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**A SOCIO-CULTURAL COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FRESHMEN
OF MEXICAN DESCENT ATTENDING WESTERN
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**

by

Diane M. Ariza

**A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology**

**Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
April 2000**

**A SOCIO-CULTURAL COMPARATIVE STUDY OF FRESHMEN
OF MEXICAN DESCENT ATTENDING WESTERN
MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY**

Diane M. Ariza, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2000

Institutional racism, encouraged assimilation, and ignorance of Latino/a values are current barriers to the academic success and leadership development of students of Mexican descent in higher education. This study examined the lives and personal stories of 22 college freshmen of Mexican descent from Texas and Michigan and how they transitioned and adapted their first year at Western Michigan University. This study used interviews and participant observation to examine the individuals in each cohort in order to construct their life stories.

An additional purpose was to critically examine the role of the researcher who was highly involved in the recruitment and retention of the majority of these students. Therefore, considerable discussion and examination is offered using a critical/postmodernist methodological framework in order to evaluate what influence the researcher's role had on these students' stories.

Findings suggest that there exists considerable intra and inter socio-cultural variability in terms of demographics, generational level, language, cultural awareness, ethnic loyalty, and high school preparation which influence how these students acculturate in a predominantly white environment. Further findings demonstrated

that overall the students in the Texas cohort were more socio-culturally challenged than those in the Michigan cohort in adapting to an institution such as Western Michigan University.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This qualitative study examines the lives and personal stories of 22 freshmen of Mexican origin enrolled at Western Michigan University. As do all students, they share common struggles and dreams to persist and hopefully graduate from college. However, due to their different socio-cultural experiences, they present issues and concerns that differ from other students concerning transition from high school and adaptation to their first year in college. Moreover, what often sets them apart from other ethnic and racial student groups is the failure of universities to legitimize politically and socio-culturally the uniqueness and diversity that exists between them and other students. Another way of redefining this deligitimization process is the act of “silencing” or voicelessness that occurs when higher educational institutions’ normative policies, discourses, and practices enable what Weis and Fine (1993) refer to as the “structuring of silence.”

While qualitative methods were the preferred methodological strategy for this study, the use of this approach leads to a critical assessment of the theories and methods used to justify qualitative models. As a methodological observer, I examine my epistemology and theories that undergird my research, and provide an extensive critique on the challenges and advantages of conducting qualitative research that often

is not reflected in scholarly field research.

The diversity within the Mexican American culture is far more complex than what many perceive as a monolithic cultural group. After further examination and reflection while conducting the study, my awareness of how the generalizations and stereotypes repeatedly mentioned in the cited literature further marginalizes these students' existence, survival, and success. The intra and inter diversity that exist within this population is far greater, and consequently, presents epistemological challenges with how one begins to re-define people of Mexican descent. This is clearly evidenced in this study which examines 22 college freshmen from diverse backgrounds from both Michigan and Texas. One cohort consists of ten high school graduates from Texas recruited to Western Michigan University (WMU) through a Texas Initiative Program; the second cohort consist of eleven high school graduates from Michigan; a third cohort consists of one student who identified with both Texas and Michigan. Some of their stories identify aspects of the racism and prejudices practiced by mainstream organizations; in other cases, their stories reflect similar experiences shared by majority Anglo freshmen (Stabb, Harris, & Talley, 1994).

Tinto (1987) and others studying retention issues argue that in order to be successful, students need to become incorporated into the life of the college while they have to socially as well as physically dissociate themselves from the communities of the past. More current research (Murguia, Padilla, & Pavel, 1991) argues that Tinto's concept of social integration needs to be refined, and acknowledge that ethnicity also plays a role in the integration of a student to campus, and that not all students react

and adapt the same way based on their cultural values. In their qualitative study, 24 junior and senior Hispanic and Native American students were interviewed using an open-ended, structured interview. The fundamental question was to identify how informants experienced their own ethnicity in the context of a university campus and then to relate those experiences to Tinto's model of institutional departure. They found that ethnicity can be an important element in the social integration process. They further concluded that "ethnicity can limit access to majority enclaves either through self-selection or through enforced segregation" (p. 436). Therefore, for many minority students finding ethnic enclaves can provide a means for students to socially integrate and adapt.

