of Latinx parents' involvement in post-secondary educational spaces while supporting their children's attainment of a baccalaureate degree in the region of Western North Carolina.

Appalachian State University's Institutional Review Board has determined this study to be exempt from IRB oversight.

This project has no personal risks or benefits. Your experiences and opinions as a parent are very valuable and I seek to use them for scholarly purposes. If you accept to participate, our conversations will be recorded to capture your responses and later deleted after being transcribed. Our conversations will be kept confidential in my personal computer with a secure password to protect the information. In addition, the use of pseudonyms will be utilized to refer to participants in the reports. All the information provided will remain confidential at all times.

This project provides no compensation for your participation. Participants have the right to participate or no participate, to leave at any moment and the right to not respond during the interview.

I estimate that the interview will take about one to two hours of your time in a place that is convenient for you. If you are interested in participating, please sign this form in agreement to participate in this project.

I agree to the terms above, and give my voluntary consent to be part of this project.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you have questions about this project contact:

JuanEs Ramirez, ramirezje@appstate.edu or at 828.303.9635
Doctoral Student

Dr. Laurie A. Ramirez, ramirezla@appstate.edu or at 828-262-8008
Dissertation Chair

**Padres Consentimiento para participar en un estudio de investigación
Spanish Version**

Estimado(s) Padre de familia,

Por medio de esta carta les invito a participar en una investigación que estaré llevando a cabo para poder completar mis estudios doctorales en Appalachian State University. El propósito de este estudio es proveer un espacio crítico via *pláticas* para tomar en cuenta las perspectivas de los padres Latinxs en los espacios educativos postsecundarios mientras apoya a sus hijos obtener una carrera universitaria en la región del oeste de Carolina del Norte.

La Junta de Revisión Institucional de Appalachian State University ha determinado que este estudio está exento de la supervisión del IRB.

Este proyecto no tiene riesgos o beneficios personales. Sus experiencias y opiniones como padres de familia son muy valiosas y espero utilizarlas objetivamente para documentar mi investigación. Sus respuestas serán confidenciales y en ningún caso yo revelaré la fuente de mi información.

Si aceptan participar yo estaré grabando la conversación para poder conservar sus respuestas y después de transcribir la información será borrada. Nuestra conversación será guardada en mi computadora personal con una contraseña para proteger la información. Además, el uso de seudónimos será utilizado al referirme a los participantes en los reportes. Toda su información es estrictamente confidencial.

Este proyecto no incluye ninguna clase de compensación por su participación. Los participantes tienen el libre derecho de participar, pueden retirarse en cualquier momento durante la entrevista, y queda a su discreción el no responder preguntas durante la entrevista. Estimo que la entrevista solo durará una o dos horas de su tiempo y se llevará a cabo en el lugar que usted estime conveniente. Si desea participar, por favor de firmar esta forma de que usted está de acuerdo en participar libremente en esta investigación.

Estoy de acuerdo con todos los términos mencionados previamente, y doy mi consentimiento voluntario para participar en esta investigación.

Firma: _____ Fecha: _____

Si tengo dudas sobre este proyecto puedo contactar a
JuanEs Ramírez, ramirezje@appstate.edu o al 828.303.9635
Estudiante de estudios doctorales

Dr. Laurie A. Ramírez, ramirezla@appstate.edu o al 828-262-8008
Directora de Tesis

Appendix D: Student Participant Criteria

- Diverse countries representation from Latin America or Hispanic background;
- Participation of a parent or guardian;
- The student participant must have attained a baccalaureate degree from the in Western North Carolina region;
- Be available for up to two hours for interviews online, telephone, or face-to-face.

Vita

Juan Esteban Ramírez-Escobar was born in Medellín, Colombia to Yolima Escobar-Henao and Ivan Dario Ramirez-Gomez. JuanEs and his family moved to the United States and settled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Western North Carolina in the year 2000. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in International Business and Spanish from Lenoir-Rhyne College and completed a Master of Science from Mountain State University. In addition, Juan Esteban completed an Education Specialist degree and Doctor of Education degree in Higher Education at Appalachian State University.

As a leader in his community, Juan Esteban has served on numerous boards at the local, state, and national level in social justice causes related to equity, diversity, and inclusivity. His mission is to continue the conversations around the cultivation of cultural wealth, advocate for all lived experiences, and craft spaces of *confianza* to keep knowledge on the move. In addition to his passion for education, JuanEs cherishes time with his family, traveling, and learning.