NUESTRA REALIDAD: ILLUMNATING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES

OF MIDDLE-CLASS HISPANIC PARENTS IN

PREDOMINANTY WHITE TEXAS

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

by

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Abstract

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The University of Texas at Arlington, 2014

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As the student population across the nation becomes increasingly diverse,
educators are constantly met with challenges that go beyond teaching. While the
Latino[1] population continues to grow, and the projection of the U.S. becoming a
majority-minority nation is fulfilled, it is important to pay close attention to the
educational inequities and challenges that continue to exist for students of color.
Parents of color[2], which is defined in this study as Hispanic parents of Mexican
origin, have been urged to actively participate in schools in an effort to increase

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[1] *Hispanics/ Latinos* – these terms are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent (U.S. Census, 2010).

[2] *Parents of color*-This term is often used to define population which include African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. For the purpose of this study, this term will be used to define Hispanic parents of Mexican and Guatemalan origin.

student achievement. However, the literature seldom distinguishes between the experiences of Hispanic parents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. This qualitative study specifically examined how eight middle-class Hispanic parents perceive their involvement[3] in predominantly White schools, using Critical Race and Latino Critical Theories as tools for analysis. Conspicuously absent are studies that describe the unique experience of upper-income Hispanic parents with respect to their children's schooling. The primary data collection sources included two rounds of semi-structured individual interviews, a focus group, demographic questionnaire, observations, and analytical memoing. The findings of this study revealed differing definitions of parent involvement, as well as instances of racism and discrimination noted by participants.

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[3] *Parent involvement*-the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication with school staff involving student academic learning and other school activities (DoE, 2004)

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, there has been a considerable change in the

makeup of the United States population. The Population Reference Bureau (2010)

has noted that the nation is growing in size and diversity. Data from the 2000

Census showed the number of Hispanics[4] in the United States growing up to 35

million, making Hispanics the largest minority group in the nation. Today,

Latinos continue to be among the fastest growing ethnic group in the United

States, with the group comprising 17% of the nation's population in 2013 (Pew

Research Center, 2014). It is estimated that the Hispanic population will continue

to grow, with the United States becoming a majority-minority nation for the first

time ever since1943 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013a). Also, it is believed that the

percentage of the population of Hispanic or Latino origin will increase from 15.9

million to 34.4 million by 2060, with one in every three residents being of

Hispanic descent.

However, the largest racial and ethnic minority group continues to trail

their White peers in educational attainment, including graduation from higher

education (Pew Hispanics, 2012). In 2012, the National Center for Education

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[4] *Hispanics/ Latinos* – these terms are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent (U.S. Census, 2010).

Statistics (NCES) reported that Hispanics had the lowest rate (79%) of high school completion compared to 89% of Whites. The group also had the highest percentage of student dropout rate, with 15% of Latinos ages 16-24 not enrolled in either high school or college (NCES, 2012). While the number of students enrolled in colleges and universities has increased, Hispanics still lag behind Whites by 16.4 % and Blacks by 5.9% in attainment of a college degree (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012).

While a significant number of Hispanic students are enrolled in K-12 schools across the nation, there is an urgent need to understand why they continue to encounter educational inequities and challenges at critical points along the academic pipeline (Gay, 2004; Pew Research Hispanic Center, 2012). In 2011, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that Hispanics had the lowest attainment rate of at least a high school diploma (78.1%) and the highest dropout rate (5.8%) compared to Whites (2.4%) and Blacks (4.8%). In addition, Hispanic students continue to trail behind their White counterparts in the completion of a four-year degree. In 2010, 140,000 Hispanic students received a bachelor's degree, compared to 1.2 million non-Hispanic White students (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013b). In an effort to close the achievement gap, the United States Department of Education [U.S. DoE] (2004) has called for an increase in

the parent involvement[5] of families of color and low-income backgrounds, urging increased communication between parents and schools.

As middle-class families of color enter traditionally White schools, their presence has been deemed beneficial to student achievement (Cucchiara & Horvat, 2009; Robinson, 2007). Parents of color[6], which is defined in this study as Hispanic parents of Mexican origin, have been urged to actively participate in schools (Hong, 2011; Laureau & Hovart, 1999; Lopez, 2001). However, because students from middle-class backgrounds may have greater access to opportunities and resources necessary to achieve at their maximum potential, much of the research on parent involvement has focused on low-income communities of color (Robinson, 2007). As a result, researchers argue that parents of color have been negatively generalized and infused with deficit-laden perspectives, attributing students' lack of educational achievement to parents' backgrounds and cultures (Robinson, 2007; Valencia, 2010). Much of the literature seldom distinguishes between the experiences of Hispanic parents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

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[5] *Parent involvement*-the participation of parents in regular, two-way, and meaningful communication with school staff involving student academic learning and other school activities (DoE, 2004)
[6] *Parents of color*-This term is often used to define population which include African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. For the purpose of this study, this term will be used to define Hispanic parents of Mexican and Guatemalan origin.

Background of the Study

On any given day, the definition of academic success can be described differently, depending largely on whom you ask. While attributes that include grades, athletics, and even popularity can be a part of the equation, no two people will define *success* in American schools the same way. The accolade of academic achievement has historically been predetermined to belong to White students, with achievement gaps existing between them and most groups of students of color (Singleton & Linton, 2006). Even with a plethora of research in the area of disparities in academic achievement, the mystery of educating all children remains a challenge, particularly because, "schools are not designed to educate students of color," (Singleton & Linton, 2006, p. 5), and [schools] continue to blame other social, economic, or political factors.

The southern state in which this research study took place also has an increasingly large population of residents of Hispanic origin. Ranked as one of the fastest growing states in the nation, Texas second in the nation in terms of their Latino population (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013a). With patterns of change mirroring those of the United States, the state is projected to triple the size of the Hispanic population from 5.9 million to 17.2 million by 2040 (Texas State Comptroller's Office of Public Accounts, 2008). The anticipated growth also shows a 530% increase from 1980 to 2040, making Texas a majority-minority state.

The state of Texas Comptroller's Office of Public Accounts (2008) noted

that the drastic changes will require leaders, including those in the educational

systems, to address needs of all its citizens. With Hispanics being the youngest

major racial or ethnic group in the nation, it is no surprise that they are filling up

the seats of pk-16 schools. In 2011, one in four children entering kindergarten in

the United States was Hispanic (Pew Hispanic, 2012). With the accolade of

enrolling the highest number of students in setting of public education, Hispanics

have also shown significant gains in academic achievement. In 2011, the percent

of Hispanic adults ages 25 and older with at least a high school diploma or

equivalent was 63%, a 13% increase from 2000 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013a). A

2012 report by the Pew Hispanic Center recognized that for the first time,

Hispanics (18-24 year-olds) were the largest minority group enrolled in four-year

institutions of higher learning across the nation. The same report also showed

Hispanics received associates and bachelor's degrees at record high numbers. In

Texas, the numbers were similar. With the distinction of being the state with the

second largest elementary and secondary school enrollment, the Texas State Data

Center (2008) projected that the state to have a student population of over 60% by

2040.

Statement of the Problem

A master narrative[7] exists in the United States, which presumes the actions of Hispanic parents are uniform, regardless of income or social status. As more Hispanics are entering the middle-class, it is important to recognize the role they play in their children's education (Agius-Vallejo, 2013). While the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) defines the median household income at $50,000 annually, the Pew Research Center (2012) describes the middle-class as households with two-thirds to double the national median. In 2011, 17% of Hispanics earned between $62,000 and $100,000 and 11.5% earned over $100,000 (Pew Hispanic, 2013a). Despite preponderant imageries that have depicted the group as uneducated and underprivileged, Agius-Vallejo (2013) affirms that the average income and number of Hispanic homeowners in the United States has risen. Even with the growth of the middle-class Hispanic population, however, limited research on their parent involvement experiences in K-12 public schools exists.

Additionally, the state of Texas Comptroller's Office of Public Accounts (2008) noted that the drastic changes in population will require leaders, including those individuals in the educational systems, to address needs of all its citizens, including Hispanics. Through this research, I provide insight into a phenomenon that will not only provide awareness of the Hispanic parents' unique experiences,

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[7] *Master narrative*-a script that has been created by the dominant group (White, heterosexual males) that specifies and controls how some social processes are carried out. It defines and limits value and who is entitled to academic achievement

but also, provide recommendations that will lead to conversations about parental involvement, which may differ from the discourse on this issue.

Purpose of the Study

The problem this study addresses is that scant research exists to provide insight into the experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents, and how they are involved in supporting their children's education. Literature that exists depicts a monolithic portrait of Hispanic parents, and fails to differentiate practices of involvement in their children's education. As such, my purpose for conducting this study is to add to the existing work on parent involvement in schools, while delving into the perceptions and practices of a group that has been overlooked.

The guiding research questions for this study included:

1) How do middle-class Hispanic parents define and perceive their parent involvement experiences in K-12 public schools in Texas?

2) What factors facilitate opportunities and/or create roadblocks to participate in their children's education within these learning communities?

Additionally, the intersection that race, racism, discrimination, and class plays will be examined, in hopes of providing an in-depth understanding into the experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents. This study will to inform educators and policymakers as they continue to design programs and initiatives for parents of all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The research will provide an

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opportunity to improve communication and collaboration between parents,

families, and schools, which may ultimately improve the academic achievement

of all students.

Through the collection of data, I was able to garner results to provide

recommendations that can influence future policy, research, and practice.

Implications for policy include the following: 1) Require employers to allocate

time that would allow parents to attend events that typically take place during the

workday, 2) urge districts and schools to establish a committee to create an action

plan that would identify specific needs and a specific organizational vision to

increase the involvement of all parents, and 3) provide professional development

for teachers and staff that share best practices for increasing parent involvement.

Furthermore, the results of the study can also be applied to programs of

higher education, including scholars who are interested in finding solutions to

closing achievement gaps through targeted activities of parent involvement. The

implications for research include: 1) the continued effort to expand the

conversations regarding the intersection of race, class and gender, especially in

the Hispanic community. Additionally, this discussion could provide

opportunities to recognize in-group differences that exist between Latinos of

different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. 2) Expand the scope of the

research by studying participants in different settings. An example could include

conducting a quantitative study that compares major metropolitan areas in Texas,

such as Houston and San Antonio. 3) Future studies could focus primarily on the experiences of parents of color, in general, and school-sponsored organizations, such as the PTA.

This information will particularly be useful to those interested in the changing role of race in programs of parent involvement in practice. Due to the fact that this study was centered on the role that race, racism, class, and discrimination played in the experiences of the participants, the data indicated that cultural differences existed between the participants, school officials, and parents of the predominantly White schools their children attended. Implications for policy suggest that school personnel should: 1) Respect and encourage all types of involvement by becoming familiar with parental support instilled in the home. 2) Design and implement a professional development series that addresses the growing population of Hispanics (and other students of color) in predominantly White schools. For example, schools officials can begin by implementing a professional development series that addresses the growing population of Hispanics in predominantly White schools. 3) Encourage the participation of Hispanic parents by implementing practices that are culturally sensitive.

Personal Relevance

My interest in this research topic began four years ago when my husband, Anthony[8], an African American man and I, a Mexican American woman moved into tightknit predominantly White, affluent neighborhood in Longhorn, Texas. During this time, we enrolled our daughter Reyna in kindergarten at Spring Creek Elementary School, a school that traditionally serves middle-income and affluent White families. The school is a part of the Longhorn Independent School District (LISD), an urban district that serves students from diverse backgrounds, 24.5% African American, 13% White, 60.5% Hispanic, 0.3% Native American, and 1.8% Asian/Pacific Islander. At LISD, 75.3% of the students are economically disadvantaged[9]. At Spring Creek, over 86% of the student population is White, while a small percentage is Hispanic (6%) and economically disadvantaged (4.5%). In fact, the majority of students perform well on state mandated tests. For example, in 2010, 99% of all third grade students at Spring Creek that took the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS)[10] passed, compared to the 73% who passed in the entire district (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

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[8] Pseudonyms will be used to protect identities of individuals, places and events associated with this study.

[9] Disadvantaged students refer to students from low socio-economic background and/or have not performed satisfactorily on an assessment instrument administered.

[10] The Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) is a standards-based test, which means it measures how well students are mastering specific skills defined for each grade by the state of Texas. In 2010-2011, the TAKS was used to test students in reading in grades 3 through 9; in writing in grades 4 and 7; in English language arts in grades 10 and 11; in mathematics in grades 3 through 11; in science in grades 5, 8, 10 and 11; and in social studies in grades 8, 10 and 11. The goal is for all students to score at or above the state standard (Texas Education Agency, 2011).

Growing up in a low-income family (Note: When I applied for financial aid in 1995, my parent's combined income was close to $15,000), my parents instilled in my siblings and I that we can and will "do better" than them. Therefore, throughout my K-12 schooling, I was committed to excelling academically in order to gain access to educational and professional opportunities outside of my neighborhood. Being the first in my family to obtain a career in higher education, and the fact that both my husband and I are educators, I was certain my experiences as a parent would be different than those of my parents, especially in regards to home-school relationships. I vividly recall my mother expressing that one of the reasons she did not enjoy the school setting was because. "*Las maestras se creen muc*ho" (The teachers think they are better than us). Because my father worked maintenance for the school district, his experience with school staff was different from that of my mother. He often described how he interacted with school administrators, teachers, support staff and students who were supportive and thought highly of his work ethic. For example, they would usually give him plates full of cookies, cupcakes, and tamales whenever there was a class party or celebration. In our home, school-related issues were often left for my mother to address. Due to my postsecondary educational attainment, professional experiences as an educator and knowledge of the K-12 school system, I envisioned a different type of interaction through my involvement in my daughter's school.

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Besides my high school and college graduations, my parents rarely attended my school events and meetings. Therefore, I was excited to join the Spring Creek Elementary School Parent Teachers Association (PTA), attend the parent-teacher conferences, and volunteer for school activities. After the first event, which occurred before the school year began, I wrote the following reflection in my journal, "*It felt like we were the three only chocolate chips in a sea of vanilla ice cream,*" (Author's personal journal, n.d.). As the parents congregated together at the park across the street from the school, it was obvious that the families had known each other for years. Since we had just moved into the neighborhood, I was determined to get to know others families and be actively involved in the school activities. However, I cried almost every day throughout our first year in this learning community.

Despite the strong involvement of parents, the environment was not inviting towards me. I was often overlooked when parent volunteers were needed for school events and activities. Throughout the school year, I was present every day, stood outside the school at 2:55 p.m. and later on those days for cheerleading practice or Girl Scout meeting. At times, I received an occasional smile from a parent. Although we were involved in numerous activities and events, my daughter Reyna, began to also recognize the exclusionary practices and asked time and again, "*Mommy why don't they invite me to their playgroups*?" I

continued to assure her that it was not her fault, and kept thinking *things will get*

better (Author's personal journal, n.d.).

Unfortunately, during the spring semester of Reyna's kindergarten year, I

observed an event that proved otherwise. I was one of the four chaperones for the

fieldtrip to the zoo. I was in charge of four girls, including my daughter. I would

like to say that all five-year-olds behave in a way that displays kindness and

eagerness to be friendly to others. But the behavior I observed that day was the

exact opposite. I recall sending a text message to my husband: *Little white girls*

become just like their mothers when they grow up. Nobody will ever treat our

daughter the way they are treating her today (Author's personal journal, June 6,

2011). That day, my daughter was being treated in the same way these girls'

mothers treated me throughout the year. In all of my years as a student and

educator, I had not experienced the sadness that I experienced that day.

All of a sudden it made sense to me, "*All the advanced degrees in the*

world will never change the fact that I am not White. I live in the same

neighborhood, yet I will always be an outsider" (Author's personal journal, June

6, 2011). Nothing could have prepared me for the rejection I felt as a mother of a

biracial child. If I felt this way about these interactions, I was not sure that I could

understand how our daughter felt. As a family, we immediately made a decision

to enroll our daughter in a new school within Longhorn ISD, Westside Montessori

School [WMS]. The student and teacher population that was more diverse at

WMS (34.1% African American, 36.7% Hispanic, 24.6% White, 4.7% Asian/Pacific Islander) and five miles away from our home. However, I continued to be interested how other parents of color at Spring Creek Elementary School navigated the education system, or if they too would eventually go elsewhere. As a child, I had an abundance of love and admiration for my teachers, and never truly understood what my mother meant when she described her feelings of being excluded from the school due to her lack of education and money, and inability to comprehend or communicate in the dominant language. After many years of working as an educator and obtaining advanced degrees in order to provide my daughter with a 'better life', I felt the same way my mother did. Although our predicaments were different, the sense of generational marginalization remained.

Organization

This dissertation study is organized into seven chapters. In Chapter One, I discussed the personal relevance, and provided background that focused on the education and parent involvement of Hispanics in the United States. In addition, this chapter defined the purpose of the study and introduced the research questions that would guide the study. Chapter Two presents a review of literature related to the demographics of Hispanics in the United States, parent involvement and engagement, and deficit perspectives of Hispanic parents. Additionally, I provided a justification for this study through depicting the lack of scholarly research on middle-class Hispanic parent involvement. Chapter Three included an

in-depth overview of the theoretical frameworks. Two frameworks, Critical Race Theory of Education (CRTE) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) were used to guide the study, as well as center the analysis. Chapter Four provided an explanation of the methodology, site, sample, and data collection procedures used in this study. This chapter also includes the methodological approach for collecting and analyzing data, limitations, and delimitations. There are two chapters for findings in this study. Chapter Five captured the findings to the first research question, related to the participants' background and experiences of parent involvement. Chapter Six presented the findings for the second research question. This chapter focused on the participants' perceptions of the intersection of race and class in their involvement. I concluded the dissertation with a summary, key findings, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

> It is easier to raise strong children than to repair broken men.
> --Frederick Douglas
> (no date)

It is important to understand that parent involvement is multi-faceted. This study seeks to explore the involvement of middle-class Hispanic parents in their children's education as a way to better understand experiences that are unique, and often untold (Robinson, 2007). Much of the current literature on Hispanic parents' involvement in their children's education fails to detail differences between families from varied income levels. This chapter examines related literature concerning the changing demographics of Hispanics in the United States, continued lagging academic achievement of Latino students, and parent involvement. I also explore the ideology of deficit thinking and the role it plays on the involvement of Hispanic parents in K-12 schools. Lastly, I discuss the scant literature that exists on the parent involvement of the Hispanic middle-class.

Changing Demographics of the United States

The Pew Research Center (2014) paints an accurate picture of the shifting demographics across the nation. According to the report, there was an increase of 53 million Hispanics between 2000 and 2014. The growth of the Hispanic population also accounted for over half of country's growth, compared to the overall U.S. population increase of 12%. The population of Hispanics with

Mexican origin increased by over 50 percent, growing from 20.6 million in 2000 to 33.5million in 2011. The Pew Research Center (2013a) also reported that in 2011, Hispanics of Mexican origin accounted for about three-quarters of the 51.9 million Hispanics in the U.S.

Because the Hispanic population has contributed to more than half of the growth of the total population in the United States in the past decade, it is imperative that various stakeholders involved in education acknowledge the increasing numbers of Latinos in K-12 educational institutions across the United States. As this group continues to lead in high numbers, schools are aiming to close achievement gaps while considering what can be done towards improving their academic success (Gay, 2004; Rolon-Dow, 2005; Ushomicsky, Hall, & Haycock, 2011). Across the nation, efforts to address the academic achievement gap between Hispanics and their White peers are promising.

In a report by the Education Trust, Ushomicky, Hall, and Haycock (2011) provide recommendations for raising achievement and closing achievement gaps for all students. Detailing the more rigorous standards that should be adopted, the authors outline flaws of past accountability systems with hopes towards school improvement efforts for all. Additionally, in 2007, the University of Texas at San Antonio provide a report that included recommendations to create college opportunities for more Texans. The report highlights that a significant population growth, with Hispanics expected to comprise 58 percent of the total population in

Texas in 2040, will create the greatest challenge for improving college participation and attainment.

With the promise of increasing graduation rates as well as college and career readiness for all students, including Hispanics, various states have adopted standards reform approach or an initiative to improve student achievement. In Texas, the comprehensive standards known as College and Career Readiness Standards, (CCRS) were recognized by Achieve Inc., (2011) as being the only ones in the nation to implement all key college and career readiness policies— including alignment of curriculum standards, graduation requirements, assessments, and P-20 data systems. In 2010, Texas was one of four states where high school graduates were required to meet college and career ready expectations to graduate (Achieve, Inc., 2011), showing that assessment of college and career readiness was necessary. However, with Hispanics comprising 48% of student enrollment, statistics continue to show that the number of Hispanics in Texas schools, and across the nation is increasing, but continuing to lag academically.

The Academic Achievement of Latino Students

According to Achieve Inc., (2011) 47 states and the District of Columbia have implemented rigorous and aligned standards that will prepare students for the demands that follow high school graduation. Across the nation, implementation of higher standards has appeared promising for the Latino population. The Pew Hispanic Center (2013) reported that in the fall of 2012, the

percentage of Hispanic high school graduates enrolled in college was higher than that of their White peers. Additionally, similar trends showed that in 2011, the high school dropout percentage rate declined from 28% (in 2000) to 14% (in 2011) for 16-24 year-old Hispanics.

However, despite recent progress in academic achievement, Hispanic students continue to trail their White peers. In a report from the National Educational Longitudinal Studies (NELS), Almeida, Johnson, and Steinberg (2006) report that minority groups, including Hispanics and African-Americans, are at a higher risk for not completing high school. Research has also described the critical role early reading indicators play in the likelihood of high school graduation and college entry (Hernandez, 2011). Over three decades ago, Lloyd (1978) suggested that students with low reading scores, at the end of third grade, would have lower graduation rates than those reading at higher levels. More recently, similar research confirms that a growing number of low-income, Black, and Hispanic students enter fourth grade without being able to read proficiently (Fiester, 2010). In a longitudinal study of nearly 4,000 students conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2011) asserts that students who are not proficient[11] in literacy by third grade are four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers. They also found that for students who could not master "even the basic skills by third grade, the rate is nearly six times greater," (Hernandez,

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[11] Reading at or above grade level

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2011, p. 5). Unfortunately, the same report also noted that the rate was the highest, 33%, for Hispanic students compared to African Americans, 31% and greater than those of White students with poor reading skills (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2011).

With parents often being defined as their children's first teacher (Fiester, 2010), the role they play in their children's education has been attributed to academic success. The National Education Goals Panel (1995) reported that all schools should collaborate with parents to increase the social, emotional, and academic growth of students. While experience and research has proven that simple acts of involvement, including reading and speaking to children, can prepare students for success in schools (Epstein 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lopez, 2001; USDoE, 2004), it is also important to recognize the partnerships that should be in place in order for the goal of academic success for every student to come to be fulfilled.

Parent Involvement Overview

The Children's Defense Fund (2010) has declared the greatest threat to the national security of the nation as the "failure to protect, invest, and educate all of our children who make up all of our futures," (p. v). Because Hispanic students continue to trail behind their White counterparts, the participation of parents in their children's education has been deemed critical (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Lopez, 2001; Valdes, 1996). Scholarly evidence and national

policies have confirmed that when parents participate at school and encourage learning at home, children are more successful academically (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hong, 2011).

The role parents and families play in their children's education has evolved over that past 100 years (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Historically, parents have always played an active role in the education of their children. Beginning with mothers teaching their daughters skills of the home and fathers educating their sons about vocational skills (Button & Provenzo, 1989, Reese & McClellan, 1998), parents have played a critical role in creating home-school ties. For example, during the age of the Puritans and the Pilgrims, parents emphasized their beliefs in education through their connection to the church that was necessary in building academic success. Programs of parent involvement have also developed from "a 1960s deficit home intervention model approach to a language and socialization difference model seen during the 1970s and early 1980s" (Olivos, Jimenez-Castellanos, & Ochoa, 2011, p. 163). Educational policy has continued to advocate strong parent involvement for the improvement of student achievement.

As both culture and history have evolved, the role of parent involvement has continued to change, often gaining even more attention. From the late 1980s to early 1990s, and even today, emphasis has been paid to declaring opportunities for parent involvement as empowerment and participatory (Olivos, Jimenez-

Castellanos, & Ochoa, 2011). In its 1987 publication *What Works*, the U.S.

Department of Education (US DoE) unmistakably denotes the direct effect that

parents' assistance in education has on how schools effectively educate their

children. The report supports parents' role as a child's first teachers, affirming

that parent's involvement in their children's learning is often the most influential

indicator of student achievement.

In the late 1990s, the National Education Goals Panel (1995) targeted

increased collaborations between homes and schools, stating that in an effort to

increase parental involvement and academic improvement, schools would

increase and improve partnerships with parents by the new millennium. In 1996,

the National Network of Partnership Schools (NNPS) designed an approach to

that would guide the development of comprehensive and sustainable partnership

programs between families, schools, and communities. Sanders (2010) discusses

how based on a framework of principles underlined in research, the NPPS urges

schools to acknowledge and support the pivotal role families play in supporting

learning in and out of school.