While I agree theoretically with this critique on Tinto's social integration model, I believe that much of the work on student attrition, and more particularly Latino(a)/Chicano(a) college populations, is limited because it does not further investigate the heterogeneity that exists within Latinos(a). Nor, for purposes of this study, does it investigate the heterogeneity of those more specifically of Mexican origin that impacts their adaptation to college life. Garza and Lipton (1982), and Fracasso and Bush-Rossnagel (1994) argue that there is cultural variation within groups. For example, intragroup variability with regard to acculturation levels does exist and "there is a danger of overgeneralization, over-extension and stereotyping that can stem from studying Chicanos as if they were a singular culture" (Garza & Lipton, p. 133). Some of the current literature acknowledges that the generational level (whether they are a first, second or third generation U.S. born citizen), degree of adherence to the

customs and values of American and Mexican society, and the ethnic density of communities in which they reside, all play a critical role in how one begins to understand the socio-cultural complex layers of students of Mexican origin.

This study is divided into five chapters which along with the Introduction, include: Chapter II—Literature Review, Chapter III—Methods, Chapter IV—Portraits, Chapter V—Analysis, Themes, and Conclusions. In Chapter II, I define the terms critical theory and postmodernism as cited in the current literature, and argue along with Tierney (1993) that both epistemologies can be combined to more accurately reflect the struggle of underrepresented students on university campuses. Moreover, I examine how field workers continue to be less critical with how they share their epistemological shortcomings during and after fieldwork has been completed and analyzed. In Chapter III, I explain the methods that I used as an involved observer, where my student informants/participants were interviewed and observed in various settings. Unstructured interviews or “conversations” were conducted with each student informant using a general set of questions to begin dialogue. Other information (e.g., length of conversations, number of conversations) is also included. In Chapter IV, 22 summarized narratives are recorded. Some are lengthier than others and for each interview a brief biographical sketch is included. Some of these stories reflect struggles of loneliness, racism, inequality, survival, and prejudices. Other stories reflect a mode of survival and adaptation that represent the “American” ideal—the belief that with hard work and a college degree one can claim economic benefits that enable one to find a secure job.

In Chapter V, common themes emerge from each cohort that make them distinct and separate from each other (e.g., urban demographic traits, family education and income, racial mixture of parents, influence of the complexity of each cohort's cultural make-up). These environmental factors directly influence how each student chooses to identify with other students of Mexican and non-Mexican descent. Consequently, these same factors also influence their level of adaptation and integration to college. Other common themes, including social alienation, silencing, academic unpreparedness, prejudice, family relationships and responsibilities, and intra and inter group conflict, are further explored. In this chapter, I also explore my role as a critical methodologist within a critical theory perspective and face the struggle of having to balance the role of both advocate (insider) and researcher (outsider). I must necessarily admit that my roles as (a) a woman of color who has experienced similar types of struggle, (b) an administrator with the hope of being able to increase the enrollment and awareness of students of Mexican descent, and (c) a researcher wrestling with issues of objectivity versus subjectivity while confronted with the constant generalizations and misconceptions of people of color, all have an influence on how these students tell their story. Moreover, through the lens of critical theory, I acknowledge my personal biases and the conflict associated with being an advocate. At the same time, I attempt to create some distance in order to maintain some level of objectivity and not impose a socio-cultural-political reality that is not their's and only my own. In this chapter, I also offer some observations and recommendations to those who care and want to make a difference. Conducting research and creating administrative policy

that legitimizes those who continue to be silenced represent a few basic steps institutions can take to create change! To students of color, I offer support and hope that the struggle will continue, and note that it must be expressed in order for you to be active, influential participants!

Significance of Work

I believe this study is significant for a variety of reasons. The Latino(a) student voice is one that often does not get legitimized. Therefore, in a more simplistic sense, it adds to the limited documentation and overall knowledge of our Latino(a) college populations with respect to their complex, socio-cultural make-up and methods of adaptation to college campus in their first enrollment year. As stated earlier, studies exist (Attinassi, 1989; Fuenes & Sedlack, 1993; Galindo & Escamilla, 1995; Padilla, 1992; Vasquez & Garcia-Vasquez, 1995), primarily quantitative, and some particular to Chicano students, that provide a foundation for understanding some of the factors that may contribute to high attrition or the continuous struggles that Latinos(a) face while attending college. Nevertheless, one flaw in these studies is that they do not further detail the complexity of the Latino(a) population and those of Mexican origin, and therefore, the variables that are selected and later tested, continue to generalize the Latino(a) college experience.

For the most part, the scholarly works are based on the analysis of secondary data and analyses of census, or survey-generated data. Because of the qualitative nature of this study, one instead hears the voices of the people who are the subjects of

these discussions and debates. This study provides a more personal understanding of the lives, contributions, hopes, and concerns as they begin as freshman students and continue their college education. They have personal challenges, yet many are beating the odds, and have chosen to not drop out. Although inter/intra group differences and similarities impact their overall academic and social experiences, they all share the one “great” hope that they will graduate from college and continue to attain personal successes as well as make contributions to the lives of their family members and others. Also, this study contributes to the literature and enhances our understanding of college students of Mexican descent from the Midwest, and particularly Michigan, of which there is currently limited knowledge.

It is also important to explore, how the researcher/learner’s voice develops throughout one’s work. Often times the researcher’s story is silenced because the perception of many positivists is that knowing more about the personal life of the researcher somehow dilutes the significance or validity of one’s findings. Contrary to this belief, and heavily supported in the critical ethnographic literature (Carspecken & Apple, 1992; McLaren, 1994; Tierney, 1993), my cultural identity as a Latina and multiple roles as researcher, administrator, and counselor/advisor to these students have implications for the findings. By being critical of my work, I can share my theoretical and epistemological challenges and act as a “border intellectual”(Giroux, 1992) whereby I illuminate my theoretical understanding of the world and the university campus in order to extend and enhance our understanding of the struggles of Mexican Americans and Mexican college freshmen. Concurrently, because of my

Latina identity and emic perspective, I can empathize and serve as an advocate to all Latinos(a) with hope that WMU's academic community, as well as other colleges and universities, can find value in building communities of difference whereby "people can come to terms with their own and other's identities, not merely to be learned for learning's sake; rather to be employed in the work of building democracy--in our organizations, in our communities, and in our nation" (Tierney, 1993, p. 158).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

As trained social scientists, we are conditioned to appropriately define our theoretical frameworks and include apriori assumptions about our research design. However, my epistemology is not one that can be narrowly defined, but instead, should be placed within a discourse where open dialogue and critique can occur. Moreover, one could argue that by trying to define the term “is to assume an epistemological stance in which the social world can be precisely defined” (Quantz, 1992, p. 448).

However, for the purposes of this study, my epistemology is contextualized within the framework of critical postmodernism where I argue that, by being critical, one allows for understanding the structural power of the norm. In studying culture, it is not enough to describe values and beliefs as isolated cases; they must be contextualized within social relations. Within these social relations, there exist groups that exercise their authority by regulating and controlling others to gain personal benefit. Carspecken and Apple (1992) therefore argue that “culture and power are not part of different language games, but, rather, form an indissoluble couplet in daily life” (p. 508). Knowledge that is often legitimized represents those that control the cultural, economic and political relations of our society based on certain beliefs,

visions and practices structured around class, gender and race. Therefore, as a critical researcher questions that are often asked are those that address the role of institutions (i.e., schools) in the context of an unequal society; and therefore, concerns are raised that address inequality and the relationship of human activity, culture, and social and political structures. Carspecken and Apple further contend that a critical field study is not only aimed at making an empirical descriptive contribution, but also a theoretical contribution—which deepens our understanding of core social-theoretical concepts such as “action, structure, culture, and power” (p. 512). Therefore the critical approach to field research is framed within the motivation and questions posed by the researcher.

Within the postmodern perspective, the attempt is to rely less on cultural homogeneity and cultural continuity, and to depend more on multivoicedness and inclusivity of ethnic groups that continue to be silenced. Neither cultures nor individuals can be understood in terms of unity. Consequently,

the dialogic conception of individuals and culture extends the critical sense of a plurality of cultures. It is then that one understand that society is complex and contradictory and that the elements of society (individuals and culture groups) are themselves internally complex and contradictory. (Quantz, 1992, p. 489)

Conversely, and subsequently in this chapter, I critique the senselessness of trying to compartmentalize my research using such restricted terms. I realize that the more I try to observe, understand, and define the layers upon layers of socio-cultural attitudes, values and identities that exist within diverse communities (i.e., Mexican American college freshmen), I find myself, nevertheless, entrapped by a scholarly

tradition that creates definitions and terms which often restrict the realities of those being studied.

Skeptics may argue that critical theory and postmodernism fall on opposite theoretical axes and thus can not be used to develop a concept of difference. Postmodernists (e.g., Anzaldua, 1987; Lugones, 1987; Lyotard, 1984) claim that critical theorists work within a traditional, rationalistic, European framework; and therefore, it is difficult for a critical theorist to be postmodern because postmodernism attempts to debunk this tradition and redefine it through multivocality and understanding of differences outside of the academic mainstream. Critical theorists and critical ethnographers (Giroux, 1992; McLaren 1991; Quantz, 1992; Tierney, 1993) do in fact recognize that all knowledge is socially and historically determined, and a consequence of power. Furthermore, if one has conscious political intentions that are oriented towards emancipatory and democratic goals, one may be able to eventually develop conditions whereby “those who are oppressed might be able to liberate themselves” (Tierney, p. 4).