More recently, the aim of closing the achievement gap drives *No Child*

Left Behind (NCLB), a federal policy that has intended to provide a more equal

opportunity for high-quality instruction for all students. (USDoE, 2004). The plan

stresses building strong home-school connections that can aid school to "close the

gap between disadvantaged, disabled, and minority students, and their peers,"

(USDoE, 2004, p. 7). With the aspiration of school improvement, the DoE (2004) delineates opportunities and obligations for parent involvement, holding schools accountable in developing consistent, two-way communication to support student learning.

The policy mandates that schools provide tools for parents that will support them in ensuring that learning is taking place in the home, communicate regularly with families about academic progress, provide opportunities for family workshops, and offer parents chances to engage in parent leadership activities at the school site (USDoE, 2004). Involving parents, while creating partnerships with the school and community to improve student achievement is the paramount in how NCLB defines parent involvement. In a book written by leading scholars and practitioners in the field of family and community involvement, Blankstein and Noguera (2010) uphold that "both researchers and common sense tell us that parents and educators share the same goal—student success," (p. 2) Parent involvement, therefore, continues to be considered a critical component of student achievement of all students.

Parent Involvement vs. Parent Engagement

The parent involvement prototypes described in the review of literature detail prescriptive models that have traditionally catered to a Eurocentric, middle class audience (Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Such examples define schools as the agents of knowledge and power, having them define the

expectations to which parents should abide. Parent involvement initiatives have been designed to include local and federal mandates (USDoE, 2004) that include activities to help close existing achievement gaps, particularly between White students and their peers of color.

It is critical for the reader to know that the purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of middle -class Hispanic parents within the realm of school-sanctioned activities (parent involvement). Because federal policy (USDOE, 2004) has called for an increase in meaningful and collaborative communication between schools and parents, it is also necessary to recognize the characteristics of parent engagement. For example, Ferlazzo (2011) discusses how parent engagement provides opportunities to collaborate with school officials in making decisions that will affect the achievement of all students within a learning community. Engagement also allows parents to be a part of the daily occurrences of the school, through the intentional implementation process of collaborative relationship between educators and parents (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Ferlazzo, 2011; Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). Central to the concept of school engagement is the focused effort to empower parents to take on collective action while working closely with school officials to improve public education.

Advocates of empowering parents as partners in education, Mapp and Henderson (2002), address the need to distinguish between involvement and engagement, because the two do not occur simultaneously. In a 2011 study that

focuses on enhancing the leadership of Hispanic parents, Bolivar and Chrispeels also allude to the need to redefine parent involvement by creating opportunities for collaborative decision-making. Such actions ultimately create empowerment amongst schools, parents, and ultimately the entire community. Parameters of parent engagement include listening and including parents, two-way communication, and parent relationships.

While differences exist between parent involvement and parent engagement, involvement is relevant in this study for several reasons. First, in providing descriptions of how parent involvement can be increased, federal policy (USDOE, 2004) suggests: assisting children in learning, becoming partners in education, and serving on decision- making and advisory committees—as deemed appropriate. Additionally, the goal was to understand the role race, social class, and racism played in the experiences of middle- class Hispanic parents through school-sanctioned activities. Because the literature has focused on using deficit views when discussing the involvement of parents of color, the counter-stories and narratives presented through conversations and interactions with the eight participants emphasized how they were able to negotiate their involvement without fully adhering to what was expected of them, providing instances of resistance that continue to exist for parents of color.

Parent Involvement and Student Achievement

Multiple perspectives, frameworks, and explanations of parent involvement have been presented. The Harvard Family Research Project (2007) asserts that while parent involvement is beneficial across all ages and grade levels, when formal schooling begins, students in elementary school undergo personal and intellectual developmental changes that can be supported by parents and families. "Substantial research supports the importance of family involvement in the elementary school years, and a growing body of intervention evaluations demonstrates that family involvement can be strengthened with positive results for children and their school success," (Harvard Family Project, 2007, p. 1). The benefits of home-school relationships for students in elementary school set a foundation for academic achievement throughout their educational careers.

In 2004, Barnard found that when high African American participation occurred during students' elementary schooling, they attained high school completion at higher rates. A similar study that examined relationships between the parent involvement and literacy achievement of 300 low-income families between K-5th grades, found that as parents increased their participation in their children's education, academic performance in literacy improved as well (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). Whether parents are supporting their children's educational attainment and achievement through literacy, providing help with assigned work from school, monitoring learning, or

maintaining high expectations, such processes are critical for the academic achievement of elementary school children.

A leading researcher in the field of parent involvement, Joyce Epstein, also identified multiple measures that are necessary to affect increased academic results for students in elementary schools. In her seminal study, Epstein (1995) suggests a typology that connects family, school, and community that includes six critical components: parenting, communicating, supporting school, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating with community. Epstein (1995) asserts that overlapping spheres of involvement influence student achievement and when parents have a connection to schools, they become more involved in supporting learning. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1995) also provide a comprehensive theoretical framework. The authors address three main issues of parent involvement: 1) why parents become involved, 2) how parents choose types of involvement, and 3) how parental involvement makes a positive influence on student achievement. The model also suggests three factors that influence the frequency and variety of parent involvement: 1) personal motivators, 2) perceptions of being invited, and 3) life context variables (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997).

Additionally, in a meta-analysis conducted in order to synthesize qualitative literature between parent involvement and student achievement, Fan and Chen (2001) examined multiple measures of parent involvement in 25

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research studies. The researchers identified three similar concepts: 1) communication, 2) supervision, and 3) parental expectations and parenting style. Moreover, in describing common goals for student success, Blankstein and Noguera (2010) also discuss partnerships between the school, family, and community that are necessary for student success. They recommend three principles for building school-family relationships: 1) mutual understanding based upon empathy and recognition of shared interests, 2) meaningful involvement of family and community in a variety of school activities, and regular outreach and communication to family and community (Blankstein & Noguera, 2010, p. 3). The principles outlined, therefore, encourage engagement with parents and families, and yield student achievement.

Traditionally, parent involvement has been broadly defined as opportunities that connect parents to schools. "Family involvement is often thought of simplistically as helping with homework, attending parent-teacher conferences, or volunteering in the classroom" (Wooley, Glimpse, & Johnson, 2001, p. 34). In their research of 200 superintendents across 15 states, Kessler-Sklar and Baker (2000) found that over 90% of the school districts had parental involvement policies and organized initiatives aimed at improving academic performance. The authors found that such policies, including communicating with parents on students' progress and involving parents in decision-making, supported how parents remain connected to their children's learning.

Delgado-Gaitan (2004) conveys examples of conventional parent-involvement activities that engage parents through undertakings usually designed by school staff and leaders, including volunteering, making copies, and attending field-trips. Other research confirms that such traditional models are good, but for best results, opportunities for parent involvement should be viewed as more than activities, including the support parents provide at home (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). In describing how parent involvement can act as an opportunity to engage and have parents become equal partners, Wooley, Glimpse, and Jackson (2010) allude to how participation should be more than mere activities. "More than 30 years of research tells us that it [parent involvement] is so much more than that" (p. 34). Instead, effective ways to build shared responsibility for student achievement, partnerships between schools, homes, and even communities should be established (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2001). Such collaborations should locate students at the center, urging all stakeholders to work together towards school success.

Researchers have insisted that the more popular forms and programs of parent involvement have generally been developed to provide ways to make up for what was considered as a lack of involvement from parents of color, including Hispanics (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; 2004; Kim, 2009). Schools have sought to control the direction in which parents participate, generally through ways that appeal to the White middle-class, including fundraising, volunteering, and

attending events sponsored by schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; 2004; Hong, 2011; Valencia, 2010). In discussing inequities amongst distribution of power between parents and schools, Fine (1993) observed that parents from low-income backgrounds "feel and are typically treated as 'less' than the professionals" (p. 13). At the same time, parents from professional or upper-income backgrounds are described as being more involved. Delgado-Gaitan (2001, 2004) discusses how such assumptions, generalizations, and stereotypes of the behaviors of parents of color have been presented with deficit-laden perspectives that have permeated schools.

Deficit Perspectives of Hispanic Parents

Literature asserts that negative generalizations and stereotypes regarding the involvement of parents of color, specifically Hispanic in K-12 schools, have been presented with deficit-laden perspectives. For example, Sanders (2010) describes feelings of inadequacy amongst parents in low-income neighborhoods, within their relationships with schools. Delgado-Gaitan (2004) agrees that negative stereotypes that have historically existed claim, "that language or cultural differences interfere with learning" (p. 15), contribute to problematic negative perceptions that educators have of Latino parents. Schools have also commonly defined Hispanic parents through characteristics of deficiencies, such as being adversarial and nonresponsive.

The paradigm of deficit thinking has been prevalent in our society since

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the 1600s (Valencia, 1997, 2010) and continues to plague our schools today.

Students and families of color have long been targets of this action. Schools have

also adopted general beliefs regarding the involvement of parents of color in

schools. Current models of parental involvement restrict involvement to specific

groups: the hegemonic, White middle-class (Robinson, 2007; Valencia, 2010).

Auerbach (1989) was one of the first scholars to acknowledge that programs of

parent involvement are designed upon deficit or strength-based views of families.

The deficit perspective attempts to blame and fix families that are not active

participants in their child's education (Auerbach, 1989). From a deficit viewpoint,

parents' level of participation is dependent upon whether they are involved in

activities that are in tune with the goals of the school. Rather than examining how

schools are structured to prevent the academic success of students of color, this

model bases school failure on the students, their backgrounds, and their families.

More recently, scholars (Auerbach, 2007; Delgado-Gatinan 2004; Lopez,

2001; Zarate, 2007) discuss non-traditional support parents of color provide to

their children that may not appeal to the goals of schools. By providing a space

for learning and planning for the future, parents of color continue to support

students informally. In a study that focused on examining Latino parents'

perception of involvement in their children's education, the Tomas Rivera Policy

Institute (TRPI) found that Latino parents were more concerned with how they

participated in their children's lives than their academic involvement (Zarate,

2007). For example, the definition of parent involvement Latino parents provided included teaching good morals and respect of others, exercising discipline, providing advice on life issues, and establishing trust with the child (Zarate, 2007).

Additionally, in an ethnographic study on the lives of four immigrant/migrant families in Texas, Lopez (2001) offers an example of deficit thinking in practice. Through the stories of the four families, he found that the parents perceived that they were involved in supporting their children's education. Through the demonstration and act of valuing education through hard work and providing *consejos* (advice), the families were, in fact, actively engaged in the development of their children's academics. However, educators or policymakers have not customarily recognized the form of support they provided. He concluded that the practices defined as parental involvement in schools adhere to the beliefs of the education community. When Hispanic parents are not involved through traditional measures, including volunteering or assisting with homework, they are deemed as uncaring, uninvolved, and/or unconcerned.

The literature supports that typical middle-class parents demonstrate their concern and value for their children's education by attending school meetings and functions, volunteering, helping their children with their homework, and ensuring that their children are ready to start school by teaching them their letters and numbers (Daniel-White, 2002; Epstein, 1995; 2001; Hong, 2011; Lopez, 2001).

Parent involvement, however, has different definition for different groups, including Latinos.

Because of cultural differences in role definitions, Latino parents often view the relationship they have with schools with much more distinct boundaries between the school and parents. According to Lopez (2001), if the involvement of these parents were to be seen through a lens of traditional involvement, "they would appear to be largely uninvolved in their children's education," (p. 15). Latino parents place importance on raising children who are well behaved and respectful, value education, and thrive on good morals and responsibility (Valdes, 1996). Current research describes the deficit perception that suggests that all parents of color are unprepared and unwilling to participate in the learning that occurs at school as a deficit model of parental involvement (Valencia, 2010). "Deficit thinking is tantamount to the process of 'blaming the victim.' It is a model founded on imputation, not documentation" (Valencia, 2010, p. xiv).

In turn, schools have sought to control the direction in which parents participate and collaborate with schools (Kim, 2009). Deficit thinking takes place when school officials assume that parents have not prepared their children with the necessary tools to be successful in school (Garcia & Guerra, 2004), and do not participate through the imposed norms of what parent involvement should look like. While the intent may be to design opportunities for parents to support their children, a lack of differentiation amongst activities exists. In addition, school

officials have little regard to race or ethnicity. The literature has deemed the roles

of race and class as, "inevitable determinants of which groups of parents wield

power and privilege" (Olivos, Jimenez-Castellanos, & Ochoa, 2011, p. 85).

Research has generally defined White middle-class families as being more

involved, making the assumption that all parents with greater financial resources

forge positive partnerships with schools (Lareau, 1989; Lareau & Weininger,

2003). In her early work on status and privilege in parent involvement in U.S.

schools, Lareau (1989) found that parents with higher social and income status

participate in their children's education by exercising their privilege. In a later

study, Lareau and Weininger (2003) also found that such parents use their capital,

or resources drawn upon, to show their power over others in the school, including

teachers.

Although parents with greater financial resources, including middle-class

and affluent families, have been generalized to have more status, power, and

communication with teachers and schools, Sanders (2010) warns that they too are

at risk. Traditionally, middle-class and affluent parents have been lauded for

being more involved than minority or low-income parents. However, Shannon

(1996) also conveys that educators not only complain about the parents they

describe as uninvolved, but about overbearing parents as well. Many times,

"teachers also complain about the aggressive parent involvement of majority,

middle-class Anglo parents" (Shannon, 1996, p. 83). The author also predicts that

if parents of non-White students, who have been perceived to be uninvolved, become more involved, they too will be seen as being aggressive. Shannon (1996) claims that it is common practice for schools to tolerate the actions of White middle-class, but be dismissive towards the actions of other groups—including Hispanics. Overall, differences in social class and status are critical in shaping the ways schools respond to, works with, and welcomes parents.

The Involvement of Middle-Class Parents of Color

An abundance of literature has positively linked parent involvement to increased student achievement for students of all races, cultures, and backgrounds (Delgado-Bernal, 2004; Epstein, 2001; Hong, 2011). As previously stated, the literature has presented Hispanic parents as being monolithic. While directing attention to how the lack of involvement of Latino parents has contributed to a continued academic achievement gap, the literature has neglected the Hispanic middle-class. In reviewing the literature, I was able to find several studies (Howard & Reynolds, 2009; Reynolds, 2009; Robinson, 2007) that focused on the role of middle-income Black families in their children's education. However, the voice of Hispanic middle-class parents remained absent from the scholarly research.

In their qualitative study, Howard and Reynolds (2009) examined the experiences of middle-class African-American parents and students. The authors interviewed 30 parents (20 mothers and 10 fathers) whose children attended

school in a predominantly white, suburban community in California. Through the investigation of the role class and race play, they found that most of the participants believed in the importance of being involved in their children's education. The authors provide factors and recommendations that can inform and can support the involvement of middle-class African-American parents, including being informed about what is happening in their children's schools, the need to question critique and challenge decisions being made, and the importance of collaboration and networking with other African American parents.

Following a case study approach, Reynolds (2009) examined the role of race and class and how it related to the perceptions of engagement of sixteen middle-class Black families. Drawing on Critical Race Theory (CRT), she identified implication of race as a dominant factor in determining relationships between parents and school officials. She found that participants perceived disparate treatment by school officials. The parents identified racism as the root cause of racist attitudes and beliefs adopted by the schools. Moreover, she provides recommendations to support collaborative relationships that disrupt current practices and policies that continue to marginalize Black students. For example, forming collegial, collaborative, and mutual working relationships with parents, recognizing parents as full partners in education, and addressing the role racism continues to play in the education of Black students.

Additionally, Robinson (2007) presents a phenomenological perspective through her investigation of the perceptions of the practices of eight middle-income African American families in their children's education. With attention on how middle-class African American families support the literacy development of first-grade children, she discredits a deficit portrayal that has been painted. The images of uninvolved parents with low expectations are combatted through the portrayal of the different levels of engagement of her participants, while noting the importance of understanding that not all African American families are uninvolved in their children's education.

While scholars have argued that there is a need to understand the involvement of middle-class parents in the academic lives of their children, the findings are exclusive to African American families (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Reynolds, 2009; Robinson, 2007). In contrast, I was not able to find any literature that conceptualized the parent involvement middle-income Hispanic families. A review of the literature reveals the need to allow the voice of Hispanic middle-class parents in the academic discourse. Through this study, I aspire to add to the limited research that has focused on understanding in-group differences of parents of color, including middle class Hispanics, and gain insight to the perceptions of involvement with their children's education.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As race often continues to be a silent culprit in conversations regarding the educational inequities experienced by people of color, it also plays a critical role in this study. Scholars have argued that social knowledge generates a hierarchy, which continues to explain the lower academic and social outcomes of people of color (Parker, Dehyle, & Villenas, 1999; Villenas & Dehyle, 1999; Yosso, 2005). The role race plays in the participation of Latino parents in schools is at the center of my framework for analysis. I build upon the premise of Critical Race Theory (CRT), which challenges such beliefs and deficit views of people of color that have been used to "explain the persistent achievement gap between white and nonwhite students" (Kumansi, 2011, p. 200). CRT is valuable when addressing the intersection of race and class that continues to exist within the experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents in schools. This chapter provides an overview of the conceptual underpinnings, including Critical Race Theory, Critical Latino Theory (LatCrit), and counter-storytelling, for examining the parent involvement of middle-class Hispanic parents.

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is a framework of analysis that places race at the center of inequalities that continue to exist in society (Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Matsuda (cited in Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) defined CRT as

a progressive theoretical framework that initially began in the legal field to examine the role of race and racism in American law and work towards eliminating racism and other forms of oppression. In the mid-1970s, the theory emerged in the field when a group of legal scholars, including Derrick Bell, Kimberlee Crenshaw, Alan Freemen, and Richard Delgado displayed discontent with the slow pace of racial reform in the U.S. Courts (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). CRT builds on previous movements, Critical Legal Studies (CLS) and radical feminism, and stemmed as a result of a legal system that failed to address "the effects of race and racism in U.S. jurisprudence (De Cuir & Dixon, 2004, p. 6). The theory analyzed the role of race and racism in the disparities and inequities that exist between hegemonic and marginalized racial groups, as well as challenged the traditional civil rights approach that remained color-blind to social injustices (De Cuir & Dixon, 2004; Kumansi, 2011). Scholars continue to assert that racism is apparent in all parts of the U.S. civilization (Delgado, 1995; Ladson Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Parker, Dehyle, & Villenas, 1999). In the field of education, CRTE has been adopted to address inherent inequalities, causing a close examination of racism of educational theory, policy, and practice in schools across the U.S. (Solorzano, 1998).

Specifically, critical race theorists in education challenge negative stereotypes, generalizations, and assumptions that are evident in classrooms and programs in schools where students of color are the majority (Dehyle & Villenas,

1995; Kumansi, 2011; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2005). Kumansi (2011) discusses the normalcy of attributing the disparities and inequities between students of color and their White peers to social class. She refers to race-neutral policies that focus on an assumption that the construct of race does not relate to the issues of school achievement.

CRTE has been used as a tool that supports the examination of race and class in the continued achievement gap that exists between White students and students of color. Initially introduced through an article that addressed discussions of race in schools, CRT in education can be traced back to the seminal work of Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995). In "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education," they posited that CRTE could be used to uncover the role of race and racism in education. They argued that the voice of marginalized people of color needed to be heard in order to understand their experiences in education. Years later, the book *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God's Children Got a Song* (Dixson & Rousseau 2006) highlighted the collective work of educational scholars that continued to examine the constructs of CRTE in schools. Providing discussion of CRTE in two realms, research and practice, the book expands on the progress of using CRTE to address a range of concerns in education.

Critical scholars theorize how race intersects with ethnicity, class, and other systems of power, and work towards liberation of oppression (Delgado-Gaitan, 1996; Villenas & Deyhyle, 1999). According to Solorzano and Yosso

(2000) a critical race theory in education challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups. CRTE has been used in analyzing academic programs, systems of tracking, curriculum, and assessments that primarily allude to the assumption that students of color are deficient. Given the fact that this study aims to explore the unique experiences of Hispanic middle class parents, CRTE plays an important role in capturing issues of race and class that may exist.

Solórzano (1998), Solórzano and Yosso (2000), and Yosso (2005) outline five tenants that form a CRT in educational settings, which include:

1) *The intersection of race and racism*-CRT recognizes race and racism as a permanent fixture of American life, and the continued role the two play in American schools (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995)

2) *Challenging the dominant ideology*; CRT in education examines the social inequalities that exist in systems of education. CRT challenges dominant assumptions based on claims of equality, objectivity, and race neutrality in systems of education (Ladson-Billings, 2000).

3) *Commitment to social justice*. CRT is committed to a transformative social justice agenda and aims to end all forms of subordination, including racism, sexism, and classism (Solorzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001).

4) *The centrality of experiential knowledge*. CRT recognizes that a dominant

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ideology exists, and that the experiential knowledge of marginalized

communities is critical in understanding their experiences of subordination

(Delgado Bernal, 202). CRT gives voice to people of color through the use of

storytelling, narratives, oral histories, *cuentos,* and *testimonios*, (Delgado

Bernal & Villapando, 2002; Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Parker & Villapando,

2007).

5) *An interdisciplinary perspective*. CRT uses interdisciplinary methods to

analyze race and racism in historical and contemporary texts (Solorzano &

Yosso, 2001).

The five tenets represent a collective definition that been informed by the

work CRTE scholars (Yosso, 2005). In education, the premise is to use CRT as a

means to challenge the role race and racism plays in empowering students and

families of color.

Counter-Storytelling

In an effort to examine the actual experiences of marginalized people,

Solorzano and Yosso (2001) also contend the use of counter-storytelling as a

means to combat the hegemonic master narrative. Delgado and Stefancic (2001)

define counter-storytelling as a method of telling a story that "aims to cast doubt

on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the

majority," (p. 144). The aim of counter-storytelling, therefore, is to give voice to

marginalized people while creating an understanding of their unique experiences.

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CRTE aims to provide the perspective of the voice of marginalized groups through their own experiences (Kumansi, 2011). The use of storytelling and counter-storytelling counteract the master narrative of the dominant group, while recognizing the experiential knowledge of people of color (Delgado, Bernal & Villapando, 2002). While elements of the five tenants may be evident through the voice of the participants, the supposition of counter-storytelling and experiential knowledge are used as the main vehicles to uncover assumptions about race as they relate to experiences Hispanic middle class parents.

Critical Latino Theory

CRTE also serves as the foundation for the use of Critical Latino Theory (LatCrit) as a methodological tool. Scholars, including Garcia and Guerra (2004) Gonzalez and Moll (2002) and Villenas and Dehyle (1999) have used tenets of CRTE to challenge the deficit perspectives that blame Hispanic parents and families for the poor academic performance of their children (Yosso, 2005). Garcia and Guerra (2004) discuss the negative assumptions they have encountered about culturally diverse students and families in low-performing schools. They identify negative suppositions that occur when parents of culturally diverse backgrounds are urged to change when they do not participate with obligatory parameters and definitions of parent involvement.

Gonzalez and Moll (2002) affirm that the life experiences of Latina/o families, termed *funds of knowledge (FOK)*, can empower them. According to this

view, everyday experiences brought from the home of Hispanic students create socially distributed bonds of trust and shared expectations within their communities. Consequently, *FOK* encourages educators to look beyond prior perceptions, while building on the prior knowledge students have acquired from their parents, families, homes, and communities (Gonzalez & Moll, 2002; Moll, 1992).

Additionally, in their review of seven ethnographies Villenas and Dehyle (1999) examine Latino schooling and family education. Using CRTE, they highlight experiences of the subordination and marginalization that exist in the constant low expectations of Latino students and parents. They discuss how the voices of Latino parents expose "negative ways in which they are treated, by insensitive bureaucratic requirements, and by the ways in which school-conceived parent involvement programs disregard Latino knowledge and cultural bases" (Villenas & Dehyle, 1999, p. 413).

Furthermore, other scholars, including Lopez (2001), Fernandez (2002), and Delgado Bernal (2002), use CRTE to collect the stories of their participants. These stories allow the experiences and perspectives of Latino parents to be voiced. The personal experiences directly challenge popular research, and recognize the cultural knowledge Latino students, parents, and communities hold (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

LatCrit Theory

The main reason I chose to couple the two theories was because has been CRT has been criticized for heavily emphasizing the Black/White binary, excluding other communities of color (Davila & Aviles de Bradley, 2010). While the oppression of African Americans has been heavily highlighted, racism towards other races, classes, languages, etc., are also prevalent. With Hispanics being amongst the fastest growing population in the U.S., the systemic marginalization that exists in schools should be publically documented. With a commitment of addressing issues of social justice that arise in the Latino community, LatCrit expanded on conversations of race and racism addressed in CRT to include the experiences of Latina/os and Chicana/os (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Issues affecting Latina/os, such as identity, criminal justice, and immigration enforcement have been considered using a LatCrit framework (Lopez, 2001, Romero, 2008). In an effort to challenge the status quo, and understand the manifestation of race, classism, discrimination, and racism in schools, experiences that are unique to the Latina/o population should be fully understood and not classified with the experiences of other groups. I draw from the lens of LatCrit (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) to specifically situate the experiences of the Latina/o participants in my study. Solórzano and Yosso (2001) define LatCrit theory in education as, "a framework that can be used to theorize and examine the ways in which race and racism explicitly and implicitly

impact on the educational structures, processes, and discourses that effect People of Color generally and Latinas/os specifically," (p. 479).