Postmodernists are more interested in deconstructing ideas and constructs. “All meaning is seen as socially constructed. Any narrative which is viewed as ultimate is deconstructed so as to show the subjectivity of the claim” (Veith, 1994, p. 51). There is interest to present multivocality and to understand difference.

However, I argue as does Tierney (1993) that “a relationship between critical theory and postmodernism can exist whereby the macropolitical level of structural organization (critical theory) and the micropolitical level of different and contradictory

manifestations (postmodernism) can be a means of analyzing global relations of oppression” (p. 28).

The Critical Perspective

My study includes a critical theory perspective in two ways. First, and most important, I understand and sympathize with those critical ethnographers who argue that one cannot bifurcate theory from method. “Method is fully embedded in theory and theory is expressed in method” (Quantz, p. 449, 1992). Quantz further argues that for it to be critical “it should participate in a larger critical dialogue rather than follow any particular set of methods or research techniques” (p. 449). I am aware that I am conditioned and trained to do research and write within a context of scholarly traditional boundaries where positions of power and authority exists; nevertheless, my struggle is to liberate myself from this tradition. Therefore, this study goes beyond a monolithic, homogenous, socio-cultural compilation of experiences that exist in traditional ethnographic scholarly work, and I prefer to use praxis where this project is not treated as only an empirical study, but more importantly, it is an ethnographic study as an aspect of critical theory “which must eventually be completed in political and social action” (Quantz, p. 467).

I carefully look at how power manifests itself at the macro-political level in higher education through the authority exercised by faculty and administrators. This is often displayed when teaching and administrative practices do not take into account the learning and cultural values that students bring to their campus and classrooms.

This silencing is an institutional act that through “normal” accepted policies, discourse, and practice creates a structure that discounts or deligitimizes the voices of those excluded. Fine and Weis (1993) argue that in education, classist tracking practices institutionalized in the name of giftedness, sexist curriculum taught in the name of sex education, and theoretical models that explain a student’s maladjustment to the institution as a student problem instead of an institutional problem, are just examples of practices that sustain silencing. These biases are couched within a discourse that speaks to the common good, yet typically affirm the position of those who have been privileged by these practices and who continue to benefit at the exclusion of the voiceless.

Other forms of silencing which I specifically have chosen to focus on in this study include what some refer to as the “ivory” tower image that reserves a quality education for white majority students at the expense of Latino(a) and other minority groups; and also, what I refer to as the “ebony” tower image perpetuated by majority students, faculty, and administration that defines minority issues as a black or African American phenomena—creating voicelessness for other ethnic groups populations. Stabb et al. (1994) argue that central to the issue is the way universities and researchers define the process of acculturation on university campuses.

In the 70’s, studies on acculturation were defined as “a process of assimilation whereby nonwhite students adopted behaviors, attitudes and mannerisms of Euro-American culture and relinquished patterns unique to their own culture” (p. 29). One way this image is perpetuated is by the act of assimilation or social integration models

used by higher education institutions to superficially assure all students who follow mainstream culture will be guaranteed postsecondary success. Success is defined in terms of college graduation and development of one's critical thinking, and social and communication skills in order to attain sociocultural, personal, and economic rewards—with more emphasis on the latter. For example, Slaughter (1991) argues that in her study of “official” higher education ideologies at various postsecondary institutions, university presidents spoke about academically developing students for the productive contributions required in our economy. And, that investment made in the intellectual development of the youth was deemed fundamentally essential to the economic development of the U.S.

Another form of ivory towerism or Eurocentrism is the way universities impose their pedagogical and curriculum practices. Churchill (1995) calls it the White Studies' Eurosupremacism where one finds postsecondary educational institutions reluctant to move outside of their comfort zones of imperial ideology. This ideology is based on placing value on a way of practice and thought that focuses on control, power, elitism and subversion to others, instead of embracing an intellectual freedom and pursuit of knowledge that includes the perspectives and realities of other people.

Stabb et al. (1994) also argue that in the 80's the process of assimilation was not necessarily a matter of having non-majority groups relinquish power; instead a process of exchange or transformation of values among or between groups with different values and cultural practices was emphasized. Although many campuses began to value differences and engage in more systematic changes that would be inclusive of

minority students, in reality the changes were responding primarily to African American students' concerns. This is the second form of silencing that I referred to earlier as the ebony tower mentality, which is not often discussed in the literature as a form of silencing for other ethnic minority groups who attend predominantly white campuses.

At predominantly white campuses, there is a continued de-emphasis on the individuality or particularity of other ethnic groups by both Anglo and African American administrators and faculty. Consequently, on many college campuses, especially in the Midwest, the term minority refers to black. Policy, curriculum, and student development issues that are created to impact the status of minority students are usually created with African American students in mind at the expense of other ethnic minority groups. Subsequently, the ebony tower mentality influences what Fuertes and Sedlack (1993) and Salazar (1990) argue is the institutionalized racism, encouraged assimilation, and ignorance of Hispanic values that continue to exist as barriers to the success of Latinos(as) in higher education. Fuertes and Sedlack state that a major obstacle to Latino(a) students' development is the "lack of visible Hispanic culture at some colleges and universities" (p. 281).

With praxis it is with continued hope that a dialogue will be created between those in power and those oppressed in order to eradicate racism and oppressive acts that are perpetuated at institutions of higher education. Moreover, as change agents we need to generate societal and individual emancipation in a historically structured higher education system where "the problem does not exist in changing people's

consciousness—or what is in their heads—but the structure which includes the political, economic, institutional regime” (Foucault, 1980, p.133). Again, I am not interested in describing these students as victims of society, but, rather as rebels against such oppression (Gouldner, 1968). The attention, therefore, shifts away from Latino(a) and their families being perceived as disadvantaged and instead focuses on the structural processes of the university that creates oppression for these students.

Reyes and Halcón (1991) argue that first, all Hispanics occupy a low status in the larger society and are perceived as culturally, racially or linguistically different and often inferior. But they contend that this deficit perspective, as in the larger society, colors all interactions between the dominant and the minority groups as mirrored in the academy and is perpetuated and maintained by the following:

the practice of hiring underrepresented minorities only for certain specialized ethnic departments, of limiting their number in mainstream departments, of fueling and perpetuating the myth that they are not fully qualified for academic positions, the continual devaluing of minority research and numerous other hairsplitting practices are all manifestations of covert racism that constitute roadblocks to full incorporation into the academy. (p. 181)

These roadblocks eventually impact the recruitment, retention and promotion of Latino(a) students of Mexican origin on college campuses. Therefore, it requires candor and honesty by the administration to acknowledge that power in the hands of the very few can only translate into further oppression. And therefore, each individual must “begin to transform oneself into formalizing an invitation where the claim to reason with the happiness and freedom of individuals and the justice of the collective can be obtainable” (Tierney, 1993, p. 5).

This project is not an exercise in theoretical polemics. As a Latina and researcher, I have a responsibility “not only to transform history in a general and broad way but also to transform the particular and concrete history of the people being studied” (Quantz, 1992, p. 466). Clark (1965) refers to this role and method as being an “involved observer.” He states:

One brings a degree of clarity and objectivity essential for social science accuracy, as well, as a participant in the community, one brings a personal history of association with and concern for many of the people in the very community one seeks to study. (p. xvi)

It is necessary to take this posture for sociology, and, for that matter, other academic disciplines, since they have been irresponsible under the guise of scientific objectivity, because they have conveniently ignored and overlooked racism, sexism, and cultural imperialism, and have failed to train new scholars to think any differently.

In this study, I acknowledge that these students are perceived by many as victims of oppression. Others see them as no different than majority white, Anglo Saxon students, and believe that consequently they should not be given any special privileges or advantages. However, their stories reflect other realities and assessments of their marginalization and struggle. Again, “how are marginalized people positioned in material and symbolic relations, how do they participate in these relations, and how can our understanding work toward the restructuring of these relations?” (Quantz, p. 468).