Expanding on the tenets of CRT, scholars have used LatCrit in the field of education to challenge the views of colorblindness, meritocracy, objectivity, and neutrality (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Solórzano, 1997). Although the five principle tenets of CRT extend into LatCrit, two tenets play an important role in the experiences of Latina/os. Particularly, LatCrit builds on the principle of *voice* and the intersection of race and class, and was used to specifically analyze the experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents and their involvement.

CRT acknowledges experiential learning, which is connected to the use of counter-storytelling in LatCrit. Dixson and Rousseau (2006) discuss the use of voice as an acknowledgement of experiences of communities of color. Using personal narratives provides an opportunity to detail the experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents.. Fernandez (2002) suggests that counter-stories and narratives recognize individual experiences from the lives of people of color "who are often the objects of our educational research and yet are often absent from or silenced within the discourse" (p. 46). Additionally, Solorzano and Yosso (2001) contend that it is critical to understand the intersection of race and other identities (including gender and class) that further complicate race and racism in the experiences of people of color in schools. In order to gain a more accurate of the

experiences of Latina/os middle-class parents, it is important to be aware of the systems of oppression that may be specific to the deficit perceptions that have defined their involvement. LatCrit confronts the hegemonic narrative, and challenges the deficit theories that claim the White, middle-class parent involvement as the norm.

LatCrit, therefore, uses counter-storytelling and the recognition of experiential knowledge to highlight the issue of race and social change for Latinos at the center of analysis (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Through the engagement with participants, I include stories and counter-stories of the individuals in this study. By doing so, I address the experiences that can only be captured from the participants I have chosen because of their familiarity with the phenomena under study.

Delgado-Bernal (2004) describes the makeup of the Latino community as one that is varied, claiming that Hispanics comprise only a piece of the Latino cultural heterogeneity. However, Pizarro (1999) contends there is a lack of literature that supports the educational empowerment of Hispanics. More specifically, he argues that the research that does exist does not include the perspective of Hispanics in regards to education. With an emphasis on the voice of a group that has been neglected in the literature, CRTE and Lat Crit fit well within the objective of this study. Since the current parent involvement literature lacks the perspectives of middle-class Hispanic parents, my hope is that through

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detailed and personal conversations with participants, I can bring forth the social

construction of race, and acknowledge the salient role it continues to play in our

schools. I highlight experiences that are unique to middle-class Hispanic parents

that may differ from the stories that have been told—depicting all Latinos as poor,

uneducated, and uninvolved. It is my goal to recognize and detail experiences that

challenge the traditional claims that have been made regarding the parent

involvement, or lack thereof, of Hispanic parents in U.S. schools. Concurrently,

this study serves as counter-story to the master narrative that has long been told

about the relationship between schools and Hispanic parents.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN

The review of the literature revealed a need to delve deeper into the stories of how middle-class Latina/o parents perceive their experiences in supporting their children's schooling. Therefore, for this phenomenological study, qualitative methods were used to discover, explore, and investigate the perceptions and/or realities as constructed through an exclusive sample of middle-class Hispanic parents (Creswell, 2013). This chapter begins with a discussion of the research design and methodology of the study. I go on to describe the site/setting, recruitment process, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis. I conclude the chapter by discussing the trustworthiness of the data collected and my role as the primary researcher.

A Qualitative Research Approach

In an effort to answer my research questions, I implemented a qualitative research design for this study. Though not generalizable in nature, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) encourage the use of qualitative research when focusing on interpreting phenomena in its natural setting, while aiming to better locate the researcher in the world being explored. Furthermore, Creswell (2013) provides the following definition:

> Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of
> interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research

problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and the data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes (p. 44).

He continues by describing the process used for presenting the information through the voices of the participants. Additionally, as a qualitative researcher, I provide a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and suggest how to effectuate change through my findings.

Through a qualitative research design, I was able to observe personal experiences, processes, and beliefs, and provide detail and depth (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002) to answer my research questions. This approach afforded my participants an opportunity to tell their own story, based on their own experiences. Furthermore, it allowed me to gain the perspectives of middle-class Hispanic parents, rather than relying on information that currently exists in the literature (Creswell, 2013).

Methodology

One's experience of the world is based on occurrences that are unique to that individual. Because the aim of the study was to understand the lived experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents, the construct of this study was

designed as a phenomenology. Moustakas (1994) defines a phenomenology as a methodology that "seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts, judgments, and understandings" (p. 58). Phenomenology can be traced to early philosophers, Franz Bretano (1838-1917) and Carl Stump (1848-1936), who viewed the research approach as a way to describe lived experiences without making causal explanations (Spiegelberg, 1982). Additionally, Rossman and Rallis (1998) credit the tradition of phenomenology as being rooted in German philosophy, which focuses on the essence of lived experiences. The authors describe German philosophers Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) as prominent leaders of phenomenology.

Creswell (2013) defines a phenomenology as one that "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences" (p. 76). Moustakes (1994) also emphasizes the insightful meanings that can be gained from participants through a phenomenological design. "Phenomenology seeks meanings from appearances and arrives at essences through intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience, leading to ideas, concepts judgments, and understandings," (p. 58). A phenomenology will allow me to become knowledgeable of the characteristics of a purposeful sample that provides information on a population that has been neglected in the research literature.

Furthermore, Groenwald (2004) asserts that the aim of phenomenology is

to be able to describe experiences as accurately as possible. Because little research exists on the problem being studied, I will work closely with participants to collect rich and thick descriptions that are unique to them. Through the use of phenomenology, I will be able to understand the "social and psychological phenomena from the perspective of the people involved," (Groenwald, 2004, p. 5). Phenomenology commonly includes interviews as a primary method for collecting data, in an effort to portray the story as told by participants. Using semi-structured interviews, and asking open-ended questions, will help me to understand evolving themes and patterns portrayed by the specific experiences of my participants.

While qualitative research has taken many different approaches, the phenomenological inquiry was particularly appropriate in addressing meanings and perspectives of research participants (Creswell, 2013; Groenwald, 2004). Because limited research on the experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents existed, I was be able to collect rich and thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and provide detailed accounts of occurrences that were unique to the participants, as Latinos. Additionally, incorporating Critical Race and Latino Critical Theory also provided a forum that allowed participants to expose racial inequities they felt existed. Employing a phenomenology allowed the voices of the participants, who have typically been generalized as not being interested in their child's education, to be heard (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991;Valdes, 1996).

Setting

With growing population trends across the nation, it is evident that the state of Texas has also seen an increasing young Hispanic population. In fact, Hispanics comprise 50.2% of the population enrolled in the public schools across the state (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2013). For the first time ever, the group makes up the majority of students. The staggering statistics provide evidence of changing demographics across the state, which ultimately affect its 1, 241 school districts.

Hispanics of Mexican origin or descent are ranked at the top of the nation's largest Hispanic country-of-origin group (Pew Hispanic, 2011). For this study, I chose to focus on a large metropolitan area situated in North Texas. The Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) Metroplex has been ranked as the fourth largest metropolitan population in the United States, and the largest in Texas (U.S. Census, 2011b). The DFW Metroplex encompasses 13 counties, and has gained more new residents than any other metropolitan area in the United States, about one million since the 2000 Census. Additionally, DFW has been ranked by the Pew Hispanic Research Center (2011b) as one of the top 10 Hispanic metropolitan areas in the United States. In 2011, 28.4% of the Metroplex residents were Hispanic, with 85.4% of Mexican origin (Pew Hispanic, 2011). While

447, 000 Hispanics (ages 5-18) were enrolled in K-12 schools in 2010, the group also had the lowest educational attainment. Additionally, the median income for a family of four was $40, 000 for Whites, $28, 000 for Blacks, and $20, 000 for Hispanics (Pew Hispanic, 2011).

Participant Recruitment

With the goal of adding to the existing body of literature on parent involvement, my aim was to recruit a purposeful sample of participants that had not been included in previous research. Particularly, this study explored the perceptions of Latino parents, who attended U.S. school. While the setting represents an urban school district with a high percentage of Latino students, the sample will be representative of parents whose students attend predominantly White schools, and their role and involvement. Through personal communication and involvement in parent activities, I previously established a strong working relationship with the parents whose children attend schools where the population is predominantly White, and middle-class. Through informal conversations I had with close friends and acquaintances, I began to suspect that the unspoken segregation and discrimination I had experienced was not only evident across my own city; it also exists in institutions of education across the state. Moreover, in my circle of friends and acquaintances, I was not the only one discussing such experiences. Through continued discussions, the experiences being shared made it

clear that the marginalization that continued to exist against Latinos was not inclusive to any one social class.

Hyncer (1999) reports, "the phenomenon dictates the method (not vice-versa) including even the type of participants (p. 156). Purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002) was used to identify participants that could provide the necessary data. The sample included participants that "have had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" (Kruger, 1998, p. 150). My research study began in May 2014, after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Texas at Arlington.

I began by selecting an inclusive population to provide insight into their parent involvement experiences. I contacted potential participants to discuss my study and schedule the initial interview (Appendix A). After dates were selected, I emailed individuals a demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) and consent form (Appendix C). I also printed and provided the forms to participants who did not have access to email or a printer during the first interview. I asked participants to choose a location for the first interview (including coffee shops, participants' homes, and restaurants). I also scheduled follow-up interviews with the participants immediately following the initial interview.
I selected two additional participants through a snowball method, which allowed me to expand the sample by inviting others to participate through the

recommendation of those individuals who were active participants in the study (Creswell, 2013).

Participant Selection

In an effort to fully describe a perspective of the phenomenon under study, a phenomenology required me to select individuals who can fully describe their unique experiences. Because my goal was to interact with a purposeful sample of middle-class Hispanic parents, I utilized a purposeful method of sampling (Patton, 2002). I chose to solicit middle-class Hispanic parents[12] whose children attend a public school in the selected metropolitan areas. Aguius Vallejo (2012) says that traditionally, scholars define middle-class using income, educational attainment, and homeownership as primary indicators. I chose the combination of parameters listed above due to the fact that within my own experience, even though my husband and I did not own a home in the affluent White community we lived in, our combined income allowed us to afford to lease a home. Similarly, although several participants owned homes in the DFW area, their homes were not located in the suburban neighborhoods where their children attended school. The criteria I chose were indicative of the respondents in my study. These individuals are representative of what Aguis Vallejo (2012) refers to as a pathway of integration into the middle class, representative of the information I am aimed to uncover.

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[12] Selection of participants is not inclusive to partners/husbands and wives. Either parent, male or female, was able to participate.

Moreover, the criteria for selection consisted of: 1) Self-identify as Hispanic of Mexican origin, 2) Self-identify as middle-class, and have a household income above the state median income of $51, 926;[13] 3) Have at least one child/children currently attending a K-12 public school in a predominantly White, suburban community within the DFW (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Participants' Pseudonyms and Background Information

Name	Number of Children in K-12 School	Higher Education	Married	Middle-Class
Priscilla	4	B.A.	Yes	Yes
Kassie	3	M.A.	Yes	Yes
Carlos	3	M.A.	Yes	Yes
Lupe	1	M.A.	Yes	Yes
Rey	3	No	Yes	Yes
Michelle	3	Some College	Yes	Yes
Becky	1	Some College	No	Yes

As previously described in this chapter, the DFW Metroplex has a growing population of Hispanics and this growth has impacted the changing

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[13] In 2011, 21.9% of Hispanic households earned $50, 000 or more; 17% earned between $62, 00-$100, 000; 11.5% earned $100, 000 or more (Pew Hispanic, 2012);

demographics of the schools. While each individual in this study had at least one child attending a predominately white school, of the eight participants, four had children attending schools where the demographics have shifted to reflect the growing number of Hispanics. For example, in Lone Star ISD the elementary school remains predominately white and the middle and high schools have shifted to where there are now more Hispanics. This is evident in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Demographics of K-12 Schools Participants' Children Attended

Parent	District	School	Level	White	Hispanic
Priscilla	Lone Star	Spring Creek	Elementary	79.7%	8%
	Lone Star	Spring Wood	Middle School	33.8%	58.4%
	Lone Star	Spring Spice	High School	30.2%	58.5%
Becky	Lone Star	Spring Creek	Elementary	79.7	8%
Michelle	Lone Star	River Raft	Elementary	46.6%	46.6%
	Lone Star	Spring Wood	Middle School	33.8%	58.5%
	Lone Star	Spring Spice	High School	30.2%	58.5%
Rey	Lone Star	River Raft	Elementary	46.6%	46.6%
	Lone Star	Spring Wood	Middle School	33.8%	58.5%
	Lone Star	Spring Spice	High School	30.2%	58.5%
Kassie	Kendlewood	Kendleridge	Elementary	76.2%	9%
	Kendlewood	Corey Crouch	Middle School	81%	9.8%
	Kendlewood	Kendlewood	High School	85%	7.4%
Lupe	White Road	South Amos	Elementary	46.9%	27.2%
Eva	Little Road	Bee Hive	Elementary	63.9%	27.2%
	Meander	Kirby Road	Middle School	50%	31%
	Meander	Meander Road	High School	70.8%	18.3%
Carlos	Meander	North Hill	Middle School	68%	29%

To fully capture the lived experiences of the parents in this study, it is suggested to only study a few people, while collecting detailed information regarding an experience in a qualitative investigation. Scholars recommend 3 to 10 members in a phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007; Englander, 2012). The

phenomenological studies I reviewed ranged from three to 25 participants. A total of eight Latino parents (three men and five women) were chosen with regards to their experiences with involvement in their children's education. For each one, I chose a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and to protect his or her identities (Table 4.2). In Chapter 5, I provide more thorough descriptions and background information, as they relate to research question number one. Throughout the study, I will use the word participant interchangeably with parents and research partners.

Data Collection

Englander (2012) insists that a qualitative researcher should begin the "initial phase of the process in phenomenological research with acknowledging that there is a need to understand a phenomenon from the point of view of the lived experience in order to be able to discover the meaning of it" (p. 17). With a goal of capturing rich descriptions of the phenomena and their settings the data collection phase focused on gathering information that allowed themes to emerge (Creswell, 2013). Patton (1990) describes the interview as ideal methods for collecting data, primarily used to provide insight into what someone has experienced in relation to the phenomenon. Initially, I chose to use interviews as my main method of data collection. I felt that the process would allow me to gain meaningful insight regarding perceptions of the experiences with parental involvement opportunities that were in place, how participants would design

optimal opportunities for participating, and to determine if any factors provide challenges to their participation. Because I built strong relationships with all of the eight individuals, I considered them to be my research partners, I was often invited to attend meetings, information sessions, and other events. Additionally, I was able to conduct informal observations, take field notes, and write analytic memos.

Interviews

Each interview followed a semi-structured process, which Fontana and Prokos (2007) describe as providing greater depth than other types of data collection in qualitative research. All of the interviews and materials (consent form, questionnaire) were in English. Interviews ranged in time from 45 minutes to 90 minutes. I digitally record each interview, and use jottings—or short notes— and descriptive field notes (Creswell, 2013) to capture important details and notes about responses that may not be captured on tape.

Seidman (1991) recommends following a multi-step approach for the phenomenological interview. The three steps afford the researcher an opportunity to build rapport and trust with participants, address the lived experiences, and allow time for participant reflection. I adapted Seidman's (1991) recommendation, and created an interview protocol that was divided into multiple sections, allowing me to interview each participant at least two times.

The first interview allowed me to gather basic background information from individual participants. The interviews included questions, previously designed in an interview protocol, described by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) as a form containing open-ended interview questions and ample space to write notes pertaining to participants' responses. Each interview began with a grand-tour question (Spradley, 1979). For example, "Now that we have discussed the purpose of my study, can you tell me about yourself?" These questions were used to set up the conversation, hoping to allow participants to share their views, lead to authentic conversations, and build rapport. By asking open-ended questions, I was also able to gather evidence pertaining to the participants' early life experiences, as well as demographics of the schools and communities to which they belong (Appendix D).

Concerning this process, Seidman (1991) explains "the purpose of the second interview is to concentrate on the concrete details of the participants' present experience in the topic area of the study" (p. 11). The second interview focused on answering questions that pertained to participant's current experiences with parent involvement. Interview questions focused on "the participant's experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions" (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196). During this time, participants also provided clarification, reflection, and made emotional connections. Questions focused on the participants' perceptions of the opportunities for parent involvement, how leaders and personnel foster

participation, and how existing programs promote active participation of middle-class Latino parents (See Appendix D). Examples of questions from the protocol include the following:, "Can you describe how you have stayed involved in your child's school?" Or, "What could the school do different to involve you or other Hispanic parents?" I also used the second interview to ask parents to provide recommendations for increasing their involvement.

Focus Group

Following a phenomenological approach to research requires building relationships that enable and encourage continuous opportunities for dialogue (Englander, 2012; Seidman, 1991). I was able to bring together three parents for an informal focus group interview to review and discuss the themes I had identified from transcripts when analyzing individual interviews. According to Creswell (2013) focus groups allow for individuals to put forth opinions that may not emerge in individual interviews. I had not previously planned to use a focus group; however, I felt that the similarities would help me to make better sense of the data. The focus group also allowed the participants to expand and justify their original responses (Grondin, 1995). This method also provided a richer data source, allowing opportunities for further communication with each other, where they were able sharing understandings.

Observation Field Notes

Originally, I did not plan to include the use of observations in my study. As I built relationships with the parents, I was invited to different events that promoted parent participation. Although I was not able to attend an event with every parent, I was able to gain additional perspectives, data sources, and a means to triangulate the data gathered. Observations ranged from 30 minutes to two hours, and were conducted during interviews and while attending school or school district sponsored events.

Janesick (1999) supported incorporating reflective notes as a way to "provide a data set of the researcher's reflections on the research act" (p. 505). I used the interview protocol, a notebook, or any piece of paper I could find to take handwritten notes or draw visuals to serve as reminders of participants' verbal and nonverbal cues and demeanor (crying, laughing, hitting the table). I also wrote reflective notes during and after the interviews and observations. I was able to jot down brief descriptions and important points (including probes and follow-up questions). After my interviews, I immediately recorded my thoughts to reflect on my initial understandings and general experiences. This step allowed me to make any necessary changes to the way I approached subsequent interviews.

Analytic Memoing

Another data source I used in this study was "memoing" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 69). Analytic memos helped me to reflect on the experiences

shared by participants. I also wrote memos on questions or challenges that were posed throughout the data collection and analysis process (Maxwell, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1984). This process allowed me to reflect on what I learned from the data, including main issues, themes that emerged, and other salient points that supported later analysis (Groenweald, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1984). Dating my memos allowed me to organize the data, and later correlate my analysis and reflections with the data collected (Groenweald, 2004; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Reflective Journaling

Ortlipp (2008) explained that incorporating reflective journaling into the research process enables a researcher to me to make "experiences, opinions, thoughts, and feelings visible and an acknowledged part of the research design, data generation, analysis, and interpretation process" (p. 703). I used a reflective journal that I began writing when my daughter started kindergarten (four years) as an additional piece of my data collection. This journal provided an opportunity for me to remain committed to engage in the process of self-reflection by referencing my own experiences. It also allowed me to dismiss preconceptions I gained during the conversations and observations with participants. The journal provided an environment where I could be true to myself, while sharing my deepest and darkest feelings before, during, and after the data collection process. In it, I was able to express anger, frustration, challenges, and questions or doubts I was having. While difficult to refer to, often in tears, the reflective journal was a

reminder of the journey I was on, not just on my own, but also with my participants.

Data Analysis

Patton (2002) describes the data analysis process by saying that "the challenge of qualitative data analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data" (p. 432). I ensured that ongoing data analysis occurred simultaneously throughout the data collection process (Merriam, 1998). Additionally, suggestions in the process of phenomenological analysis have been recommended. Moustakas (1994) and Hyncer (1999) explicitly describe steps that a phenomenologist can follow to answer the research questions. Hyncer (1999) advises that the researcher continually listen to the recorded interview, in an effort to become familiar with the information shared by the participants. Therefore, the first interview transcription occurred within 48 hours.

In an effort to immerse myself in the data, I transcribed each interview verbatim myself. I also used a descriptive and reflective note protocol while listening to the interviews, in order to reflect on the information participants were providing (See Appendix E). Recording my thoughts and reviewing various data sources allowed me to understand data more deeply, and to organize my data as I began to generate recurring themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I used the frameworks of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit),

to find instances that highlighted race, racism, and discrimination, as I repeatedly listened to the stories shared by the participants.

In addition to ongoing review of data, and transcribing and editing audio recordings, I followed Creswell's (2013) simplified version in analyzing data collected in a phenomenology. Prior to the start of the data analysis process, it was important for me to participate in the bracketing process (Moustakas, 1994). Through bracketing I was able to describe my own personal experiences with the phenomenon under study. This allowed me to more fully understand and focus on the participants' experiences and points of view. I then proceeded to employ three additional strategies suggested by Creswell (2013) to better understand the results of the data I collected. Those strategies include: a) horizontalization or highlighting "significant statements that provide an understanding of how the participants experiences the phenomenon, b) creating themes, clusters, or units of meanings to identify themes, c) representing a "textual description" of "what" participants experienced and d) providing a "structural description," present a description of the context of "how" the phenomenon occurred (Moustakas, 1994, p. 82). From the textual and structural descriptions, I documented relationships that emerged between the recurring themes. I was then able to provide what Moustakas (1994) terms *essence,* or a summary of all the themes, or common experiences prompted by the data, and provide the voice of my participants.

Trustworthiness

Because the goal of qualitative research is not to provide generalizations, validity, and reliability, it is important for qualitative researchers to employ the use of trustworthiness and credibility in an effort to provide corroborated evidence from different sources or methods of data collected (Creswell, 2003, Merriam, 2009). Through in-depth investigation of the phenomenon under study I was able to develop trusting relationships that developed through prolonged engagement with participants. I was able to provide examples of additional strategies Creswell (2013) recommends, including triangulation and member checks.

Patton (2002) descries the process of triangulation as a method used to establish validity through the analysis of multiple perspectives. Triangulation occurred throughout the entire data collection (e.g. varying types of interviews, observations, reflective notes and journals) and analysis phases (identifying themes). The multiple forms of interviews (in-depth individual interviews and focus groups) allowed me to collect data afforded me the opportunity to interact directly with participants, pose follow-up questions, and probe for further information. Because I conducted two interviews, I was able to develop trusting relationships with participants, which led me to conduct observations. The use of an interview protocol served as a checklist that held me accountable, and kept me focused in remaining neutral throughout the conversations with participants.

Additionally, it provided a forum that allowed me to jot my thoughts, and probe deeper when a response seemed unclear. Having a second interview allowed me an opportunity to reflect as a researcher, pose clarification questions, and probe deeper when clarification was needed. It also kept me true to my goal of asking questions that would answer the research question I posed, rather than leading the participants to responds in a certain way.

Because I digitally recorded and transcribed the interviews, I was afforded the opportunity to refer back to the information participants shared throughout the ongoing data analysis process. To increase the internal validity of my study, I conducted member checks, throughout data collection and analysis where I returned the preliminary analysis to the individual participants (Merriam, 2009). Participants were given a chance to provide feedback and/or additional responses. This helped to ensure that the information gleaned was truly what the participants were attempting to portray (Hycner, 1999). Lincoln and Guba (1985) term this technique as "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 314). For example, before starting the second interview, shared I shared my analysis and interpretation with participants. I offered them the opportunity to expand on the previous interview, ask questions, or receive clarification.

My Role as a Researcher

Creswell (2008) describes qualitative research as a method that begins with assumptions about an issue or problem of interest to the researcher. Additionally, Delgado-Bernal (2008) provides a description of one's communal, personal, and professional identities merging like a braid of identities—*la trenza de identidades*. With that being said, it was inevitable to include myself in this study. Behar (1996) terms this the vulnerable observer, where the researcher is able to understand "what aspects of the self are the most important filters through which one perceives the world and, more particularly the topic being studied" (p. 13). The identification of my role as a researcher allowed me to recognize any personal bias that I needed to be aware of throughout the study.

My interest in this study began because of my own experiences. Therefore, the findings were interpreted and influenced by my own understandings. It was through my lens, as a third generation Hispanic mother, that I was able to underpin themes and conclusions garnered from the data. I am a middle-class Latina, raised by my parents to value education as a means to escape poverty. However, my parents did not model examples that followed traditional modes of being involved with the school. Instead*, mis padres*-my parents, exemplified their support in my education by trusting and respecting the knowledge my teachers displayed, providing support and advice on choices I was making that would affect my future, exemplifying hard work and dedication, and

monitoring decisions I made (Lopez, 2001: Zarate, 2007). For years, I felt that because my parents did not sit down with me to review homework, attend my academic or extracurricular activities, or even persuade me to go away to college, they did not play a role in my academic success. Even today, my mother repeatedly echoes, *yo no te ayude porque no pude—I didn't help you because I didn't know how*. When I became a parent myself, I became interested in understanding the resistance I was met with in a school that looked very different from the ones I attended. While my low-income parents were not able to participate in the traditional activities constructed by the school, my husband and I have had such opportunities. And while both my Latino parents and I aspired for academic success for our children, we also felt a sense of resistance—not only from the teachers that looked different than we did, but also from ourselves.

My interest is personal. As an educator myself, I had always imagined that I would approach home-school relationships with more confidence. My curiosity in the involvement of middle-class Hispanic parents deepened when I realized that the mere fact of wanting our daughter to succeed academically was not enough. It appeared that teachers and other parents had already decided to believe the negative stereotypes that exist for families of color. And while Reyna has been what some may term successful academically, every day, I look at her, and know that she is capable of so much more. At home, I sob at the level of what I term inequity. I question, *Is it because she's Black? Do they expect less of her, of us,*

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because of who we are? And while I tackle these questions through conversation with colleagues, family, and friends, I halt when I consider approaching the teacher or principal about it. At this point, even though my profession allows me to communicate with educators across the state regarding high quality instruction, I still withhold the agency I need to approach the situation at hand. In interacting with other Hispanic parents in similar situations, I now know that even though our students are not struggling in school, we have often questioned our level or type of involvement. Because I became emotional and involved throughout the entire research process, it would have been unrealistic of me to attempt to conduct this study from an objective perspective.

However, through the data collection and analysis processes, I was able to also incorporate the thoughts and voices of other Hispanic parents. The narratives I present support what Villenas (2005) describes as the "story of trying to broker between cultures" (p. 71) in an effort to understand the involvement of the middle-class Latino parent.

CHAPTER 5

BREAKING BARRIERS: PERCEIVED EXPERIENCES OF MIDDLE-CLASS HISPANIC PARENTS' INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS

The sole purpose of my study was to conceptualize the experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents through the involvement in their children's education. My goal was to describe their perceptions toward the phenomenon of parent involvement that has been manifested in schools across the nation. Employing a phenomenology allowed me not only to understand, but also appreciate, the participants' perspectives through their own experiences, rather than through my predictions or preconceived assumptions (Moustakas, 1994). Framing the study in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (LatCrit) presented an opportunity for the participants to provide examples of personal and sometimes private instances that were centered on race, racism, classism, and discrimination.

This chapter provides a detailed account of the practices employed by middle-class Hispanic parents in their children's education. It is organized into five main sections. It begins by providing significant background information about each participant, and descriptive perspectives about the experiences detailed in the study. In addition, I present key findings in regard to how middle-class Hispanic parents portray their involvement experiences in K-12 public schools in Texas. The narrative I present was developed through themes that emerged from

conversations with participants, providing examples of actual experiences of a marginalized group through what Solorzano and Yosso (2010) term a counter-story in Chapter Three. In the subsequent sections, the stories provided by participants allowed their experiences and perspectives as Hispanic parents to be voiced. Because the literature has often termed parent involvement as helping with homework or attending to school-sanctioned events (Delgado-Bernal, 2004; Wooley, Glimpse, & Johnson, 2001), their perspectives directly challenge the master narrative that positions Hispanic parents as being uninvolved in their children's education. This chapter also recognizes what scholars (Auerbach, 2007; Delgado Bernal, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lopez, 2001; Zarate, 2007) have described as unique and non-traditional support Hispanic parents provide to their children, outside of the realm of school.

Participants' Background

A crucial goal of phenomenology is to gain access into the lives of participants who have experienced the phenomenon under study (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). The first section of this chapter provides descriptive information gathered from the demographic questionnaire and through interviews with each one of my research partners. Certain conditions existed for participation in this study (See Chapter Four). Besides individuals meeting the specified criteria, I was able to garner that the participants were similar in many other respects outlined below.

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Higher Education

All of the participants deemed higher education as being necessary, particularly in promoting social change for the Hispanic community that has been historically marginalized. With close to all of the participants being the first in their family to graduate high school, each individual has either reached or surpassed the educational attainment of their parents. Two participants (Carlos and Lupe) hold graduate degrees, and three (Priscilla, Kassandra, and Eva) hold baccalaureate degrees from four-year institutions. The remaining three participants have all attended a college or university or have an active career in the military. Similarly, they expressed wanting the same or greater higher educational attainment for their children.

Family

Each participant described family differently. Although I did not use marriage as criteria for participation in my study, most of my participants were married at the time of the interview. Four of the participants (Carlos, Eva, Kassandra, and Priscilla) had been married for over 15 years. Two (Rey and Michelle) were married to each other. Additionally Eva, Lupe, Becky, Michelle, and Rey had blended families, including children from previous marriages. Each of the parents spoke strongly about the support they receive from their extended family (grandparents, aunts and uncles, and friends). The number of family

members varied among participants, but all had at least one child in the K-12 public school setting.

Middle-Class

The participants were able to provide insight into how they defined middle-class. Although all of them self-identified as belonging to the middle-class, they were also able to further express that it was really just a term which exists because of societal parameters. They were able to describe their current income status as one that far exceeds that of their parents. Both Carlos and Eva recalled only having the clothes that were necessary for school, including two outfits or uniforms and one pair of shoes. Eva shared, "I only got two outfits for school for the new year, for the school year. I got two outfits for school and a pair of shoes from Payless." Similarly, Carlos discussed having to wash his school uniform daily in order to wear it the next day.

Each person essentially described their middle-class status as being able to provide for the family, without any type of assistance from the government or other family members. They also added that that their children have been provided with much more than they had growing up. Kassie explained the difference in how dinner is served at home now, compared to when she was growing up. She is able to create a healthy menu, which includes foods—vegetables, meats, and fish—that seemed too expensive to purchase when she was younger. Additionally, participants discussed a feeling of security (being able to

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sleep without worrying about utilities being turned off), owning a home, a sense

of privilege, and being able to do more with their children (vacation,

extracurricular activities, eating out) than their parents did with them. The

participants described wanting to be able to retire and live comfortably, without

having to ask their own kids for help.

Participants' Biographies

Priscilla. Born and raised in the North side[14] of Longhorn, Texas,

Priscilla attended both private and public schools during her K-12 educational

years. After marrying Mike, and becoming the mother of four children (3 sons

and a daughter), she opted to stay home with her children for 13 years. Following

her mother's example, Priscilla returned to the university after her youngest son

began preschool. She recently received her bachelor's degree, and now works as a

Parent and Public Engagement Specialist with the Longhorn Independent School

District (LISD). In her role, she works closely with marginalized families and

communities, through communication and outreach, to empower families with

information and resources to assist their children in schools. In our conversations,

Priscilla mentioned that when she was growing up, she did not feel that her

mother actively involved in her education. She talked about her father, and

described his role as a provider for the home. Through her experiences personal

and professional experiences, she remains actively involved in her children's

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[14] The participants described the demographics of the North side of Longhorn, Texas as area of town that has traditionally been predominantly low-income and Hispanic, with a growing number of Mexican immigrants.

education, with the "hope of providing more opportunity for my children to see me at all of their events."

Kassandra (Kassie). The oldest of four children, Kassie thrived on learning from the books that her mother gave her. Similar to her sister, Priscilla, Kassie chose to stay home with her three children until each one of them started Catholic school. She became a high school teacher after her husband's second military deployment to Iraq, when she felt she needed to begin contributing to her family's income. Recently, her family moved to an affluent suburban neighborhood where her children now attend public school, and are involved in various sports. Both Kassie and her husband actively promote and support their children's academic and extracurricular activities by attending events, practices, and games. Kassies's greatest goal for her children is for her sons to complete their education with at least a Master's degree, and change the course that has traditionally been held by Latino males because "that's one thing nobody can ever take away from you."

Carlos. Carlos was also born and raised in the North Side of Longhorn. A husband and father of three sons, he is actively involved in his children's lives in and out of school. He earned his Master's degree in family studies, and currently works as a juvenile detention officer for Longhorn Juvenile Services. One of Carlos' greatest roles outside of his employment includes working with youth, including his own children, in different capacities. For example, as a youth

mentor, he aims to provide leadership opportunities that will enable young Latinos to become self-sufficient and enhance their lives. Carlos and his wife also lead church youth groups, and volunteer and guide several groups aimed at improving Latino communities and neighborhoods in Longhorn.

Carlos credits his immigrant parents for the monetary sacrifices they made so that he could attend Catholic school. Believing strongly in the spiritual component of a private education, he wanted to make sure his sons received a similar foundation before moving them to public school. Not satisfied with the lack of academic opportunities for Latino youth, Carlos was elected to the school board for LISD on the platform of increasing the involvement of Latino parents in schools. His mantra, "Parents are the magic dust. When parents get involved, things just get better," drives his aim at changing the perception that Hispanic parent involvement is nonexistent.

Eva. Eva grew up in a close-knit community of Latinos, in the South side[15] of Longhorn. The daughter of Mexican immigrant parents, and an immigrant herself, Eva was the first in her family to graduate from high school and pursue a higher education. Her advanced degree in rehabilitation science, and background in counseling, led her to her career as a probation officer with juvenile services. Eva and her husband have a son who is in middle school and a

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[15] [15] Angela described her community as one with a large population of working class Latinos, where many families moved to when they immigrated from Mexico.

daughter in high school. They live in the suburb of Howard, Texas, located 15 miles north of downtown Longhorn. The decision to leave the city was based on a need to protect her children. "We didn't want our kids involved in gangs or drugs." Eva opted to be more present in her children's lives, choosing to attend athletic practices and events at church.

However, Eva described instances of isolation, and not feeling a sense of community in their affluent White suburban neighborhood. She shared experiences of marginalization, understanding that preconceived assumption exist based on being Hispanic. Wanting her children to have positive experiences at school, Eva feels it may be necessary to leave the suburbs and return to an environment that creates a sense of community for her family.

Guadalupe (Lupe). As a child, Lupe's Mexican immigrant parents supported his academics. They strongly encouraged their four children to become educated. Because their own schooling was so limited, his parents were not able to provide any academic reinforcement, including homework and other requirements of school. Lupe is currently employed as a Parent and Family Specialist with the LISD. This role affords him the opportunity to engage and support parents, families, and communities of color in understanding their role throughout K-12 institutions of learning. He has an 11-year-old daughter, Emily, from a previous marriage, and a one-year-old son with his current wife. Although his professional life focuses on family and community involvement, his

commitments to his work do not allow him to be as involved as he would like to be in his daughter's education. Lupe credits Emily's mother for establishing systems that promote her academic achievement. He believes that parent involvement is necessary "because it's one piece in how we help our [Hispanic] children become successful. It's just one piece, but it's a piece."

Rebecca (Becky). Becky was the only person in this study that grew up in a low-income, single-parent home. Her mother, who was born in Guatemala and later immigrated to the United States, raised Becky and her younger sister Victoria. During their K-12 educational career, Becky's mother was not able to provide academic support to her and her sister because of her shortage of experiences of U.S. schools, and not understanding the English language.

Originally from Florida, Becky moved to Texas to pursue her career in the military. As a single mother of two herself, she is the first in her family to pursue a higher education degree in Business Administration, while continuing to be an active member of the military. At the time of the interview, Becky was purchasing a new home with the goal of providing a sense of stability for her daughters. Amanda attends elementary school, and Nadia stays at the daycare at the military base where Becky is employed. She believes that parents are critical in their children's lives, but finds that at times it becomes difficult for her to be a part of all of the activities available at Amanda's school. While she aims to be more

present than her mother, she does not want to be overbearing in terms of her involvement at school.

Reynaldo (Rey). Rey's parents moved to the United States, from Mexico, when he was a toddler. Both Rey and his brother, Hector, are products of LISD. He has two older daughters from a previous marriage. Yolanda attends high school and Melissa is in middle school. Rey also has an eight-year-old daughter, Lisa, with his wife Michelle. He works the night shift for a pharmaceutical company. Therefore, activities that are planned for after school or in the evenings conflict with his professional schedule. He prides himself on eating lunch at school with his daughters, picking them up from school, and attending extracurricular events. While Rey does not believe that formal types of parent involvement are necessary for the academic success of his children, he was prompted by his wife to become more involved in their daughters' schooling. Rey has opted to become more active outside the home.

Michelle. Michelle was born and raised in a small town in New Mexico. Her parents were both immigrants, and neither received a formal education in the U.S. Michelle's father worked as a rancher, while her mother returned to school to acquire her G.E.D, graduate college, and began her career as a special education teacher. Michelle was the first, and only, of three siblings to pursue a higher education. After attending New Mexico State for a few semesters, she moved to Texas to attend a professional school. Michelle, and her husband Rey, both

believe that school choice is important, and they do not send her daughter to the school she is supposed to attend. Instead, they enrolled Lisa at a River Raft Elementary School in LISD. Even though they have to drive all the way across town to get Lisa to school, they feel strongly about the strong academic instruction and sense of community pride she is receiving. Michelle is a Vice President for a travel company, and has a flexible work schedule, which allows her more time to attend events at the school. However, a recent promotion at work, and other experiences described in Chapter Seven, have not allow her to be as involved as she thought she would like to be. For example, because she works 30 miles outside her home, she does not always have the time to volunteer to attend field trips or organize class parties. She believes that parents should make a conscious effort to be aware when participating in their children's education, and not just be a presence.

Summary

The eight Hispanic parents (five females and three males) in this study represent diverse backgrounds and beliefs. Their own experiences as students, perception of how their own parents provided support, and educational background shaped how they conceptualized their current practices. Each of the participants' awareness of how they participate in their children's education varied. The following sections detail how he participants described the role they played in their children's schooling.

Documenting the Experiences of Middle-Class Hispanic Parents in K-12 Schools

The goal of phenomenology is to literally understand experiences, or the way an individual experiences things. In an effort to understand the participants' conscious experiences, I posed the first research question: How do middle-class Hispanic parents define and perceive their parent involvement experiences in K-12 public schools in Texas?

Each participant in my study cooperatively described their practices of involvement in their children's education. The data shows parents' unique levels of defining and implementing their participation. This section reveals how participants remained involved in their children's education. It begins by highlighting the levels of support their' parents provided, and how that shaped their own participation. Section Two and three provide evidence that supports existing literature of how Hispanic parents support their children's academics, and expands to what Zarate (2007) terms life participation[16].

The USDoE (1987, 2004) has referenced the strong impact that parents have on their children's learning. Recent federal policy calls for schools to provide parents with scaffolds that will support their involvement in learning taking place at home, and through two opportunities provided by schools

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[16] Life participation- a way in which parents provide support through life education, which integrates into a child's life in school. Examples include being aware of and monitoring a child's life, teaching good morals and values, discussing future planning, establishing trust, and encouraging family and community to look out for each other (Zarate, 2007).

(USDoE, 2004). In this study, my eight research partners provided background

that supported their degree of involvement in schools. Growing up, they

witnessed first-hand examples of how the literature has termed Latinos as being

uninvolved by not conforming to current models of parent involvement that cater

to the hegemonic White middle-class (Robinson, 2007; Valencia, 2010). Because

their own parents were not familiar with U.S. schools, they described examples of

non-traditional forms parent involvement that have been recognized by scholars

(Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lopez, 2001;; Valencia, 2010; Zarate, 2007) that

distinguish methods in which Latino parents support their children's academics.

When they became parents themselves, they vowed to change the master narrative

that has portrayed Hispanic parents as rarely being involved. Six of the

participants described minimal involvement from their own parents while they

were in school. They also termed their involvement different from that of their

own parents. More importantly each one was also able to provide their own

definition of parent involvement and parent engagement based on his or her own

experiences.

Conceptualizing the *Non-Involvement* of Latinos

The literature has explicitly defined the expectations parents should adhere

to when discussing the role of parents in schools (Epstein, 1995). Historically,

Hispanic parents have been described as having limited participation in the ways

schools expect. Additionally, the literature has documented Hispanic parents as

not having necessary resources to be as actively involved in a way that can benefit the academic achievement of their children (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011).

For a long time, in both my personal and professional lives, I agreed with what others described as the ideal type of parent that was needed in order for a child to be successful academically. When I began this research study, I reflected:

Growing up, I do not remember ever discussing education with my parents. They knew I was attending school, receiving good grades, and that I was involved in lots of after-school activities. Perhaps, because I was an honors student, and my grades remained "good" through college, there was never any discussion of college, or of my aspirations. (Author's personal journal, n.d.)

During my time as a student, between elementary and high school, I became accustomed to being on my own when it came to my studies. Like the scholars I referenced in Chapter Three, I held negative views of the support my parents provided for me when I was growing up.

Additionally, the literature has also focused on the lack of involvement from low-income, immigrant Hispanic parents (Bolivar & Christpeels, 2011; Lopez, 2001; Valencia, 2010). Six of the eight participants (Carlos, Rey, Michelle, Eva, Becky, and Lupe) were born to immigrant parents. Their parents did not receive any formal education in their native country, and came to the

United States to gain employment. Their experiences as students were limited, and that transferred over to their role as parents.

When I first became interested in this study, I had accepted the boundaries that literature and society had placed on the involvement of Hispanic parents. It was not easy for me to recognize the role my own parents played in my academic success. I understood that they provided financial and emotional support, but to me that responsibility was a general obligation as a parent. I understand, now, that all children are not privileged to have similar systems of support. I lost count of the hundreds of times that my parents made financial sacrifices to save their hard earned money so that I could have designer clothes and shoes, just like my friends did. Even though fitting in with the kids whose parents could afford the latest fashion trends was not a necessity, I did not give them credit for ensuring that I always had what I wanted instead of only providing what I needed. I did not take into account all of the early mornings or late evening my mother waited for me outside of the school gym to make sure hers was the first car I saw when I got off the bus after a volleyball game or track meet. Instead, I grew resentful because I did not see either of my parents or other family members in the stands like I saw other families. With a sense of anger, I vowed to be more involved in my daughter's schooling.

Through a traditional sense, parent involvement has been broadly defined as opportunities that connect parents to schools, through consistent

communication. Wooley, Glimpse, and Johnson (2001) discussed how families

are often considered as supporting their children's learning when they help with

homework, visit the school, or volunteer to chaperone fieldtrips. My initial

conversations with participants revealed what they termed as limited involvement

in schools displayed by their parents. As we continued our discussions, most of

them were able to reflect on their understandings of how their parents had their

own ways of being involved. Ultimately, they were able to display a sense of

pride when discussing the monumental support their parents provided towards

their education. They also discussed spoken and unspoken expectations from their

parents that helped them to succeed in school. As Lupe discussed, "Our own

experiences as parents are based on what we witnessed our parents doing [or

not]." I include this information here because the types and levels of parent

involvement the participants witnessed from their own parents ultimately shaped

their own experiences.

An Empty Toolbox

　　Much of the scholarly discourse addresses the social, cultural, and

intellectual capital middle-class White parents possess, and Hispanic parents, and

other parents of color, lack (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Epstein, 1995; Lopez, 2001).

Despite overwhelming support for an increase in the involvement of Hispanic

parents, scholars (Daniel-White, 2002; Epstein, 1995; 2001; Hong, 2011; Lopez,

2001) have attributed the low level of participation to the lack of knowledge about

educational systems that Hispanic parents hold. Throughout my interviews, my eight research partners were able to defend their parents' level of involvement with school as they were growing up.

Rey was adamant in discussing how his parents did not have the necessary tools to support or promote his academic success. Besides having immigrated to the U.S., he expressed other concerns that impeded their involvement.

Both of my parents were born in Mexico. My parents both came to the U.S. in 1976, and they basically just came here to work. That's all we did. My parents didn't speak any English or have any knowledge of what needed to happen. I knew they were always working. So after a while, I just stopped asking. I knew they couldn't make it [to any school sponsored events] because they had to work.

Ultimately, Rey became accustomed to not having his parents help with his homework, nor asking him about his grades, and yet being satisfied with the fact that he would go to school every day. "They were content with us just going to school," he shared. His parents did not look at his report card, and had no idea of how to help him. Rey expressed that because they had never gone to school themselves, and because he was the oldest child, they had nothing to which to compare his experiences. Therefore, according to Rey, "they did not have a clue" regarding the possibilities of higher education.

Another tool that was lacking from their parents' toolbox was the ability to understand the content their children were learning at school. Six of the participants told me how their parents had not received any formal education in their native country. Therefore, habits such as reviewing homework every night were not common.

Carlos also provided examples of how his parents were not able to support his academics. "They didn't understand academically what was going on," he said. Because he was the oldest child, his parents not have previous experience in providing support with any academic or social issues that occurred at school.

> There was a time when my dad came up to me, like in sixth or seventh grade, and said this is beyond me now. I'm going to need for you to learn how to ask for help yourself. And when I was at Terrace Hils [high school], they definitely couldn't help.

Carlos also recognized that his parents did what they could with what the resources and knowledge they had, even though it often meant that as a student he had to find alternative ways to help himself. The information gathered made it clear that most participants felt that their parents lacked the educational tools and resources to guide their children through the K-12 educational pipeline.

Most participants also explained that their parents did not provide them a model of parent involvement to mirror. Eva's parents, both Mexican immigrants, did not receive any type of formal education in the U.S., and Eva did not feel her

parents had very high expectations for their children. Besides wanting for her to finish high school, Eva did not feel that her parents were involved. "I didn't see any of that [parent involvement] growing up in my own home, when I was being raised." She explained that her parents never had discussions about grades or higher education with her or her siblings. Eva went on to discuss that because her father worked, her mother was the only one that could ever accompany her to school-sponsored events. In fact, she only recalls seeing her mother at her eighth grade and high school graduation.

Because Eva was the first of four children to graduate from high school, her mother questioned whether she needed to attend her high school graduation. Eva laughed when she told me, "Who does that? Who doesn't know they need to go to their daughter's graduation?" As Eva explained, her mother had never been to a high school graduation before. As for the rest of her family, nobody else attended.

Through no fault of their own, my own parents had limited experiences with schools as well. Although my parents and grandparents were born in the United States, my father was the only one who attended Catholic school, and dropped out in the ninth grade. Because all of my siblings were much older than me, I am not too familiar with how involved they were in their schooling. I do recall, however, my mother telling me that the only time the school would call her was when my brother, Hector, was going to be receiving swats from the principal.

Even though I was eight years younger than my older sister, and more active in sports and extracurricular activities, my parents remained unaware of what I was doing in school. Reflecting on this today, I realize that they trusted the teachers and schools in general:

> I remember when I ran for Student Council Secretary in 6th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade. All of my friends had their moms helping them make elaborate signs, buttons, and shirts. My mom never even knew I had been elected all of those times. It's like she knew I would stay after school for sports and clubs, but she never bothered to ask what I was doing there so late. Did she know why I went to school on Saturdays? Did she realize what that meant for me, for my future? While some students had nothing on their list of extracurricular activities or offices held, my list was exhaustive. My parents never knew what I was doing. If they did, we never talked about it. (Author's personal journal, June, 22, 2014).

In speaking to my parents about how they supported my academic success, I understand that the fact that they had no sense of familiarity with schools led them to believe that the teachers and other school personnel controlled what I was learning. Because my mother never learned how to read herself, she felt that she could not help me. Instead, sending me to school clothed and fed, was *mami's* way of ensuring that my teachers received her best work every day. My father kept himself busy working, and guaranteed that I was a well behaved student.

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While my parents did not sit down with me to discuss what college I was going to

attend, they provided various attributes of life participation (Zarate, 2007) that

many other participants described as well.

The push for increased involvement stems from the desire to have more

Latino parents participate in school-based or school-sponsored activities with an

aim of closing historically existing achievement gaps (Dearing, Kreider,

Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Harvard Family Project, 2007; USDoE, 2004). Parents

who did not attend schools in the United States, however, had no way of relating

to the practices or expectations of participating in their children's education.

Besides sending their students to school, they did not volunteer to decorate the

cafeteria for kindergarten graduation, read to students in the school library, or

chaperone for school dances. The data explicitly depicted that participants did not

see partnerships between their parents and the schools modeled.

They had Their Own Way of Being Involved

Years of research have deemed traditional forms of parent involvement

(PTA, volunteering, bake sales) necessary in schools (Epstein, 1995; Wooley,

Glimpse, & Johnson, 2001). However, Latino scholars (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004;

Lopez, 2001; Valencia, 2010) have also accepted varied forms of Hispanic

parents' involvement that can potentially impact student achievement. In this

study, my research partners recognized the transmission of high expectations from

their parents and how they demanded the best from them in terms of education.

Lupe recalled that even though his parents did not receive a formal education when they migrated from Mexico to the United States, they expected their children to do well in school. His parents did not fully have an understanding of the dominant English language, and were not able to navigate systems in school. Lupe recalled that his parents encouraged high performances at school. "They expected good grades from us. They wouldn't accept failure." As the years progressed and the academic materials increased in difficulty, Lupe's parents expected their children to help each other. High expectations, such as the ones Lupe described, held the children accountable to each other, while continuing with the tradition of excellence that was expected at home.

The eight parents explained that a goal of parenthood includes one's children to reach a higher level of economic security than they did. Often, this is achieved through formal education or schooling. Participants also described their parents' transmission of education- related values, beliefs and actions that were not necessarily expressed. However, it was understood that certain guidelines would be followed to ensure the academic success of their children.

Growing up, Kassie's mother became preoccupied with her own education, when she decided to pursue a bachelor's degree. Being the oldest of four children, Kassie knew she would have to do well for herself. During our first interview, Kassie was adamant when she shared how both her mother and grandmother instilled a drive for learning in her at an early age. "Even though I

didn't understand her, I knew my grandmother wanted for me to continue studying, finish my education and stay focused. Both her and my mother did." Every year, she would send that message to Kassie, written in every birthday card. Although Kassie did not understand when her *abuelita* spoke to her in Spanish, she continuously smiled when sharing her grandmother's goal for her.

Kassie also shared how her mother never read to her, or provided any type of praise for her good work. Yet, she unknowingly expected Kassie to learn from the books she bought her at garage sales. As she cried, Kassie recalled, "One day, out of nowhere, there was a bookshelf. One day, I came home from school, and there were books. And my mom, she just gave me a love for reading right there and then." She described how she began reading one book after the other, until there were no books left to read. As she finished reading the books, her mother would replenish her supply. This simple act created a hunger for reading that ultimately led Kassie to pursue a career as an English teacher, and share a similar passion with her students.

Kassie's mother continues to support her daughter's love for reading, even today. On a recent family vacation, while Kassie felt ill, her mother visited a New Orleans plantation. Upon her return, she noted "my mother brought me a book from the plantation. I was so sick. I couldn't go with them. But she continues to recognize my passion for autobiographies. At my age, she bought me a book."

The unspoken support and expectations Kassie shared, often in tears, were also

evident when I spoke to her sister Priscilla.

Even though they are sisters, Kassie and Priscilla expressed very different

experiences. However, both discussed how the actions of their parents ensured

they would be successful in their education. Priscilla shared this description of her

mother:

> When I was in school my mom was in school, studying to be a teacher. So,
> it [involvement] was not very much. She was very busy. She had a hard
> time getting to certain events for us. But she tried, she really did. And so
> that's, I think that meant a lot to all of us. Is that she really did try. And
> you know, even though she was tired, staying up late studying, we knew
> she wanted a better life for us and she wanted to set a good example for
> us.

Overall, all of the participants described their parents' exclusive way of

being involved in their lives with a sense of contentment. While most of their

parents had limited opportunities to follow traditional forms of involvement, the

perpetual quest to have their children do better was evident in the experiences the

participants shared. Becky continuously referred to the standards her mother had

for her and her sister. Coming from a small town in Guatemala, she talked about

how her mother always encouraged her to pursue a higher level of education than

she did. That expectation transferred over into Becky's plans for her own children.

Similarly, Michelle's parents also moved from Mexico to the United States. Although neither parent graduated high school, her mother received her G.E.D., and years after became a special education teacher. With tears in her eyes, she described the high hopes her parents had for their children. "I guess they wanted better for us. So they were pretty strict about school," she reminisced. She discussed how her parents would not let her take home low grades, misbehave in class, and monitored what friends she hung out with. Commonly, these participants talked about the day-to-day interactions that occurred with their parents that pushed them further within the educational system. They reflected on their parents' own schooling histories, aspirations for their children to bring home good grades, be involved in activities, and associate with good friends.

Life Participation

The literature tells us that in attempting to understand the perception of Latino parents, it is also necessary to include how they equate academic success to the involvement in their children's lives and education taught in the home (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lopez, 2001; Valencia, 2010). Being aware of daily occurrences is a form of life participation for Hispanic parents (Zarate, 2007). Participants discussed how important it was for their parents to know who they were communicating and associating with, and also that they knew their friends'

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parents or families. This was especially important, as they grew older. Lupe shared:

> As we continued to grow and progress through school, you know, they just made sure we were going to school, that we were passing our classes, and that our friends were good and decent friends. They had to know the families we were hanging out with. It was important for them to know how their friends acted or behaved, and how they spoke. They wanted to ensure their children had friends with similar mannerisms and behaviors.

Being around other students with aspirations of academic success and overall self-improvement was mentioned several times by the participants. The participants' parents wanted their children to associate with friends who did not get into trouble, showed respect, and had a similar upbringing and rules to follow. For example, when Carlos was in third grade, his parents decided the environment he was in was not beneficial for him. "I was getting into quite a little bit of trouble during those years. So, my parents got word in the neighborhood that they ought to send me to private school." Although Carlos' parents could not financially afford to send him to Catholic School, they worked with other families in the community to gather the necessary resources to help him enter into an environment that would help him succeed academically as well as keep him out of trouble.

Additionally, Michelle's voice began to crack when she spoke of the one time she let her parents down. "In high school I got mixed in with kids whose parents didn't care as much. And we got caught ditching. My parents took it really hard. They didn't expect that from me. I was always the good kid." Because Michelle's mother was a teacher in the school district she attended, she was always in the know of what was happening at school.

In their research, Lopez (2001) and Zarate (2007) discuss non-traditional ways in which Latino parents support their children's education. They refer to the value of hard work and life participation as ways in which Latinos are actively engaged in their children's lives. In addition to parental aspirations, the sense of community also played a strong role in how the participants' parents supported life participation. For many (Carlos, Michelle, Rey, and Becky), they lived with their parents in the same neighborhood all of their lives. They built relationships with those that lived around them, and were held accountable not just by their parents but also by other adults. Carlos and Michelle spoke of how when they would act up at school, or start hanging out with the wrong crowd, their parents would find out. The continuity of life participation, as described by Zarate (2007) is apparent in the experiences that participants share, and will be apparent in the upcoming sections.

Conclusion

It was important for me to include this information in an effort to delve into the diverse background of each participant. The information they shared with me helped to depict the level of support Latino parents have historically provided to their children, even when cultural or language difference are present (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004).

Many participants were unable to share any, if at all, instances of how their parents followed models of parent involvement that are deemed to be traditional and necessary (Daniel-White, 2002; Wooley, Glimpse, & Johnson, 2001). However, similar to the findings Lopez (2001), Valdes (1996), and Zarate (2007) shared, they were able to tell a story about the unique support their parents provided, including the importance of respect, values, and high expectations. The relevance lies in understanding how their experiences as students impacted their own involvement as parents. It also serves as a platform for the comprehensive information that will be presented in the upcoming sections.

CHAPTER 6

REDEFINING INVOLVEMENT OF MIDDLE-CLASS HISPANIC

PARENTS

Based on the experiences of their parents' limited involvement as children, the participants were able to provide examples that shaped the forms and levels of support they provided. Considering that all of my research partners self-identified as middle-class, most of the examples they provided aligned with conventional or mainstream models that encompass forms of parent involvement defined by scholars—parent-teacher conferences, volunteering, or other forms of formal events designed by the school—(Hong, 2011; Wooley, Glimpse, & Johnson, 200). All of my research partners shared instances of being actively involved in their children's education. However, they also felt that the support they provided their children at home was just as important. In this chapter, the eight Latino become empowered by telling their own story, which challenges how they have been described in the main discourse (Yosso, 2005). This narrative includes the following subsections: breaking cultural traditions, supporting the goals of the school, continuing their involvement, leaving nothing to chance, and a conclusion.

Breaking Cultural Traditions

> *I just know that I want to be a part of everything that my kids are doing now. If it's every game, I want to be there. I want to be in the stands. I make it a point of being there for my kids, from my oldest to the youngest.*

I just saw that what she [my mom] didn't do, and how it hurt me. So, that

is what I know now. I can change the culture.

(Priscilla, Personal communication, May, 15, 2014)

A recurring theme that was gathered from my data analysis was participants' self-reflection on wanting to be more involved in their children's education than their own parents were (Zarate, 2007). All of my research partners identified as being actively involved in his/her children's education. Additionally, every parent also expressed how he/she redefined involvement as a Hispanic parent. Most of them specifically discussed being much more equipped with tools necessary to navigate educational systems. For example, they discussed having attained a higher level of education (see section: Participants' Background), belonging to the middle-class versus working-class, and possessing the necessary tools to navigate systems in schools.

Hispanic parents have long been generalized as not being active participants in their children's education. Much of the literature has attributed the lack of involvement to not being able to navigate systems in schools, particularly defining Hispanics as having limited experiences with schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lopez, 2001; Valencia, 2010). Goldenberg and Gallimore (1995) discuss how the schooling histories, and/or negative experiences of Latino parents (particularly those not educated in the United States), impact their involvement. Additionally, the interviews revealed that the social and intellectual capital the

participants possessed allowed a different form of participation, because they were able to understand school personnel and expectations of relationships that should exist between parents and schools. Unlike their own parents, my research partners understood what school personnel expected when they discussed *good* forms of parent involvement. They were aware that expectations existed, and unlike their own parents, found ways to communicate with educators.

For example, Lupe discussed how his role as a Family Engagement Specialist presents opportunities of empowerment, when dealing with issues at his daughter's school. He talked about being able to negotiate with teachers, knowing the right questions to ask, and how to play the role of an advocate for his daughter.

Knowledge about how schools operate provided opportunities for the participants to support their children in schools. Eva also discussed the difference between her parents' support, and how she supports her children and their education. As a child, she felt that she did not have, "anybody to guide me." Working as as a probation officer has allowed Eva to gain confidence in speaking to parents. She also knows how important it is be in constant communication with her children, regarding their education. "I know how to help my kids with their homework, with their projects. I've gone out of my way so they turn in the best work," she said.

Unlike her own mother, Michelle is able to help Lisa with homework and projects, making sure that lots of thought and effort go into the work that is turned in at school. Additionally, when Lisa is having difficulty understanding instructional content, Michelle provides different examples. "I have to do some changing of things with the things they sent home. It just doesn't make sense the way they are teaching it. They teach it one way, but I have to teach it another way because it's easier." By allowing Lisa to see different versions of what she is learning at school, Michelle has assured that she can fully understand the concepts.

Going back to specific examples of how the participants have broken the negative stereotype that exists regarding Hispanic parents, it is important to note that the level of knowledge about the expectations from schools is greater for those who actually received their education in the United States. These participants had previous experiences with schools in the U.S., understanding what was expected of them, and allowing them, and enact forms of parent involvement that are valued in schools. Particularly, their efforts have been viewed, by educators, as methods to improve student achievement.

Supporting the Goals of the School

Parent involvement takes many forms, and differs depending on who is defining it. Through my conversation with the parents in this study, it was evident that they were able to describe various ways in which they support their children's

learning. Particularly, they spoke of ways in which they communicate with teachers or other school personnel as advocate for the education of their Hispanic students. While scholars (Delgado-Gaitan, 2012; Olivos et al. 2011) have provided distinctions between parent involvement and parent engagement, participants seemed to piece both together. They were able to discuss a general goal, improving student achievement. In fact, the literature asserts that when parents are actively involved in their children's education, students from all backgrounds will perform at higher academic levels (Barnard, 2004; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006).

With parents often being called a child's first teacher (USDoE, 1987, 2004), most of the participants shared tasks that included school-like activities, including reading, learning letters and numbers, and other activities that promote children doing well in school. Because Priscilla did not feel that her mother was actively present during her early years in school, she purposefully chose to stay home until all of her children reached school age.

> Well for the first 13 years I was a stay at home mom. So, I was very
> active. Parent involvement? If the parent is involved, they're actually
> doing stuff like me. I'm an involved parent. I do a lot. I'm involved in the
> education process.

With a large smile on her face, Priscilla discussed feeling a sense of accomplishment after attending a workshop that stressed the positive impact

parents have on their children's academic achievement when they read aloud to them. She recalled the countless hours she spent reading to her four children when they were younger, and told me about the tradition they have where every Sunday everyone in her family reads for an hour in their favorite part of the house. Priscilla began to cry when she told me about a conversation she had with her oldest son, Mike:

> He said mom you did so much with me when I was little. With Karina. With all of us. You know, Olga, that's a foundation. Staying home with them for the first 13 years was so great. And it was so meaningful. What a blessing. They look back and they say this. That's validation for me.
>
> Traditional models of parent involvement focus on activities that support agendas

and objectives set by schools (Daniel-White, 2002; Wooley, Glimpse, & Johnson, 2001). The emphasis of such prototypes is on the goals created to close achievement gaps, particularly those of marginalized students.

Rey provided insight into how he and his wife (Michelle) ensure their practices support the goals of the school and their daughter's learning (Epstein, 1995):

> I'm not as involved as my wife is. But I support her, because she knows what she's doing. And literally, I see my daughter come home literally smarter every day. Not just by the grade year. It's every single day.

He went on to discuss how he remains involved in Lisa's education, by attending parent-teacher conferences, reading books together, providing help with homework and projects. Rey also prides himself on knowing what is happening with his daughters at school. When one of his daughters shares something they learned in school, he tries to make a connection to how he learned that information as a child. He also credited his wife for being more involved, spending more time with her after school.

Similarly, Michelle attributed her daughter's academic success to the level of involvement she and Rey provide. "I can say both me and Rey are involved with everything that goes on at school. Or we try to be. We're there for anything that they ask for parents to be in attendance for." She described events her family attends to support the school, including fundraisers, musicals, carnivals, and parties. Now that her child can read on her own, Michelle, an advocate for learning, also spends time listening to Lisa read aloud to her.

During my interview with Becky, she shared the several examples that have afforded her the opportunity to be involved. As a single parent, she talked about coming home from work, ensuring Amanda completed her homework, reading together, and doing as much as she could to help with anything that was school related. She also discussed attending school sponsored events, including fundraisers, plays, and school parties.

The findings suggest that the participants were interested in shaping a foundation for their children's academic success. By investing time, and making education a priority, the parents felt that they were setting expectations for academic achievement as their children progressed through the school system. However, the participants were also able to differentiate between the practices they provided based on the age and grade level of their children. Parents explained that during primary years, they focused on helping children read, providing scaffolds for homework, volunteering for field trips, and setting a solid foundation for future learning. They were also able to discuss how support changed, as their children got older.

Continuing Their Involvement

A difference among the level of parent involvement is also dependent on a child's age or grade level. Models of active parent involvement have been described as occurring more frequently in elementary years (Epstein 1995; Robinson & Harris, 2014). Another way participants chose to break tradition was by continuing to be involved in their children's education after they transitioned from elementary to junior high and high school. Participants discussed that as their children got older, they noticed a change in how school personnel expected them to be involved. Due to the fact that the demands at the secondary level called for more independence from students, they discussed a decrease in the participation of parents at events such as Open House or Report Card Night

(Epstein, 1990). Whether it be that parents, in general, believe that their children do not want them to attend meetings with teachers or school administrators, have had negative experiences with schools, or do not understand the curriculum being taught (Epstein, 1990; Robinson & Harris, 2014), the participants discussed how they continued to build on habits that were established in their home, including talking about and preparing for college and attending athletic events.

Carlos happily chatted about the academic success that his sons have experienced. Isaac, a junior in high school, is currently ranked number four in a class of over 300 students. He has already begun to plan his future, focusing on attending Stanford University—where he plans to study engineering. Alex, a freshman, was honored for a perfect grade-point average at the time of the interview.

When discussing the academic support he currently provides to his children, Carlos said, "I don't have to, because that framework has already been set. We did that deliberately." Because his wife, Annabel, worked for the school district his sons attended, she had a close rapport with the staff, allowing her to be able request for her sons to be placed in the classrooms of the most highly qualified teachers. Carlos went on to explain that his children's advanced academics are beyond him. Similar to a 2014 study by Robinson and Harris which urges parents not to help with homework after students leave elementary school,

he admitted that if he offered to help, for example in Math, he would probably confuse them more due to his lack of understanding the content.

Participants also discussed providing opportunities for their children to be exposed to academic content that would help prepare them for higher education. In thinking towards college entry, paying for test preparation courses and hiring tutors for advanced courses were ways in which participants described their involvement. They also spent a large amount of time promoting extra-curricular activities, including choir, band, cheerleading/dance, and sports.

Six additional participants spoke of the effort they make to guarantee that they are present in anything that their children are involved in after school. Rey and Michelle try to attend all of their older daughters' Yolanda and Melissa's choir, cheerleading, and volleyball events. Personally, I have witnessed Priscilla running from one practice to another, since her two oldest sons play multiple sports. She also goes to every football game, even when they are played out of town. Eva, Carlos, and Kassie also spoke of having at least one parent attend every athletic practice.

In trying to find a way to connect to each one of his son's on an individual level, Carlos talked about rarely missing football games his sons play. "We go to all of their games, all of their practices. We do all that stuff. That has been one of the main ways. We love athletics. We always watch games together. That's just what we do." At the time of our second interview, Kassie mentioned wanting to

attend a local event, Mayfest. However, her son had two football games scheduled and her husband was out of town. Kassie warned me that she would have to leave at a certain time, mentioning always wanting her sons to see her when they look up from the stands.

In contrast to literature that depict a loss of involvement from parents, as students were promoted to higher grades (Epstein 1990, 1995; Robinson & Harris, 2014), the eight participants exemplified the ways in which they continue to create opportunities to contribute to their children's success. The data presented illustrations of varying forms of involvement to support students in all that they do. The connections the participants detailed exemplified relationships that exist, even though they are not specific to academic content. From the participants' perspectives, supporting their children in everything they were involved in transferred over into promoting high achievement in and out of the classroom.

Leaving Nothing to Chance

Hispanic parents have often been charged with becoming equal partners, and increasing communication with teachers or other school personnel (Blankstein & Noguera, 2010). Most participants described how as they were growing up, their parents were unfamiliar with the culture of the educational system in the U.S., creating a sense of distance between the home and school environment.

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In an effort to stay informed, several participants discussed using technology to monitor students' grades or communicate with teachers in higher-grade levels. Lupe spoke of ways he ensures his daughter performs at the highest level in her academics, even though she does not live with him. He shared with me an email the band director at his daughter's school sent to him, and said:

> How I stay connected is through email. The correspondences, great behavior, anything the teachers want me to know about. I got a note from, look I have it here. I got a note from her band instructor. She said that Jayden has been doing an outstanding job. You know, that she performed her first solo. You know, that she's doing great.

Lupe and other participants were able to discuss how technology has changed the way schools can communicate with parents, and how parents with access to technology can take advantage of staying abreast of their children's academic progress. School districts are advocating for the use of information portals, where parents can monitor student attendance, behavior, and grades.

> Because Priscilla is employed by the school district, she has access to monitor her

children's grades and attendance via the internet. Having a zero tolerance for low grades at her own home, she discussed checking in on her son's grades weekly. If ever he was missing an assignment missing, or had a low grade, Priscilla was able

to schedule a conference with the teacher(s). Both Kassie and Eva also discussed how they depend on technology to monitor their children's academic progress.

Eva's teenage children, for example, attend schools that are run completely online. "This is a technology driven school district. Every parent has to have an email. It's required when you register your kids." Eva uses the technology to her advantage, not only for academics, but to be aware of what is happening at the schools.

Throughout the interviews, the participants discussed the lack of communication between their own parents and the school officials. What they were able to articulate to me was that besides reading notes sent home from school, meeting the teacher during scheduled conference times, or talking to the principal only when something was "wrong," they relied on technology to know what was happening at school.

Summary

In Chapter Two, I discussed parent involvement initiatives have been designed to include local and federal mandates (USDoE, 2004) that aim at closing existing achievement gaps, particularly between White students and their peers of color. I also detailed deficit perspectives that have not ceased to exist, which convey conventional parent-involvement activities that ask parents to participate in ways that appeal to the White middle-class, including volunteering, making copies, and attending field-trips (Daniel-White, 2002; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004). The

participants in this study were able to break cultural traditions that have often kept

Hispanic parents from becoming actively involved in their children's education.

They provided distinct examples of how they purposefully supported their

children in their education and extracurricular activities, by enacting expected

mainstram practices. While each parent shared experiences that were unique to

their lives, they all had similar goals. At the top of their list was being more

involved than their own parents, and increasing academic achievement of their

Hispanic children. The next section will illustrate forms of involvement the

parents deemed necessary, outside of the school.

The Value of What is Taught in the Homes of Latino Families

For years, scholars (Delgado-Bernal, 2008; Lopez, 2001; Zarate, 2007)

have aimed to disprove the concept of *traditional parent involvement* by

exemplifying ways that Hispanic parents participate in their children's education

that occurs in the home. When presenting information about their experiences, my

research partners generally discussed participating in their child's life, more than

in their academics. Such examples include definitions Zarate (2007) provides as

life participation: communicating with their children to discuss future planning

and provide advice on life issues. Parents viewed their responsibility, beginning at

an early age, to invoke non-academic elements as a foundation for their children's

future. In line with breaking tradition, this form of involvement that is not often

valued by teachers or school leaders challenges the discourse of parent

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involvement that has traditionally been deemed as necessary. Thus, in the following sections, participants describe how they supported their children in planning for the future and dealing with life issues. Although I did not specifically ask any questions about religion or faith, several participants also talked in detail on the role of God, their religious faith, and the Church. I termed this section spirituality.

Planning for the Future

While participants spoke of providing support to their children to meet the goals of the school, they also provided examples of ways in which they communicated with their children to set foundations of excellence. Participants hoped this principle would not only be applied in classrooms, but in real life situations as well. The findings suggest that the participants pride themselves on making a conscious effort to keep in constant communication with their children about occurrences in and out of school.

Rey, for example, informed me that he is not able to attend many of the school-related activities that are scheduled during the evenings. Instead, he is able to have lunch at school with his youngest daughter, Lisa, at least once a week and pick her up from school daily. "The picking up from school pretty much is every day is probably one of the best parts of the whole day," he said. During their drive home, Rey is able to talk to Lisa about what is happening at school. Rey also discussed that while he does attend parent teacher conferences, and sometimes,

other events, the most important thing to him is being able to build trust with his daughters. Rey felt that by talking to them about their day at school, their friends, and their plans for the future, the girls will be more likely to feel the impact of his presence.

Through the ongoing analysis of the data, the expectation of higher education was extremely apparent. The daily conversations parents have with their children, even as early as elementary school, exemplified preparation for their academic lives. One of the main goals the parents identified within this theme was providing their children important information about what is necessary to gain entry and graduate from college, including financial literacy, scholarship opportunities, and career paths.

Lupe described a situation when his daughter was struggling with her grades. He made an appointment to speak to her teachers, and school administrators to try to find out what was happening. Ultimately, his most powerful discussion was with his daughter:

> My conversations with her are all about college. About relationships, you know her character, boosting her self-esteem. You know, I talk to her very intentionally. All of these conversations I have with my daughter ultimately lie on preparing her for college.

From the participants' perspectives, communicating with their children

provides a forum for reflection. From discussing what they learned at school and the latest fashion with adolescents to making plans about college with older kids, these parents found time to keep in tune about happenings or concerns revolved around their children's schooling. By discussing specifics examples, such as focusing on areas of interest and what is necessary to gain entry into higher education, the participants felt they encouraged their children's future aspirations.

Life Issues

I remember when Reyna was five. She would ask me why she was not invited to her classmate's homes, playdates, or birthday parties. At that very young age, I had to explain that the fact that she was bi-racial would forever play a role in the way others treated her. I remember crying, not just because I was hurt, but because I was so angry at what I was witnessing. And one day I told my husband, *I would rather she be around people with good values, kids who treat her kindly, than to go to the best school in the district* (Author's personal journal, July 17, 2013).

As in the case of their own parents, the participants presented the significance of *educación,* by providing advice on life issues. Valdés (1996) tells us "What English speakers call 'education' is school or book learning. What Spanish speak call *educación* has a much broader meaning and includes both manners and moral values" (p. 125). For participants, this included morals, values, and proper behavior taught by parents through conversations at home that

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transform into the formal education in the classroom. Parents discussed the foundation of morals and values as necessary factors to becoming well-educated. The relationships forged between my research partners and their children afforded them opportunities to discuss issues, including race, discrimination, and social class, that are a part of their everyday life in *settings* in an out of school.

For my second interview with Kassie, she invited me to her home. We sat outside on the patio, and sipped on some tea. I met her three sons. Occasionally, one boy or the other would come outside to ask Kassie a question. One important characteristic I observed during my time there was their level of respect her son had for their mother and for me as her guest. When I applauded their stellar behavior, she expressed that both she and her husband have always had conversations with the boys about how society views them. As Hispanic parents, they feel it is important to model strong conversations skills, as well as discuss current events and global news.

Kassie discussed realizing that her dreams for her children are greater than the limits that have been set because of their ethnicity. At times, she has had conversations regarding race, and how others may view him as a Hispanic male, with her oldest son. Kassie shared:

At times he has told me, you know I'm the only Hispanic on the elite 7/7 football team, right mom? So I have to continuously communicate with

him, with them. I have to provide that support. It's not just so much the education sense. It's me providing support in everything.

Because the participants' students attend school with predominantly White students, and the ever-changing demographics in the U.S., parents felt it was necessary to discuss issues revolving around discrimination that their children were facing in schools. They wanted to ensure that their children were equipped with the knowledge and vocabulary when faced with such instances at school or in their neighborhoods.

Other participants mentioned instances of discussing issues of race and ethnicity with their children, because of incidents that occurred at school. The participants felt it was necessary to discuss incidents of prejudice and discrimination with their children, at home. For example, a teacher asked Kassie's son if he was Mexican because his skin was lighter than his cousin's who had a White surname. Another Hispanic male student was given the nickname George Lopez (like the Mexican comedian). His mother, Eva, felt offended. However, it was nothing that surprised her. The Hispanic participants in this study felt compelled to address issues of behavior and manners, particularly because of their children's race/ethnicity. Eva revealed:

> I have to give him that extra talk. I feel like I have to give him that extra talk when he goes to a friend's house. Like, "make sure that you say yes ma'am or no ma'am. Be respectful. Don't touch anything. I'm fearful that

they're going to accuse him of something or target him. Even at school, I always tell him to make sure he doesn't bring attention to himself. He already stands out because he's a minority.

The participants constantly discussed the need for *proper* behavior with their children, particularly due to how society views Hispanics. From afternoon details about their day at school in the car pool lane, to how a student felt he/she was being picked due to being Mexican, participants believed that having conversations with their children was an obligation, and often undervalued in schools. Priscilla also felt that communicating with her children was critical:

Well that's me being involved in their life. We talk. We have to talk. I don't think it's valued as much, though. I wish they would see it like that, like in our culture it is a form of support. Talking about family support, talking about love and logic, or whatever is going on. That's how we do it.

Throughout continued conversations with participants, moral development and familial responsibility transmitted by participants was considered necessary. The idea that the values and principles learned at home support and promote achievement, not only in school but also in life, were strongly echoed my research partners. They continuously emphasized the need to equip their children to succeed in any environment, particularly as Hispanics.

Spirituality

Along with having discussions regarding general life issues, several participants explained religion, faith, and spirituality as some of the values and beliefs that have historically followed the Latino culture. In 2007, the Pew Hispanic Center reported that more than two-thirds of Hispanics (68%) identify themselves as Roman Catholic. Even with shifting religious identities within generations of Latinos, 83% claim some sort of religious affiliation, with Catholicism continuing to be the highest (Pew Hispanic, 2012).

Although I did not specifically ask any questions related to their religious beliefs, Carlos, Kassie, and Priscilla discussed the role of God and the Church when defining their children's overall success. One similarity that was evident was that all three of them were attended private Catholic school. Following tradition set by their own parents, they each felt compelled that their children receive the same type of education. The three all wanted their own kids to receive the spiritual foundation before entering public school. Carlos, Kassie, and Priscilla all felt strongly about Catholic school education, its spiritual component, the higher level of academics and critical thinking skills that were learned through their early exposure to religious education. All three participants expressed the high academic accolades their children, especially the ones in higher grades, have earned. As mentioned previously, Carlos' two oldest sons have high grade point

averages. Similarly, Priscilla and Kassie's children are also excelling in school and sports.

The three participants also felt strongly about having their children center their lives around their religious beliefs. Carlos expressed that when he experienced challenges in high school, he turned to his faith, more specifically to trusting his God. Ultimately, he wanted the same for his sons. Carlos provided an example of a conversation he had with his oldest son, telling him:

> You're going to feel pain at some point in your life. And when you do, I want you to know where you can go for your source of power. Come back to your Heavenly Father, the one who created you, the one that gave you these blessings.

Carlos and his wife teach classes at St. Anthony's Catholic Church, with the hope of reaching Hispanic youth that may be struggling, not only in school but in life in general. He discussed how it may not appear that he provides support to students in a traditional sense, but he does offer other cultural resources that young people can hang on to as they see fit. "I'm doing it in many other ways. I'm the Continuing Catholic Development (CCD) teacher. I do that to be involved with my kids, and to be able to instill the love of God and love in general to others." His overall goal is for the Hispanic children with whom he mentors, including his own children, to experience the love of God and to know Him.

Kassie and Priscilla also expressed pride in their allegiance to their religious background and the Catholic school. Their father, the only Hispanic male in his graduating class at Nativity Catholic School in Longhorn, ensured that his children and grandchildren received the same type of parochial education. The two affirmed that sending their own children to private schools was embedded in their culture and their way of being. Similar to Carlos, the two sisters strategically enrolled their children at Holy Trinity School. And even though all of their children are currently receiving a public education, they yearn for continued spiritual growth. In discussing what it meant to see her kids succeed in life, Susan shared, "I've been able to see them succeed all around. Spiritually, academically, their well-being. But I want them to be strong in their faith, in their spirit. That's what's first in our lives, God." Besides going to church every Sunday and attending Catholic school for a period of time, the participants ensured that faith, spirit, and religious beliefs guide their children's present and future actions and decisions. They shared Christ-centered experiences, conversations, and hopes that have genuinely become a part of their everyday lives. Like the morals, values, and life lessons, scholars (Lopez, 2001; Zarate, 2007) have discussed as being a foundation that begins in the Latino home, these participants felt very strongly about how the role of spirituality transcends into the educational setting and overall achievement of their children.

Conclusion

The Hispanic parents in this study provided evidence that redefined the trajectory of traditional parent involvement that has been defined by leading scholars, policy makers and educators (Epstein, 1995; Mapp & Henderson, 2002) . Although the findings presented experiences of involvement familiar to the norms of White middle-class parents and families, the participants also told of their own unique forms of involvement. Their experiences were familiar to what Lopez (2001), Zarate (2007), and others have documented as equal involvement in their children's schooling coupled with involvement in their lives. Based on limited barriers to how their own parents participated in their own education, the eight participants were able to define parent involvement in their own terms. By continuing to offer support in the form on life participation, they had conversations about the future and life issues. While the age and grade level of the participants' children varied, each one managed to become more involved with the expectation of increasing student achievement. Interestingly, while parent-teacher organizations and school-sponsored events have been noted as forms of parental involvement, the participants did not seem to include such activities in their experiences. Instead, the next chapter will reveal that for these middle-class Latino parents, cultural misunderstandings, issues of power, and negative perceptions have kept them from being more involved in a traditional sense.

CHAPTER 7

CONFLICTS OF INVOLVEMENT: PERCEPTIONS OF THE

INTERSECTION OF RACE AND CLASS IN THE PARENT

INVOLVEMENT OF HISPANTIC PARENTS

The data presented in the previous chapter emphasized the perception of middle-class Hispanic parents, related to their navigation of experiences with their children's education. In general, they portrayed a sense of active participation that has been deemed necessary in attaining higher levels of academic success for students of color (Barnard, 2004; Daniel-White, 2002; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). They also provided evidence that painted a picture of how their practices follow the non-traditional forms of parent involvement that have been passed down generationally (Auerbach, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan 2004; Lopez, 2001; Zarate, 2007). The second part of the interview gleaned information regarding the actual experiences in the parent involvement of the eight participants. They were able to reflect on experiences rooted in deficit perspectives that have led to the continued underrepresentation of Latino parents in schools, regardless of levels of income.

This chapter presents narratives of tensions that continue to impede collaborative relationships between Latino parents and schools. Although a plethora of literature exists on instances of resistance of working class and immigrant Latinos (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lopez, 2001, Zarate, 2007) through a

critical lens, I uncovered narratives of the marginalization of Hispanic middle-class parents. The personal histories in this chapter include instances of power relations marked by race and class. In this chapter, I provide accounts of Hispanic parents defining how their involvement has been tainted through negative perceptions and expectations in answering the research question:

2) What factors facilitate, and/or create roadblocks to participate in their children's education within these learning communities?

This chapter is divided into three main sections. I begin by documenting the participants' perceptions of how their involvement has been defined through scholarly literature and societal norms. Second, I present participants' experiences of barriers that kept them from participating or being further involved including in school-sanctioned events, including Parent-Teacher Association (PTA). The last section summarizes instances where the participants in this study blatantly described continued marginalization of Latino parents, regardless of social class.

Lo Que Creen-What They Think

An extensive amount of scholars, practitioners, and educational leaders support the notion of increased parent involvement—particularly from Hispanic parents—in an aim to close an existing achievement gap (Saunders, 2010; USDoE, 2004). However, conventional and mainstream approaches of participation have been predetermined. While catering to the White middle-class, how Hispanic parents support their children's education has been misunderstood.

It should be noted that all of the participants in this study described being actively involved in schools. They also referred to race, racism, and social class as a challenge posed in their involvement in middle-class and affluent White schools, where they were not the majority. As noted in the literature (Fine, 1993; Valencia, 2010) when Hispanic parents are not involved through traditional measures, including volunteering or assisting with homework, they are often deemed as uncaring, uninvolved, and/or unconcerned

As an undergraduate student, one of my professors talked to the class about the importance of being *ready* for students to enter the classroom every day. He spoke very seriously, telling us that many students leave an environment of chaos every morning. Being that the University I attended was centered in a low-economic, crime infested area, he urged all of us to be prepared to handle the different situations that students of color were who we may teach one day were dealing with. I clearly remember him telling the us, *Most of these students come from broken homes, their moms have rollers on their hair, chanclas on their feet, they look a mess.* That message stayed with me, even till this day. As a Latina mother, whenever I have to be at Reyna's school, I ensure that I always look my best.

Every year, when my daughter starts school, I follow the same ritual. I take the day off of work to know that I will be available, in case something happens. I wake up earlier than usual, and not just because I am anxious or

nervous for her. I actually need extra time to get my hair and makeup done, and to

pick out *the right* outfit. This year, when my daughter began fourth grade, my

husband asked why I was getting so dressed up if I was just coming back home. I

answered *first impression. They see me, a Hispanic mom, and what do they*

expect? I don't know the teacher, I've never met her. It occurred to me, like it has

so many times before, that I am so worried about what the teacher is going to

think, because I feel that if she has a low expectation of me as a parent, she will

feel the same way about my child. When they see her, they see a biracial child.

They see her Black father and her Latina mother. To me, they already have a

perception of me. It is appalling that in 2014, I feel objectified as a parent of

color, (Author's personal journal, August 25, 2014).

It came as no surprise, therefore, when the parents in my study made a

reference to the negative perceptions school personnel, and society in general,

have about Latinos. Shah (2009) suggests that "minority parents participate less

than white parents" (p. 213). The author goes on to describe how the participation

of parents of color is hindered by both barriers that keep them from participating

in school activities. When I asked a question regarding how others would describe

the involvement of Hispanic parents, the participants used similar adjectives

including lazy, uneducated, uninvolved, and uncaring. Although the experiences

of the eight middle-class participants in this study were unlike those of their own

working-class parents, they continued to be met with negative assumptions and generalizations regarding their parental participation,

Eva explained that she has always felt that others see her and other Hispanic parents as being uninvolved. She expanded on the expectations of parent involvement from schools and teachers, particularly in schools where the majority of the population is middle-class or affluent and White. "I'm assuming that because they don't see us [Latinos] in the school the way they want, that they're assuming that there's lack of involvement," she expressed. Eva discussed wanting to have a strong presence in her children's education, yet feeling a lack of confidence based on how Hispanic parents have been perceived in schools.

Another participant, Kassie, offered similar sentiments, stating that misconceptions about Hispanic parents have historically existed and tainted their involvement. She spoke about the societal norms and stigmas that situate Latinos as parents who do not want to or know how to participate in schools. She talked about being Latina, and how her involvement is not seen as common:

> Well, it's almost like it's unexpected, you know. Like we [Latinos] are not supposed to be involved. You get these looks. They are so slight, but they are there. And then, there comes the eyebrow. It's all a part of that look.

Kassie went on to explain that even as an educator, she senses discontent with how others view Hispanic parents with low expectations. She told me that as Latinos "someone will always be looking at you, scrutinizing how you participate,

and feeling like they to fix our students and parents." She spoke of instances where the media focuses on making an example of Latino parents who have done wrong, not taking the time to applaud the many who do right.

Several participants also mentioned that negative perceptions of Hispanic parents in schools exist because they are seen as being "poor and uneducated." Rey, for example, described the middle-class and affluent White parents at his daughter's elementary school as not having a need to have two parents work. Based on his experiences, in most middle-class Hispanic families he knows, both parents work. Laughingly, he told me:

> They don't think twice about it. They think that we are uneducated and that we are poor. And because of that, they don't see us as being involved because we have to work. We just have to work. They think that we have those kinds of jobs where we can't take off. Like having a cash-paying job where you have to work or you don't get paid. I think that's how they see us as Hispanics. Like we don't own our own businesses like they do, or we don't have all this time off [like them].

Rey continued to talk to me about how causally Hispanic parents have been classified as belonging to the poor or working class. He recognized that negative assumptions act as a hindrance to the involvement of Latino parents, and are not inclusive to working class and immigrants.

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Similarly, Carlos discussed, how as a school board trustee, people constantly describe the challenges Hispanic parents face. While I watched him, his face reflected a sense of disgust, as he commented on how organizations within schools, including PTA councils, have catered to a White-Eurocentric population, generally having low expectations of "our kids, of us." He commented:

> At the school board level, what I hear time after time is that Hispanic parents just don't care. They define our parent involvement as non-existent. An example they gave me is that in Houston and San Antonio the PTAs are gone because they became Hispanic dominant. So they are making a correlation between having Hispanic dominant parents and no PTAs.

Carlos talked about a perception that Hispanic parents don't care, are out of touch, and not involved exists. While the participants were able to articulate their involvement in the previous chapter, they also adamantly stated that they were not expected to be active participants in schools because of how society has negatively construct their participation. It should be noted that similar to existing literature that focuses on the involvement of Latino parents and their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, 2004), the data revealed that middle-class Hispanic parents are not monolithic in their terms of involvement. In line with the tenants of Critical Race Theory and Latino Critical Theory, the narrative

supports the use of counter-storytelling or telling a story in an aim to "cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001, p. 144). Challenging the story that has been documented in the literature, the participants were able to participants were able to vividly describe their active participation on their terms.

The *Uninvolved*, Involved Parents

Teachers and administrators want parents to be present and participating in schools. These learning communities have traditionally organized activities and organizations (including Parent Teacher Associations (PTA) with a goal of advocating for increased student achievement. Parents are expected to show up at events that are prescribed by the school, that have specifically targeted middle-class White communities (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001; 2004; Kim, 2009). When Latino parents do not follow such norms, they are termed as uninterested or uninvolved (Valdes, 2010).

In fact, when school officials assume that Hispanic parents are not active participants because they do not participate through the imposed norms of what parent involvement should look like, deficit thinking occurs. According to Garcia and Guerra (2004) deficit thinking takes place when assumption that Latino parents are unconcerned about their children's education because they do not participate in school sanctioned/based activities. Such viewpoints focus more on

whether Latino parents are involved in activities that have been designed to meet the needs and goals of the school.

While most of the parents in this study discussed wanting to be more involved in school-sponsored events, they stressed specific details that kept them from being more active. While organizations like the PTA are aimed at providing opportunities for parents to contribute, fundraise, and network, most of the participants noted a persistent small number of Latinos involved in these meetings. In addition, the majority of the participants admitted to not being active members of such organizations, citing conflicts, discomfort, isolation, and a general lack of interest. It should be noted that during the time of the data collection, only Kassie and Priscilla were PTA members. However, neither of the parents held a leadership role within the association. My research partners were also able to articulate how the intersection of race and racism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), has acted as underlying factors in the choice they have made to allow them to redefine their involvement.

Undermining Our Presence

Much literature on parent involvement focuses on two-way communication, school and parent relationships, and working collaboratively and collectively to improve public education for all youth (Bolivar & Chrispeels, 2011; Ferlazzo, 2011; USDoE, 2004). While each participant shared diverse counter-stories (Kumansi, 2011; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001), the lack of presence

of Latino parents on the PTA and other school-sanctioned organizations was a common theme. The majority of the parents in this study recounted instances where they felt uncertain of why they should consider joining the PTA, and whether membership would support them in understanding systems in schools any further. This sentiment was particularly evident in the conversations I had with the female participants, when discussing feelings of discomfort and isolation. More importantly, the majority of the participants described the PTA as unchartered territory that was inclusive to the middle-class White parents and ideologies (Ladson-Billings, 2000), and shared stories of exclusion that led to their withdrawal.

Both Priscilla and Kassie articulated their active membership in decision-making committees at the secondary level. They understood that since the older students are deemed more independent, there are fewer opportunities to be involved. Priscilla shared her perspective, mentioning, "The only way that you can participate in the school would be through like the PTA or other parent organizations." They also noted challenges that kept them from being similarly involved at the elementary level.

Although Priscilla discussed that she has witnessed less participation from Hispanic parents at the secondary levels, her role as a Family Engagement Specialist at the high school her son attends enabled her to hold position on the PTA board. She described efforts she has taken to coordinate support for students

and families, who are homeless and in need of food and/or clothes and shelter. She serves as a volunteer at her son's middle school PTA, where she voiced that, "I'm just there as, you know, just to help." Priscilla elaborated on the amount of time she has devoted to volunteering at the elementary school her two younger children attend, and how she has found it more difficult to be a part of the PTA there.

When I interviewed Priscilla, her two youngest children had been attending the same elementary school for several years. She shared that she wanted to hold a more active role as a part of the PTA, but had not been invited to. When I asked her to clarify what factors attributed to her not having joined the organization, Priscilla stated that she found that, although general membership was open and encouraged to everyone, holding a decision-making position on the board was exclusive. According to Priscilla:

> That one is a little bit closed. I mean I would definitely want to be a part of the board there. But you kind of have to be asked to get on that particular board. Or maybe have the principal assign you that. I'm really not sure. But there, I haven't been asked.

As we continued our conversation, she eluded to how selective the parents were when it came to deciding who they wanted on the PTA board. Trying to remain positive, Priscilla explained that most parents had known each other for a long time, lived close to each other, and all their kids grew up together.

She felt that the existing members of the PTA had no interest in bringing new

people into the organization, mentioning the fact that there are no

parents of color on the PTA board.

Kassie, Priscilla's sister, also observed the underrepresentation of Latinos

on the site-based decision making committee (SBDM[17]) at her son's middle

school. Although she is not active on the PTA at her son's elementary school

(discussed in forthcoming section), she took it upon herself to ask the principal if

she could be appointed to be a member of the SBDM. The committee she serves

on consists of two parents, four teachers, and administrators, and meets every two

months.

Kassie decided to ask the principal to place her on the committee, noting

that, "it was the one way that I knew I could stay on top of my kids without being

involved with the PTA." As the only Latina to serve on the committee, Kassie

exerted a sense of pride as she discussed being the voice of the Latino

community. She told of instances where she was able to articulate her knowledge

as both a parent and educator. For example, she told me about how she felt

confident about drafting a plan for improving the low assessment scores of the

Hispanic students. At the same time, she also shared feelings of distrust and

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[17] Site Based Decision Making (SBDM) a committee, at a school, which supports decision making opportunities aimed at improving student performance, with the input of all stakeholders, including teachers, administrators, parents, and/or community members.

continued marginalization that came with being the only Latina on the committee. She asserted:

> Well when I got on this committee, I didn't think oh you're going to be the only Latina. When I'm there I'm like, "how did this happen? How am I the only Latina here?" And because I'm so vocal (chuckles), or I say too much, I think they look at me and think where did this woman [Hispanic] come from?

Kassie discussed feelings of uncomfortableness when agenda items relating to Latino students were discussed, because there seemed to be no sense of urgency in finding solutions. She felt that that being the only Latina on the committee was a challenge because there no one else wanted to have conversations about race when discussing the academic progress of the Hispanic students. Overall, Kassie thought that there was an oversight in not inviting other Latino parents to be involved on committees that are responsible for making decisions for all students. Throughout my interviews, it became evident that most of the Hispanic parents in this study were not a part of the PTA or other organizations because they felt misunderstood, and they were also unnoticed.

Several mothers, including Becky, described the other parents on the PTA as being cliquish, thus deterring their own interest in joining. They shared feeling not wanted and left out. Becky acknowledged how she felt that the PTA at her daughter's school could not handle having a Latina on the board because it was so

exclusive, and was run like a social club. Becky expressed how she was initially

involved, and attended school functions (as described in Chapter Five).

Then adamantly, Becky told me about two separate situations where she

felt that as a Latina, her daughter was being singled out or punished. When the

school refused to work with her to resolve those issues, and told her that they had

a clean reputation to keep, Becky felt the school was more focused on their

academic social and performance status against other schools than on the

education of every child. She described the school being run by the parents, and

said, "I'm not here to be a part of their social club." When I asked her to describe

what she meant, she was able to articulate that both instances her daughter was

involved in the occurrences because of what a particular parent had claimed. She

went on to tell me that because her daughter was new to the school, she did not

feel welcomed or that she belonged. Becky stressed:

> All the parents at the school know each other. They run the school. It's as
>
> if they make the decisions and the teachers and staff go along with that.
>
> They're all like friends. They are involved, yes, I thought I was too. But
>
> the parents have so much power in that school, with their money and
>
> social status. Educators there go by what those parents want to be done. I
>
> guess it's because they have all been friends for so long, you know. They
>
> all live there. They have lived there. It all goes back to that social circle,
>
> and I'm not a part of it.

She explained that her involvement was always done with the best intentions—the academic success of her daughter. "I didn't do it for the social status, or to outdo anyone," she said. For various reasons (that will be discussed in forthcoming sections), Becky's biggest reason for not being a part of the PTA is because she felt that she did not belong. She acknowledged "they [parents] pick and choose who they want. And I was never one of the ones they wanted." Becky imagined that because she was Latina, she would never meet the expectations of the parents running the PTA. Overall, Becky observed that the negative opinions of Latinos (previous section) were a determining factor to why they were not represented on the PTA.

Similarly, Michelle was able to share similar perceptions of the exclusivity of the PTA and other organizations at schools. She noted differences in how White parents are encouraged to join and participate as opposed to Hispanic parents. Michelle shared that she was not aware of any Latino parents, including herself, who are a part of the PTA. Even though the school her daughter attends has a growing Hispanic population, she had never been approached to become a member. Additionally, she noted that most of the parents [primarily White mothers] on the PTA are "standoffish, and already have their own agenda." Similar to the experiences Becky shared, Michelle noted that the school is primarily run by the parents on the PTA, and that her individual participation [as a

Hispanic parent] has never occurred. Also, when it comes to deciding who will serve, and in what capacity, decisions have been previously made.

A particular example Michelle shared centered her desire to be more involved in her daughter's classroom, as room mom. In this particular instance, Michelle noted favoritism as a reason why the same parents get chosen. She described wanting the position and later finding out that the teacher had already chosen another parent. Sounding disappointed, she said "I was going to volunteer again this year. But last I was told somebody was already chosen. I thought to myself 'how come I was never told anything about that?'" Michelle was under the impression that all parents would be asked if they would want the position. Instead, because the teacher chose a parent, she recognized that there was not an equal opportunity to participate because a parent had already been appointed to the position.

Michelle claimed she attempted to be more involved, and to build relationships with other parents. She mentioned:

> I wanted to do more I wanted to have may face out there so that they could see me participating. But it just got to that point. I mean, it was an awkward situation. Even when you make an attempt to talk to them [other parents], I was just left standing there. I was alone. I was the only Hispanic mother there. Them? They're just standing there in their cliques.

You try to talk to them, and it felt like a waste of an evening sometimes.

Although Michelle made a conscious effort to be more involved, feelings of exclusion led her to "give up." Because she has not made many friends or fostered relationships with parents at the school, opting to stop attending as many school-sponsored events and focusing her support on her daughter's academics at home.

Nobody's Got Time for That

Thomas Edison once said, "There is no substitute for hard work" (date unknown). In much of literature on the parental involvement experiences of low-income and working Hispanics parents (Lopez, 2001; Zarate, 2007) attribute a lack of time due to a demanding work schedule as a reason for not being involved in school-sanctioned activities. Although the parents in this study all self-identified as middle-class, they recognized that the fact that they had full-time jobs and other responsibilities as another motive for being absent from the PTA.

The participants described the PTA as being composed of mostly White stay-at-home mothers, with lots of time on their hands. Three of the participants I interviewed shared that their long commute to work was a factor in why they could not be more active in the PTA. Having to drive, sometimes, over 30 miles to their place of employment was described as a limitation. Eva shared:

> You know PTA things… PTA, it's usually, in my neighborhood it's all the white, affluent families. You know, it's the moms that don't work. I don't

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participate. I don't have time. I've got to go to work. To bring cupcakes

for the whole classroom, no I can't do that. I've got to go to work.

Kassie and Lupe also discussed not being able to attend PTA functions

because of their full-time employment. Kassie said, "I'd like to be more involved

at the elementary level. Truth is, I work." Similarly, Lupe noted that the PTA at

his daughter's school is very active. He provided detail about a dad's club that the

school has where the emphasis is on building relationships with fathers. When I

asked him if he participated in either the PTA or the dad's club his answer was,

"In membership I do. I think I have paid the dues. I attend their functions. I go to

the daddy-daughter dance. But I'm not as active as the other dads." His main

reason for not being as involved as he would like to be was time. Referencing his

job as a Family Communication Specialist, he mentioned:

> I stay pretty active in some of the things we do out in the community with
>
> our schools. That takes quite a bit of my time. In my role, there are just
>
> some things that need to get done. To stay in the middle-class, we have to
>
> work. I can't be there all the time, I need the money. You know, at the end
>
> of the day, you're tired. And that's why a lot of Hispanic parents don't do
>
> it.

Although Lupe was able to describe the role he does play in his daughter's

learning (as described in Chapter Five), and define the need for all parents to become more involved, his career and the distance between his work and his daughter's school have held him back.

While most parents described working as a necessity, Rey was able to articulate his experiences explicitly. Because Rey works an evening shift, he is able to have lunch with his daughter and pick her up after school. However, he is not able to attend most of the events that are planned by the PTA. In our conversations, Rey referenced that at the school his daughter attends, many events are planned to occur throughout the school day. The way he termed it was, "There's a lot going on. It's unbelievable how much is going on. I can't go to all of it. Even what happens during the day, I can't attend sometimes. Because I work nights, so I have to sleep." He explained that at River Raft Elementary there is not a need for both parents to work, because "one parent makes enough for the other to stay home." Therefore, many events are scheduled to take place between 8:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. He discussed that in cases where one parent did not have to work, it was easier for them [usually a White stay-at-home mother] to attend school events. "When you have a lot of activities planned, some parents can't always be there," he said. Like other parents in the study, he expanded on the "necessity" for both parents in his household to work:

> It's not that we don't want to go. We just have to work. There's a reason
>
> why we have to work. Many of us [Latinos], we don't have the luxury that

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the White parents that live around the school or the other schools have of

not working. Even if we are in the middle-class. That's why we are middle

class, because we work.

Even though Rey termed his involvement as more active or different than

that of his own parents (as described in Chapter Five), he described the inability

to take time off of work as a reason why he is not as involved as other parents

who do not work during the school day. He expanded on this by discussing that

because many of the other parents do not have a financial need to have a two-

parent working household, a certain perception continues exists regarding the

non-involvement of Hispanic parents. The lack of time, coupled with the negative

perception that continues to define Latino parents in schools, kept Rey from

wanting to participate in the PTA. When I asked him about his involvement in

school-sponsored events, including the PTA, he responded:

> Well, no, I'm not involved in the PTA. I'm just not involved in it. You
>
> know, it's just a personal choice. It's not something I want to do. There's
>
> so much to do. And like I said before, I hate to be this way or say this, but
>
> I just leave it to those that don't work. Honestly, I see that [PTA] like their
>
> job. They don't have to work. We do. It's just too much. I don't like it. I
>
> just choose to be involved in my own way.

Additionally, while participants were able to share a narrative with

varying examples of why they were not involved in organizations such as the PTA, Carlos and Lupe agreed with Rey that it was just something that they did not care to do. Lupe, for example, discussed how parents that are members of the PTA have historically seen examples of such behaviors within their own families. To him, it was something that was passed down, particularly in Eurocentric middle-class families. Similarly, Carlos mentioned, "like you, I prefer not to engage in a system where I'm not welcomed or where I won't have any say." He continued by describing institutional racism that exist, and continues to keep Latino parents, like himself from participating. The parents were able to position race in their conversations, ultimately leading to my next section.

What's Race Got to do With It?

At the onset of this study, I identified that I would use Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (Lat Crit) at the center of my analysis in an effort to provide participants the opportunity to discuss their rich experiences, while situating the role race plays in the involvement of middle-class Hispanics with schools. In Chapter Two, I highlighted inequities that exist when schools are filled with deficit-laden perspectives of Hispanic parents. Fine (1993) argues that parents from low-income backgrounds are usually treated as less than professional parents, and how parents from upper-income backgrounds are usually more involved. In this section, narratives of the eight middle-class Latino participants revealed that despite their efforts to be active participants, the negative

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perceptions and ways in which they were treated continued to be a factor that hindered relationships between parents and school personnel. The participants acknowledged that the negative assumptions and low expectations other parents and school personnel held often determined their involvement. The Hispanic participants in this study were able to articulate that they perceived the manner in which they were marginalized was solely due to their race.

Initially, a few participants did not feel comfortable enough to situate race in our conversations. At the same time, several of them shared vivid accounts of how they felt discriminated against in the predominantly White schools and communities they belong to. Through our interviews, all of them were able to reflect on instances of subordination and marginalization of Hispanic parents that they were able to experience firsthand. In this section, I highlight three specific incidents of racial tensions that my participants explicitly felt and voiced.

While it was not a goal to answer why, it should be noted that all of the parents in this study purposefully enrolled their children in schools where Latinos did not make up the majority of the student population. All of the participants recognized that being Latino in schools and neighborhoods where the majority of the population is White presented some challenges. Using CRT and Lat Crit provided a powerful tool that helped me understand several detailed accounts of the continued marginalization of people of color. The narratives presented by Rey, Becky, and Eva displayed that most evidence which supported that Hispanic

parents, regardless of income or social status, continue to redefine their

participation in schools because of the way they have been treated.

The Only Hispanic Man

Rey did not shy away from acknowledging that negative predispositions

exist, and have tainted the historically Hispanic community in the educational

realm as a whole. In Chapter Five, he described his own involvement by telling

me that he was not as active or present when his two older daughters were in

elementary school. He then continued to discuss ways in which he became more

involved with his youngest daughter, both at home and at school. In a light-

hearted manner, Rey said to me, "I don't have a desire to be at all of the stuff that

happens at school. But my wife, she kind of made me." Rey's wife, Michelle, also

spoke of wanting both she and Rey to be more involved. Not only did she

encourage him to attend more school-sponsored events, Michelle also wanted him

to meet more of the parents at Lisa's school. He liberally discussed being cordial

with other parents (mostly stay-at-home White mothers) and school staff on his

daily trip to pick Lisa up from school.

Coupling CRT and LatCrit theory provided an opportunity for participants,

like Rey, to recognize and *challenge the dominant ideologies* that exist in, while

recognizing the participants' *experiential knowledge* to understanding continued

experiences of subordination (Delgado Bernal & Villapando, 2002; Delgado &

Stefanic, 2001; Parker & Villapando, 2007). When I asked him if he had ever

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experienced any challenges, Rey went into great detail to describe a specific story, where he felt marginalized. Throughout this time, I was aware that Rey became angry and bothered while he discussed this incident. He clearly expressed his sentiments when he told me:

> I don't want to have anything to do with that [volunteering at school]. To be honest with you, I don't like some of the parents. Well, I shouldn't say that. It's not that I don't like them. It's that I don't like the way I've been treated before, when I have volunteered before.
>
> When I asked him to elaborate, and provide examples, recalling times when he felt like an "outcast." He began to tell me about a time when he agreed to help at Lisa's field day. When he arrived at the school, all of the other (mostly White) parents were talking and helping each other out. However, he remembered that, "nobody talked to me or said anything to me the entire time." Rey felt awkward, and tried to figure out why they would not include him, as he waited to be included and guided. He decided to volunteer again, hoping the outcome would be different.

Rey shared that his wife, again, convinced him to participate in the event so he could meet some parents. There was an opportunity for fathers to come together on a Saturday morning to help build up and beautify the school. In reference to the actual experience, Art mentioned, "It was like the best day ever."

He talked about working all day with other fathers, having lunch, and even grabbing a beer or two after the workday was over. He discussed that after the event is when he realized they continued to look at him for who he was, "just another Hispanic parent." Angrily, Rey shared:

> That's how they are. That's how it is for everything. Like they don't even know you. Monday afternoon, I stood next to a father, right next to him while picking up our kids. I stood right there next to the person that was digging a hole with me 48 hours earlier. And he didn't say a word to me. Not one word. It's like he didn't even recognize me. We shared a shovel for 10 hours. And it wasn't like we didn't have a conversation, or a drink a beer together after.

Rey specifically identified his race when he told me that there was no way that he could be confused, or that he would not stand out. After all, he was the only Hispanic father who volunteered that day. Similarly, he has been one of the only Hispanic fathers who picks up his daughter from school daily. Rey expressed sentiments of disgust as he shared that it was not just that one incident or that one parent. Instead, he felt that "it's everybody there." Rey realized that he would not become "best friends" with the parents at Lisa's school. He recognized race and income separate him from other middle-class parents, particularly those who are White. However, he acknowledged that he made several attempts to be cordial and civil, saying hello and trying to spark conversations. The incident Rey

described, along with the continuous separation between Latinos and Whites at his daughter's school, have deterred him from any further involvement with the school. He vowed to continue to support all three of his daughters at home, rather than to continue to deal with being labeled or looked down upon.

A Witch Hunt

In a 2009 research study, Shah detailed challenges, including background and language, that have played a role in keeping parents of color—regardless of economic background—from participating in school-sponsored events. This study revealed that regardless of social class, Latino parents recognized race, racism and the intersectionality with class as being a central in their experiences (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Additionally, Becky and Eva were also able to highlight race and racism as permanent fixtures in their experiences as parents in predominantly White schools (Howard & Reynolds, 2008; Reynolds, 2009; Yosso, 2005). Each alluded to instances where they felt degraded and misunderstood.

When I solicited responses pertaining to how the school(s) solicited their involvement, as Hispanic parents, most could not provide a specific answer. I first met Becky at a birthday party that both of our daughters attended. Being the only two Latinas at the party, Becky and I were immediately drawn to each other. Her daughter was attending the same school I pulled my own child out of two years earlier. She expressed that she felt "relieved" to finally have someone who

understood her, and with whom she could talk. That day, she began to tell me about the problems she had encountered at Spring Creek. Immediately, she mentioned that she felt the issues she faced stemmed from the fact that she and her daughter were Latinas.

I met Becky for lunch a couple of weeks later for our first interview. When we began to discuss her experiences, she was eager to tell me how she would only receive a phone call or note from the school when there was trouble. She had previously told me about some difficulties she had with other parents. Yet this time, the experience she was sharing also involved school personnel. At her daughter's request, Susan dropped her daughter off early at school one morning. After receiving a note from the teacher regarding school policy and drop-off time, Becky made her daughter aware that it could not happen again. The next week, the school counselor called her to discuss a complaint she had received:

> I got a phone call at work, and of course I was going to answer it because it was from the school. I picked it up, and it was the counselor. She introduced herself to me, and then she said *I just wanted to bring it up to your attention that your daughter has been getting dropped off way too early. And it has been brought to my attention.*

Becky's voice quivered as she continued to tell me about the incident.

After she explained to the counselor that it was a one-time incident, she asked her

to look into how many times Amanda had been tardy. Because Becky is a single

mother, she expressed that getting to school early was not common for Amanda.

"I usually run late," she said. "I gotta go to work, and I have another baby I have

to take to day care." As the two continued to talk, Becky was informed that

several parents complained about the one time she dropped her daughter off early

at school. At that point, she shared that the parent had also asked the counselor to

look into whom the child stays with after school, if she stays home alone, and

other personal information. Becky expressed her fury:

> I wanted to know why my daughter was being singled out. She wasn't the
>
> only one that was dropped off early that day. Several of them [girls]
>
> planned it. And I know all the other moms at Spring Creek don't work.
>
> They have all the time in the world to be running their mouth. But a parent
>
> complained, about one time? That was the second incident with something
>
> like that.

Villenas and Dehyle (1999) documented how LatCrit uses

voice to tell the counter-story of Latino parents, exposing the destructive forms of

treatment by which school officials . Similarly, Becky also shared how when her

grandmother in Guatemala became ill, she met with the attendance clerk at Spring

Creek Elementary to determine what steps she needed to take because her

daughter would be absent from school for at least a week. Together, they

determined it was best to withdraw her from school, as to not affect her grades.

When she enrolled her daughter back in school, parents began to question whether

there was really a medical emergency or if the family had gone on vacation to

Hawaii. In fury, Becky shared:

> This was the first incident. I get a call from the office telling me that there
>
> was word that we had not really gone to Guatemala to take care of family
>
> business. The rumor was that we were in Hawaii, and they needed the
>
> other parents to know that this was not the case. She went on to talk about
>
> how the school has a reputation, and they needed to keep it that way. She
>
> made sure I understood our actions were not going to ruin it [the school's
>
> reputation].

Becky had to provide the school with a stamped passport and the receipt

for the plane ticket that showed they were, in fact, in Guatemala. In addition, she

provided doctor's notes to prove her grandmother had surgery. She was especially

offended and humiliated when her daughter's teacher mentioned that it was a

parent who triggered this "witch hunt." Becky attributed a lack of understanding

of the Latino culture to the assumptions that were made against her daughter:

> My grandmother was sick. We left the country. That's what we had to do.
>
> I'm sorry if that's not what they would do. I told them, this is beyond
>
> anything I could have ever expected from a school. I refused to be part of
>
> their social club. I was not there to worry about what people thought about

me, how much money I had or didn't have, that I wasn't the same skin color. My daughter was at Spring Creek to receive an education. School is supposed to be an environment where children feel safe, not where we continued to be singled out because we are not the kind of people that are expected to attend that school.

Becky eventually received an apology from the principal. This only occurred after she took the documents to the school, and was seen crying with fury. The negative situations brought on by parents and school personnel at Spring Creek led Becky to believe, that as Latinas, she and her daughter would never "fit in" at the school or community. At the time of the interview, Becky was looking to relocate. When I spoke to her at the start of the 2014-2015 school year, she was happy with the decision she made to move her daughter to a new school. She shared:

Honestly, I see the difference. I see why people send their kids to Spring Creek. It has a lot to offer educationally, yes. And I guess I can see why they are the way they are, too. You know, like they are better. But the way we were treated, it's like we were always being targeted. We were under a microscope just so they could find a way to get rid of us. And they did.

Dixson and Rousseau (2006) discuss the using voice as an acknowledgement of experiences of communities of color. In this study, Becky was able to identify the continued systems of oppression (Solorzano and Yosso,

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2001) that she faced at as a middle-class Latina parent at Spring Creek Elementary. She affirmed that in the short time at the new school, she already felt a sense of relief and could focus solely on her daughter's academics.

Laughing Through the Pain

In her interview, Eva used words such as "alienated" and "isolated" when describing her experiences at two separate affluent White schools. She discussed a lack of interaction that existed, not just at the school but in the suburban community in which she lived. Similar to the other participants, Eva purposefully chose to send her children to certain schools. With the hope of receiving a "better education," she and her family have lived in two separate suburban affluent White communities.

Eva noted, "Everybody wants their kids to go to a good school. We usually assume that the White schools are the best schools. Well, that's not always the case." Within 15 minutes during our first interview, she pointed out her race as she portrayed an image of the surroundings that ultimately made her feel uncomfortable. Being some of the few Hispanics living in the area, Eva recounted, "When my kids were in elementary school, we were obviously the only Hispanics who attended the meetings or parent activities at school." She went on to tell me that even though she attempted to meet her neighbors, after living in her house for five years, they only spoke to her to let her know that her son had been kicking his soccer ball over to their house. The one interaction Eva

had with them was when they told her it needed to stop. Similarly, even though she attended events at the school, Eva was not able to foster relationships with any of the parents. Even though Eva's son played little league football and soccer with the same group of kids for several years, she explained that she was always alone because all the other parents would stick together.

As I continued to talk to Eva, I noticed that she would begin to laugh or giggle whenever she discussed an uncomfortable topic. We moved on to other questions; however, the conversation would lead back to a lack of community ties, not knowing anybody, and feeling alone. As her kids grew older, Eva and her family moved to a newly developed suburban area. Once again, she talked about "not knowing anybody." She went on to note that "everyone stays inside. Nobody talks to anybody." When her children continued to be involved in sports and other activities, Eva noticed that she was not the only one feeling marginalized. It should be noted that Eva acknowledged that her daughter was not targeted as much as her son because she has fair skin and blonde hair. She focused our discussion on occurrences that she witnessed with her son, having darker skin, dark eyes, and dark hair. She detailed how oftentimes, her son—being one of the few Hispanics in the neighborhood—felt left out:

> My son, even though he goes to school with these boys and plays football
> with them, they always leave him out. And he recognizes he's the only
> Hispanic. He's told me. But like I ask him why don't you go play with

your friends? He doesn't get invited to parties. And we know the kids are going to parties, it's all over social media. Or when I take his friends home, I hear them talking about going over to someone's house. But they never invite him.

Even though Eva would laugh or giggle when discussing instances as these, I also noticed her eyes would begin to water. Eva began to tell me about how she volunteered for car pool during football practice or games. She tried to attend all of the practices, but felt awkward because she always sat by herself. She told me that even though she would cheer for the other boys, or take pictures of the group after a victory, the other parents seldom spoke to her. While she did admit that after a while she began to reflect on her own behavior, thinking maybe it was her with the problem, the times she chose to sit closer to a group of parents and try to talk to them they still would not hold long conversations with her. "They would acknowledge me, like say hi. But that's all," she said. Feeling so removed, Eva stopped sitting on the bleachers to watch her son practice or play. Instead, she chose to sit in her car, alone.

As she went on, continuing on the topic of her son playing football, she began to tear up when she described asking her son to get a ride home from one of the other boy's grandmother. Her son was reluctant to share with her, but when he asked for a ride the grandmother "made a face." When Eva asked him why he thought she did not want to give him a ride, she said:

He told me it's because she [the White grandmother] doesn't like

Mexicans. And as a parent that really hurt me that he told me that because

at his young age he's picked up on that. And that's something you want

your kids to avoid, rejection. It's so painful as a parent to know that your

kid is being rejected based on their ethnicity or because of the color of

their skin, you know? The perspective is that he's brown so he's a thug.

Eva recognized that negative perceptions follow Hispanics, and discussed

that the reason her family moved to the suburbs was to escape the low

expectations she and her husband had to endure growing up. The incidents she

described, from sitting all by herself, feeling inadequate, lacking a sense of

community, and not fitting in caused her stop being as active. She described the

more blatant instances of racial tension in her current location, particularly

because the population continues to be predominantly White.

Conclusion

At the onset of this study, I identified that I would be using tenets of CRT

and LatCrit to recognize the lived experiences from the lives of eight middle-class

Hispanics. This chapter provided my research partners an opportunity to share

detailed narratives, allowing a group that has been generalized in the educational

research, to finally be heard (Fernandez, 2002). Although LatCrit borrows from

the five principle tenets of CRT, the use of *voice* and the intersection of race,

racism, were used to specifically analyze the experiences shared with me.

The parents in this study provided evidence that supported the negative experiences that have historically been associated with the lack of traditional parent involvement of Latinos in U.S. schools (Delgado-Bernal, 2004; Valencia, 2010). The narratives presented opposition Hispanic parents have met, and continue to meet. The findings suggested that even though the parents in this study self-identified as middle-class or middle-income, they were not exempt from being stereotyped or feeling undervalued by school personnel and other [White] parents. Similar to Latinos of all social classes and economic backgrounds (Delgado-Gaitan, year; Lopez, 2001; Valencia, 2010), the participants agreed that negative perceptions, misconceptions, cultural misunderstandings, and particularly race affected or shaped their involvement.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides concluding remarks, including findings and implications for future study. I begin with an overview of the research, and continue by highlighting three major findings that emerged from my study in the second section. Based on my findings, I then discuss implications for policy, research, and practice and provide limitations to the study. I end the chapter with my final thoughts.

Overview of the Study

The changing demographics of the United States have been significant over the past few decades, making Latinos the fastest growing and largest racial group (Pew Hispanic, 2013a, Pew Research Center, 2014). Additionally, the National Center for Educational Statistics (2011) provided data to show that the number of Hispanic students enrolled in K-12 public schools in the U.S. increased from 17 to 24 percent. With a growing number of school-aged Hispanic students, there continues to be a discrepancy in their educational achievement and attainment, particularly when it is compared to that of their White peers (Gay, 2004; Pew Research Center, 2014).

Scholars have sought to examine the relationship between parent involvement and the academic achievement of Hispanic students (Barnard, 2004; Harvard Family Project, 2007). Particularly, researchers, policy makers,

educators, and community members have called for increased parent involvement in an effort to close the academic gap that exists between Hispanic students and their White peers (USDoE, 2004). At the same time, there has been a focus on providing a remedy to address the limited involvement of Hispanic parents, especially immigrant and low-income Latino families (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Lopez, 2001; Zarate, 2007). However, the literature that exists on the parent involvement practices in U.S. schools has focused on Eurocentric middle-class norms (e.g.), and/or expectations of the school. With more Hispanic families making entry into the middle-class (Agius-Vallejo, 2013), the literature has ignored the need to recognize the heterogeneity that exists between parents of similar racial (Hispanic) and/or socioeconomic (middle-class) backgrounds. The purpose of this research was to examine how middle-class Hispanics conceptualized their experiences of parent involvement. The study was designed to provide information about their past and present experiences that ultimately shaped their involvement practices as Latino parents in predominantly White schools. I employed two theoretical frameworks, Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Theory (Lat Crit), which provide the necessary context to understand their lived realities both inside and outside of schools, while specifically noting the ways in which people of color continue to be subordinated in society (Dehyle, & Villenas, 1999; Dixson & Rousseau 2006; Parker; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Yosso, 2005). I utilized both theories to provide the

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participants with a space to contribute to the academic discourse on the involvement and/or marginalization of Hispanic middle-class parents in K-12 schools. For this study, I used a phenomenological approach to present experiences and perceptions that were unique to participants and that had not been previously explored in the literature (Rossman & Rallis, 1998; Spiegelberg, 1982). The guiding research questions for this study included:

1) How do middle-class Hispanic parents define and perceive their parent involvement experiences in K-12 public schools in Texas?

2) What factors facilitate opportunities? and/or create roadblocks to participate in their children's education within these learning communities?

Purposeful sampling was used to select eight participants who met the following criteria: 1) self-identified as Hispanic/Latino, 2) self-identified as middle-class, and have a household income above the state median income of $51, 926;[18] 3) have at least one child/children currently attending a K-12 public school in a predominantly White, suburban community within the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) area.

The major focus of this study was parental involvement. While various methods of collecting data were used in this study, the two main sources of gathering information from participants were demographic questionnaires and

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[18] In 2011, 21.9% of Hispanic households earned $50, 000 or more; 17% earned between $62, 00-$100, 000; 11.5% earned $100, 000 or more (Pew Hispanic, 2012)

semi-structured interviews. The

demographic data revealed that most participants were married, attained a higher

education and pursued graduate degrees, and were the first in their family to

obtain entry into the Hispanic middle-class. While all of the participants described

their involvement as active, a majority of them were not involved in a school-

based organization (including PTA).

It should be noted that as a researcher, I was completely immersed in the

research process. Delgado-Bernal (2008) defines *la trenza de identidades* [the

braid of identities] as an opportunity for the researcher to weave together their

communal, personal, and professional identities. As a middle-class Latina mother

and educator, my interest to conduct this study was both professional and

personal. Therefore, it was necessary for me to identify my position in the study.

Because of my own experiences, I was interested in the perspectives of other

middle-class Hispanic parents in K-12 public schools.

Key Findings

After rigorous qualitative data analysis, three major findings emerged

through the review of literature, demographic questionnaires, interviews,

observations, memos, and reflective journals. The findings reflected the unique

experiences of middle-class Latino parents as they defined their involvement in

predominantly White schools. Each of the themes aligned with the deficit-laden

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perspectives[19] presented in Chapter Two (Auerbach, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Valencia 1997, 2010) and the theoretical frameworks in Chapter Three. First, based on the model of parent involvement participants witnessed from their own parents, their own participation was redefined. Through counter-storytelling[20] the parents described how they facilitated their own involvement, breaking barriers that had historically defined the participation of Hispanic parents as non-existent (Daniel-White, 2002; Epstein, 1995; 2001; Hong, 2011; Lopez, 2001). Second, while participants redefined their involvement, they determined how much of the Eurocentric model they wanted to adopt, while preserving tradition in their own culture. Last, participants explicitly presented a narrative that portrayed conflicts of involvement, including the continued marginalization and subordination that hindered their desire to participate in their children's schools through traditional methods. The results of the data are presented in the upcoming sections.

Key Finding #1: Middle-class Hispanic parents redefined their involvement in public schools.

The first major finding in this study revealed the instrumental role that the parents of the participants play in how they decided to be involved in their children's schooling. . All of the participants, most whom were from low-income

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[19] A deficit perspective attempts to blame and fix families that are not active participants in their child's education, as define by traditional Eurocentric models of parent involvement (Auerbach, 1989)

[20] Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define counter-storytelling as a method of telling a story that "aims to cast doubt on the validity of accepted premises or myths, especially ones held by the majority," (p. 144).

backgrounds and the first-generation in their families to pursue a college degree, described the lack of navigational skills their own parents had with being involved in school-related activities.

The idea that parent involvement should follow norms that have been specifically designed for the White-middle class has allowed a deficit viewpoint to dictate the perception of Hispanic parental involvement in schools (Robinson, 2007; Valencia, 1997, 2010). Generally, schools have adopted monolithic beliefs that aim to fix families that do not exhibit traditional ways of supporting student achievement. According to Auerbach (1989), these deficit perspectives have defined Hispanic parents as being uninvolved and uncaring, when they do not participate in school-sanctioned activities that are in tune with the goals of the school.

In this study, I found examples of how participants viewed their own parents as being *uninvolved.* Six of the eight participants (Carlos, Eva, Becky, Michelle, Rey, and Lupe) believed that not being educated in the U.S. and having conflicts with work obligations and/or language, kept their parents from knowing how to participate in schools. Rather than conforming to the scholarly and societal discourse that portrays a negative stereotype, which claims that language and cultural differences impede the learning of children of color (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004), each individual contributed to a counter-story, which detailed their own involvement. Because there is limited scholarship on the involvement experiences

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of middle-class Hispanic parents, I provided an opportunity for the participants of this study to describe various ways they support their children's education. These conversations allowed me to understand how participants challenge and redefine perceptions about the involvement of parents of color, specifically Hispanics.

Based on the experiences of their own parents' *limited involvement* in schools, the parents in the study provided examples that shaped their own levels of participation. The data revealed that their main goal was to be more involved than their own parents. The participants recognized that their socioeconomic (e.g. middle class) and cultural positions (e.g. Bilingual, attending U.S. public schools, college educated, etc.) allowed them to interact with school personnel and understand the expectations of relationships that should exist between parents and schools. Thus, the participants described their involvement similar to the traditional middle-class Eurocentric model that is familiar in schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 2001, 2004; Kim, 2009). For example, when I asked questions related to supporting their children's academics, they discussed helping their children with homework, attending school-sponsored events, and sharing the goal of increased student achievement with the school. Additionally, parents defined their intellectual and social capital as a means to continue to redefine their involvement. In this study, five participants (Priscilla, Kassie, Eva, Michelle, and Rey) were parents to children in middle or high school. They shared instances of continued support of their children's academics, throughout the elementary,

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middle, and high school years. The parents described how they promoted

preparation for higher education—whether it was through the support in

academics or extra-curricular activities, including choir, band,

cheerleading/dance, and sports. In addition to redefining their involvement, the

eight individuals also discussed how they facilitated their participation in

educational settings where their Hispanic children were not the majority.

Key Finding #2: How middle-class Hispanic parents facilitate their involvement in predominantly White schools.

The review of literature described increased academic achievement of all

students as the ultimate goal of parent involvement. It has been suggested that

when parents participate in their children's education, across all ages and grade

levels, improvement in academics occur (DoE, 2004; Ripley, 2013). For example,

the United States Department of Education (2004) promoted an increase in parent

involvement of Hispanic parents, in an effort to "close the gap between

disadvantaged, disabled, and minority students, and their peers" (p. 7). As

mentioned in Chapter Two, most of the opportunities for parent involvement that

has been available follow a middle-class White model. Most participants

volunteering in school, parent-teacher conferences, and other school-sanctioned

events and organizations (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Wooley, Glimpse, & Johnson,

2001), when describing their own involvement. Scholars have also found that

when parents provide assistance with monitoring homework, read to students at

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home, or provide a space for learning, the academic achievement of children increases (Barnard, 2004; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006).

Perceptions of parent involvement vary, particularly among parents of different racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds. Interestingly, although the parents in this study adopted traditional concepts of participating in their children's education, they also chose not to become involved in school-sponsored organizations, such as the PTA. Through the identification of the intersection of race, class, and experiential knowledge, they provided evidence that highlighted how their practices follow non-traditional forms of parent involvement that have been passed down generationally (Auerbach, 2007; Delgado-Gaitan 2004; Lopez, 2001; Zarate, 2007).

Through conversations with the participants in this study, I found that they expressed the benefits of the home-school relationships and varying levels of participation for their children (Lopez, 2001; Zarate, 2007). Participants discussed the ways in which the support they provided to their students, starting at home, set a foundation for their academic achievement. Lupe, a Family Engagement Specialist, husband, and father of two kids, compared the daily conversations he has with his daughter about planning for the future to the high expectations his parents had of him when he was in school. In this study, I gleaned that the goal of parent involvement for each individual included working towards supporting their children's continued and increased achievement. However, instead of following a

prescribed method of being involved, they chose the way parent involvement would look for them.

In addition, the non-traditional forms of involvement exhibited by Hispanic parents were also evident in the experiences they shared. While such forms of involvement, including high expectations, work ethic, and values may not necessarily appeal to the goals of schools (Delgado-Gatinan 2004; Lopez, 2001; Zarate, 2007), participants expressed their support for such tenets representative of the Latino culture. For example, providing a space for learning and planning for the future of their children's education, and participating in their children's lives was just as important as supporting them with their academics (Zarate, 2007). The use of Critical Race and Latino Critical theories allowed the participants to challenge the one-sided narrative that has been told in the literature, while describing parent involvement on their own terms. Several times, Rey, who worked the night shift at a pharmaceutical company, admitted that because of his work schedule his involvement might not be exactly like that of others. However, with a smile on his face, he described talking to his daughter about her day at school as one of the best parts of his day. The two theories also provided an opportunity to include experiences where race, experiential knowledge, and social class continued to play a role in the involvement of Latino parents.

Key Finding #3: The Continued Marginalization and Subordination of Latino Parents in Schools, Regardless of Social Class.

While the data revealed how participants redefined their involvement in schools, the stories also highlighted how Latino parents continue to feel ostracized within institutions of education. While this study focused on middle-class Hispanic parents, the narratives acknowledged experiences that have been present for other communities of color regardless of class (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Shah (2009) discussed existing barriers that have caused parents of color and from different socio-economic backgrounds to be less involved than White parents. Comparably, participants described ongoing systems of oppression that led to the continued belief that Latino parents are uninvolved and do not care about their children's education (Auerbach, 2007; Delgado-Gatinan 2004; Valencia, 2010). Even though the participants were aware of resources available to form networks with other parents (including Parent Teacher Association, Site-Based Decision Committees, and Booster Clubs) they discussed challenges that limited their ability to be a part of such events. In addition, the data pointed out work schedules and a general feeling of exclusion as some of the reasons that have kept them from being as involved in schools. Furthermore, specific examples illuminated detailed blatant instances of isolation and discrimination as factors that limited involvement in K-12 public schools.

The participants also discussed school officials' misunderstandings of

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cultural norms, issues of power, and negative stereotypes that kept them from being more involved in a traditional sense. Almost unanimously, the parents agreed that at one point or another, misconceptions others had about Hispanics, in general, have made it uncommon for them to be actively involved. Kassie, a high school English teacher and mother of three, spoke about certain looks she received from other parents while she was a part of a Site-Based Decision Making Committee at her son's middle school. She described the experience as *unknown*, because having a Latina share her knowledge was not what was expected by other committee members. Using CRT and Lat Crit provided a tool for analysis that allowed me to understand the ways in which parents of color have and continue to feel marginalized in K-12 schools. Rey, Becky, and Eva provided stories with enough detail to support the idea that despite social class or status, deficit views of Hispanic parents continue to exist in schools (Delgado-Gaitan, 2004; Valencia, 2010). Additionally, such negative perspectives affected how the eight parents in my study chose to participate.

Implications for Policy, Research, and Practice

Based on my research, this section provides suggestions that can influence future policy, research, and practice. First, I discuss policy implications for state and local officials. Second, I present new knowledge that was gleaned from this study and how it can contribute to future research. The section concluded with recommendations for practice in K-12 schools.

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Implications for Policy

The current study found that parent involvement is unique, depending on its context. As previously described, the Hispanic population is not monolithic. Therefore, the implications for policy can be viewed at a federal, state, or local level, and focus on making changes that will encourage practices that will aim at increasing the parent involvement of all parents.

As previously noted, parents in this study referenced conflicts with work schedules as a reason for not being able to attend some school-sponsored events. While some employers provide vacation or medical leave, parents discussed not being able to have the flexibility in their work day to take time off for events such as parent teacher conferences, without being penalized. The first implication would be to require employers to allocate time that would allow parents to attend events that typically take place during the work day. An organization that establishes such a policy can create a culture that promotes the family and community involvement of all its personnel.

The discrepancy that exists in how parent involvement is defined has generally called for an increase in the participation of Hispanics. The participants in this study did not feel that any efforts had been made by school personnel or current leaders of school organizations towards designing or implementing opportunities that could promote their participation. The second implication would require districts and schools to establish a committee to create an action

plan that would identify specific needs, and a specific organizational vision to increase the involvement of all parents. This group should consist of members of the learning community, including parents, business leaders, and school personnel, who are willing to recognize the need to implement change that could fundamentally change the current types and levels of parent involvement.

The findings from this study also demonstrate a need to understand that disconnect between traditional forms of parent involvement and the non-academic support the participants described. Due to a shift in demographics that has occurred across the entire nation, the last policy implication focuses on building and sustaining efforts to effectively promote the contributions of all parents, particularly the growing Hispanic population. Schools should be required to provide professional development for teachers and staff that share best practices for increasing parent involvement. The information must focus on committing to student achievement and improving the culturally responsive pedagogy that targets unique cultural strengths of all students, parents, and families.

Implications for Research

The data gleaned from this study will add to the limited research on parent involvement of middle-class Hispanic parents, and uncover any misconceptions that continue to exist. The information can be used support the advancement of Hispanics in K-12 schools, and provide support to students and their families. Some implications were voiced directly by the participants, while others were

extracted through the data analysis. My hope is that they will aid researchers by providing a road map of what is needed in future studies.

The fact that the role Hispanic middle-class parents play in their children's education and academic success has not been explored in depth provides an opportunity for discussions to begin. Future research can expand the conversations regarding the intersection of race, class and gender, especially in the Hispanic community. Additionally, this discussion could provide opportunities to recognize in-group differences that exist between Latinos of different ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds.

A second implication for future research would be to expand the scope of the research by studying participants in different settings. In 2011, the Pew Research Hispanic Trends Project ranked Texas number two amongst the states with the largest Latino population. In addition to the Dallas-Fort Worth Metropolitan, Houston and San Antonio also ranked amongst the top 10 metropolitan areas by Hispanic populations (Pew Hispanic, 2011). Future research could include conducting case studies, focusing on the experiences of participants from multiple cities. Additionally, expanding the scope of the setting could provide an opportunity to conduct a quantitative research study, at a larger scale.

The data revealed that Hispanic parents felt misunderstood and undervalued by other parents and/or school officials who were actively involved

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in school committees. Although findings suggested that the participants in this study felt underrepresented within structured decision-making organizations of the school, Parent Teacher Associations are deeply weaved into traditional parental involvement methods. Therefore, future studies could focus primarily on the experiences of parents of color, in general, and school-sponsored organizations. The information garnered could provide insight on changes that may need to occur in existing practices.

Implications for Practice

This study found that cultural differences existed between school officials, White parents, and the Latino parents I interviewed. Therefore, when opportunities for involvement are designed, the events should not seem exclusive to any particular group. For example, I found that most parents in my study could not attend events during the workday or immediately after school due to conflicts with their employment schedules, and/or because they often felt isolated. A recommendation for practice would be to respect and encourage all types of involvement. This could include becoming familiar with parental support that is instilled at home (Auerbach, 1989; Delgado-Gaitan; 2001, 2004) that the school is not in charge of organizing. School officials can begin by designing and implementing a professional development series that addresses the growing population of Hispanics in predominantly White schools. Additionally, similar sessions can be included as a part of the PTA orientation, or other events where

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the majority of the participants are middle-class White parents. When organizations, such as the PTA, are more culturally responsive in the delivery of the information presented to all groups, understanding how Latino parents support their children's academics outside of school is promoted.

Along a similar line, data that emerged suggested that school personnel encourage the participation of Hispanic parents by implementing practices that are culturally sensitive. While multicultural events, including having students dressing up for Cinco de Mayo or recognizing Cesar Chavez have been celebrated, Hispanic students, parents, families, and communities should be welcomed and valued daily as part of the school community. Further, an additional recommendation stemming from the study would be to encourage events that are linguistically and culturally appropriate to create inclusive learning communities.

Limitations

It is recommended for researchers to identify limitations, or boundaries, established by the researcher. Limitations of the study deal with the characteristics of the design or methodology of the study. Additionally, they often refer to characteristics that potentially identify strengths and/or weaknesses of the study, which can affect the interpretation of results (Creswell, 2013).

I identified three limitations in this study. The first deals with the nature of purposeful sampling of participants in the study. Because I was interested in

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understanding the perceived experiences of a specific group of parents, I was selective in who could participate. I was only interested in sharing the story of middle-class Hispanic parents. Due to the academic studies that have previously focused on immigrant Latinos and parents of color from low socioeconomic backgrounds, I did not find it necessary to include parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds. In addition, seven out of the eight participants were of Mexican origin. I focused on this group primarily because Latinos of Mexican origin make up 64.6% of the Latino population in the U.S., and 88% of the Hispanic population in Texas (Pew Hispanic, 2013). Therefore, Hispanic participants of Mexican origin were more easily accessible. My findings may have been different if I would have also included Latino families from other ethnic groups (i.e. El Salvadorian, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Columbian, etc.), because their experiences may be different. Having a more diverse sample would have allowed me to delve deeper into the in-group differences of the Latino population. The second limitation included the site selection and setting. By choosing to restrict the research site to a northern region in Texas, I did not consider the experiences of other middle-class Hispanic parents in other geographical areas. Ultimately, the limitations presented can potentially narrow the focus of this research study, but can be used as a springboard for future research.

Final Thoughts

My interest in this study emerged from my personal experiences. As a parent of color, I was unable to find a sense of belonging in the affluent White school my daughter attended in kindergarten (during the 2010-2011 school year). Over that past few years, plenty has changed, including moving—first—to a school and neighborhood with more diverse residents. The rigorous process I embarked upon three years ago, when I first became interested in the experiences of parent involvement of parents of color (not exclusive to Latinos), has allowed me to grow as a researcher, practitioner, and parent. I have fostered long lasting relationships with other Hispanic parents that share a similar story as mine. Delving deeply into the stories of the eight parents in this study has both solidified and tested the assumptions I had based on the literature and my own theories.

My findings related to what much of the scholarly discourse has alleged for centuries-- that parent involvement is a dynamic concept. For the parents involved in this study it was no different; each one of them had powerful conversations with me about the value of parent involvement in their own home. They spoke of their role as parents who support their children's education seriously, and felt a sense of responsibility to be more involved than their own parents. Additionally, they felt that even though they were *actively involved*, they continued to combat the negative perceptions of Latinos portrayed in the mainstream media, literature, and their schools and communities.

Besides describing their own involvement in terms that have been familiar through traditional methods (attending parent teacher conferences, helping with homework, volunteering in schools), the participants spoke very passionately about the familial traditions of the Latino culture they chose to continue. During my first round of interviews, while gathering background information, the eight parents in the study described their own parents as not being *involved*. The reasons they gave included strenuous work schedules, not being well-versed in the English language, or not having any experience in U.S. schools.

Similarly, when I became a parent of a school-aged child, I vowed to do all I could to ensure my own children would never have to wonder why I was unable to attend school events. Upon reflection, I came to the realization that my understanding of what I had I termed *my parents' lack of involvement* came from what I learned in textbooks as education major during my undergraduate studies, and from the sitcoms on television. For years, a picture of the ideal parent had been painted for me. I grew to resent my own parents for not being more like those individuals I read about in class or saw on television.

Throughout this research process I learned, from my participants and my own reflections, that our realities had been tainted with monolithic depictions of our culture, our people, and even our own parents as uncaring, uninvolved, and unwilling to be involved in our children's education. The conversations we had, some filled with tears and others with laughter, allowed the participants and I—as

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research partners—to rethink and redefine what we value about our own involvement. Together, we learned that what is taught in the Latino home (values, respect, and work ethic) resonates in the classroom. While the parents in this study spoke overwhelmingly about being committed to their children's current and future education, they also emphasized the importance of being involved in their children's daily lives.

All of the participants in this study purposefully enrolled their children in predominantly White affluent schools, with the hope they would receive *a better* education. In general, most parents praised the instruction and learning occurring at the schools. However, they also shared struggles that were attributed to personal, social, financial, and cultural differences from other parents, families, and educators in their learning communities. In fact, many shared experiences that were filled with discriminating undertones. For example, Becky, Eva, Michelle, Rey, and Carlos all shared how such practices had led them to want to be less involved with their children's schools, and show more support at home.

As I was writing this section, I came across some information presented by Amanda Ripley (2013). In her book *The Smartest Kids in the World, and How They Got That Way*, she compares educational systems across the world, focusing on improving educational outcomes for our students in the United States. I was not surprised to read about how educational leaders lamented over the lack of parental involvement as a source for school failure. However, I was able to relate

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to the low expectations they had of parents. I agreed with Ripley (2013) when she said, "Once you start locating the source of your problems outside your own jurisdiction, it is hard to stop, even when the narrative is wrong" p. 36. For so long, Hispanic parents have been labeled as being uninvolved and not caring about their children's education. Their voice has not been heard, primarily because their perception of involvement has not necessarily been aligned to the traditional forms of how parents should support student learning. This research study provided a counter-story to the master narrative that has narrowly defined optimal forms of participation. My aim is for school personnel, organizational councils, and other parents stop blaming Latino parents for what they do not do, and begin recognizing the value of their unique form of participation.

My final thoughts, therefore, remained similar to those with which I began this study. Why is what we [Latino parents] do to support our children's education is not enough, and why do we have to conform to how others term being involved? With these questions in mind, this study emerged from me—the researcher—wanting to give a voice to a subpopulation of Latinos that had not been considered in the scholarly literature. My hope, is that their voices are echoed and continue to be investigated. If the perception still exists in 2014 that Hispanic parents much change their practices of school involvement, it is time for deeper and more critical conversation.

Appendix A

Recruitment Letter

Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

 My name is Olga Martinez Hickman. I am a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA), where I am pursuing my doctoral degree in the College of Education and Health Professions, Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies under the advisement of Dr. Ifeoma Amah.

 I am conducting a qualitative research study to understand the experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents with children enrolled in K-12 public schools in the Dallas Forth Worth (DFW) metropolitan region. Therefore, I would like to invite you to participate in an interview for my research study. Your willingness to participate would be greatly appreciated. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

 The experiences you share are extremely important and will help strengthen the current research on the involvement of Hispanic parents. Your information will be kept confidential, and will only be accessed by me, the researcher and my doctoral advisor (Dr. Ifeoma Amah) for the purpose of this study. The interview will be recorded and transcribed to ensure that I capture your response. You will receive a copy of the transcription to ensure accuracy.

 If you are interested in participating in this study and would like additional information, please contact me by phone at 956-212-3550 or via email at olga.martinez@mavs.uta.edu

Sincerely,

Olga Martinez Hickman, M.Ed.
Doctoral Student
The University of Texas at Arlington

Appendix B

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: Please answer all of the following questions as they pertain to you.

1. Name:

   _____

2. What is your racial and/or ethnic background(s)? (Circle all that apply)

   African American Asian American   White, non-Hispanic
   Hispanic
   Middle Eastern   Other

3. What is your age?: 20-29   30-39   40-49   50+

4. Gender?:   Male   Female

5. Please describe your current employment status.

   _____

6. Number of children you have enrolled in a K-12 school: 1 2 3+

7. What is your highest level of education: (i.e. High School Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree, Doctoral Degree, other?)

   _____

8. How would you describe your family's estimated family's annual income:

   Working-class Middle-class Upper middle-class
      Affluent

   _____

Contact information?

Phone:

_____

Email:

_____

Appendix C

Consent Form

Consent Form

Nuestra Realidad: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Middle-Class Hispanic
Parents in Predominantly White Texas Public Schools

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
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TITLE OF PROJECT
Nuestra Realidad: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Middle-Class Hispanic
Parents in Predominantly White Texas Public Schools

INTRODUCTION
You are being asked to participate in a research study about the experiences of parent
involvement of middle-class Hispanic parents. This form provides you with information
about the study. Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing
your participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you
are otherwise entitled. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE
The specific purpose(s) of this research study is to add to the existing work on parent
involvement in schools. I hope to provide an in-depth understanding into the
experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents, in an effort to inform educators and
policymakers as they continue to design opportunities for parents of all backgrounds
and socioeconomic status. This study will provide an opportunity to improve
communication and collaboration between parents, families, and schools that will
ultimately improve the academic achievement of all students. In addition, the
intersection race and class plays in the experiences of middle-class Hispanic parents
will be examined.

DURATION
Each interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
The number of anticipated participants in this research study is ten individual parents.

PROCEDURES
If you agree to participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in one-to-one interviews that will include approximately 15 questions and last about 60-90 minutes. You may be asked questions such as: What is your definition of parent involvement? How do others, including the school, define parent involvement?

Confidentiality:
All one-on-one interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. The recordings and transcriptions will be coded so that no personally identifiable information is evident. After the interview, the tape will be transcribed, which means that it will be typed exactly as it was recorded, word per word, by the principal investigator. Only the principal investigator and the dissertation chair will have access to this information. The tape and transcription will not be used for any research that is not specified here.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS
The information you share will inform the literature of commonalities and differences among the involvement of Hispanic parents. Your experiences can provide recommendations for improving opportunities of involvement for parents of all backgrounds, and will be useful in understanding current and future practices. Additionally, this study may be useful in creating future local, state, and federal policy that supports improved involvement of middle-class Hispanic and other parents of color.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
This study will have minimal or no psychological/emotional risks, no risk of physical harm, and is non-experimental. You may feel somewhat uneasy because of the digital recording of interviews. Additionally, you may feel slightly stressed to disclose personal thoughts in fear that others may identify you.

COMPENSATION
There is no compensation for participating in this study. There may be snacks provided during one-one-one interviews.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES

There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Your participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at any time will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected including transcriptions/tapes from this study will be stored in a secure locked filing cabinet in Trimble Hall 103J, at the University of Texas at Arlington for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS

Questions about this research study may be directed to Olga Martinez Hickman, principal investigator, at 956-212-3550 or olga.martinez@mavs.uta.edu, and/or Dr. Ifeoma Amah, dissertation chair at, 817-272-0991or iamah@uta.edu . Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

_____
Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent

Date:_____

CONSENT

By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

_____

SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER   DATE

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. Hello, now that we have gone over the purpose of the interview, I would like to begin by gaining some general information about you. Can you tell me a little about yourself, maybe about yourself, maybe about where you were born and raised, where you went to school, or family background?

   a. Probe: How many children do you have in school, what grades are they in, how long have they attended this school? Can you tell me about the demographics of the school?

   b. Probe: How would you describe your parent's financial background, low-income, middle-income, etc., and why? Tell me about your parent's educational background (did they attend school in the U.S., graduate high school, attend college?) What about your family now, can you describe your family's background (Higher educational attainment, employment, home, schools?)

   (Probe: How many children do you have in school, what grades are they in, how long have they attended this school?)

2. Let's talk about your parents/family. Describe their level of involvement or participation when you were a student.

   a. How is your involvement with your child(ren's) school different from how your parents were involved in your education?

   b. How is it the same?

3. How do you define parent involvement? Engagement?

4. How do you perceive the school views you as a Hispanic parent, why?

5. Can you describe how you have been involved in school sponsored activities, at home, school, or in the community, that are designed to promote the academic success of students at your child(ren)'s school? child(ren)?

(Probe: How do you provide support for connecting learning at home to school? Homework? Provide an environment in the home for literacy? Do you attend family literacy night, fundraisers, etc)?

6. Can you tell me about some of your experiences with the parent involvement activities you just described?

   a. Probe: Why did you attend? How were you involved?

   b. Probe:What do you think are the goals of the programs or activities that you just described?

7. Besides the programs/activities you have described, how else has the school promoted your participation, or involvement?

8. Can you describe how school personnel (e.g. administrator, teachers, support staff, etc.) have designed activities, specifically, to involve Hispanic parents on your child(ren)'s campus?

   a. Probe: Are there specific programs for parents who do not speak English? Are there programs or activities that are specific to communities of color, including Latinos?)

Before we conclude this interview, is there anything you would like to add, or need clarification on?

*Interview #2

1. Do you have any questions or comments since the last time we spoke?

2. Have you faced any challenges and/or concerns with being involved in activities or programs that are in place at your child(ren)'s school, or those designed to support academics?

    a. How has your involvement created new/more opportunities for your child(ren)? Do you think your involvement led to any academic accomplishments for you child? Why or why not?

3. To what extent, if any, do you believe being a Hispanic parent has affected your level of involvement at school sponsored activities designed to support learning?

    a. What about the quality of your involvement?

4. What kind of parental involvement activities would you like to see implemented in the future, that could possibly promote or increase your participation?

5. Why it important for the school personnel (e.g. administrator, teacher, support staff, etc.) to build a relationship (learn about you, your home) with parents, if at all?

6. What suggestions do you have for school personnel about improving opportunities of parent involvement?

7. Before we conclude, is there anything you would like to add to what we have discussed?

Appendix E

Interview Field Notes Template

Interview Field Notes Template

Pseudonym:

Date of Interview:

Location:

Interviewer:

Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes

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Biographical Information

Olga Martinez Hickman was born and raised in Mission, Texas. After graduating from Mission High School, she attended St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas. Upon receiving a bachelor's degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, she began her graduate career at the University of Texas at Pan American, while serving as a middle school teacher. After receiving a Master's degree in Reading Education, she became a Reading Specialist and elementary school teacher. She continued to advance her education by completing a second Master's degree in Educational Leadership. In 2004, she began employment at the University of Texas at Austin, providing professional development and technical assistance in the areas of language and literacy. Martinez Hickman entered the Ph.D. program for Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Texas at Arlington in 2011. Her research interests focus on communities of color, which will support her aim to ensure that all students receive a fair and equitable high quality education.