It is significant, indeed vital, that at a secondary level I am interested in analyzing the intrapersonal processes embedded in my work and how my various roles as

administrator, political activist, Latina, and student advocate interplay with the students' voices being represented in this study—which most often is absent in more traditional scholarly work. Seldom are the researcher's personal challenges, biases and theoretical underpinnings made explicit in one's research. The “behind the scenes” or epistemological and methodological biases must be shared in order to not mislead the reader that the collected data were interpreted and written with the least amount of error. Rabinow and Sullivan (1979) argue that one must share one's theoretical and methodological shortcomings, biases, and motives. By providing these, the students' voices become more verifiable--always acknowledging that pure and untainted data never exists. Quantz (1992) states, “We must all accept that all research is never without interest and all forms of research imposes values” (p. 471). At the outset, and as a critical ethnographer, it is my responsibility to reveal those value perspectives to the reader. Therefore, I must be reflexive as I analyze my personal contradictions. Van Maanen (1988) refers to this disclosure and calls it a confessional tale whereby the researcher or ethnographer within an autobiographical context mentions personal biases, character flaws with “an unassuming style of one struggling to piece together something reasonably coherent out of displays of initial disorder, doubt and difficulty” (p. 75). Regardless of our qualitative or quantitative posture, we must acknowledge that the knowledge we produce is inevitably limited by our own histories and the institutional forms within which we work (Simon & Dippo, 1986). Therefore, I find it necessary to act as a border intellectual (Giroux, 1992) whereby one examines critically how one's roles as administrator, researcher and

Latina become either barriers or open gateways for students' voices to be heard.

I know that as a researcher I am conditioned to be a well-trained by-product of an educational establishment that is founded on the belief that being college educated makes one more "cultured," and on rational empirical principals. So postmodernists may ask, how can I change the logic on which those ideas have been built and I am a product of? While I agree it is a significant challenge to overcome, I also argue that it is with self-analysis and critique that I am able to assess and share the biases and apriori assumptions that clearly define and set me apart from the more modernistic, positivistic, inquiry-oriented epistemologies used by many researchers.

Therefore, it is my intent to change the logic on which those ideas have been built. I am not here to embrace what many scientists call objective, value-free logic of inquiry. But I do recognize that I am a product of their knowledge and the creation and reproduction of their social constructs to the real society (Stansfield II, 1993). There is no attempt to be value-free in this study and it is not dominated by a logical positivistic epistemology. This study honors the students' voices as they define their arenas of struggle, as they exist in borderlands of multiple identities and interpretations.

Postmodern Perspective

This study is also postmodern in that I accent the multivocality and the understanding of difference within these students as essential to what Slattery (1995) posits as a primary responsibility of the researcher: "to uncover and expose the pervasive

power of the norm” (p. 19).

The 22 voices included in this study are not just representations of two collectives—the ethnic collective of being of Mexican descent, and the geographic collective of being from Michigan and Texas. This study goes beyond these general categories of using ethnic origin and geographic location as acceptable categories in defining these students; and instead, looks at the complexities of their identities.

Identity Politics

Within the postmodern discourse, identity politics is redefined as one that speaks about the plurality, multiplicity, and individualness of truths. There are not universal truths or standards when explaining Mexican-Americans or African Americans’ behavior. There are skeptics (Hooks, 1990) who argue that postmodern discourses are often exclusionary, “having been accused of lacking concrete relevance, they call attention to and appropriate the experience of difference and otherness in order to provide themselves with opposition to political meaning, legitimacy, and immediacy” (p. 1). She further argues that their repeated failure to silence the critical black presence—and for that matter Mexican Americans—in the culture and in most scholarship and writing, creates doubt and question. However, Hooks and others argue that to support this critique one needs a “radical postmodernist practice that conceptualizes these identities within a politics of difference” (<http://capo.org/premise/95/sept/p950805.html>). Moreover, these displaced marginalized voices must be incorporated in the discourse.

Calhoun (1994) situates identity politics in the collective, and not only the individual, and public and/or private. Moreover, struggles are not merely groupings, and power determines outcomes, and power relations are changed by the struggles. The grouping or collective is constantly challenged and involved with seeking both recognition and legitimacy (and sometimes power), not only expression or autonomy. Today, there are increasing demands from individuals to resist how fixed identities have been imposed on them historically (i.e., mixed race), and therefore, the rhetoric of identity politics has shifted to a politics of difference (Calhoun, p. 21). Today, women, gay and lesbians, African Americans, Chicanos, and Asians are deconstructing those pre-determined labels or categories and demanding new language on how they choose to be recognized.

Understanding the politics of difference is not the same as accepting the paradigm shift that Chow (1992) labels “soft relativism” where he claims that post-modernism gives voice to the individual by acknowledging the “I’m okay, you’re okay” where all are included, or “a leveling attribution of subversive marginality to all” (Chow, p. 24). This soft relativism is no different than the liberal individualism of the 18th century where everyone is equally endowed with identity and equally entitled to respect. The end result is one of tolerance, but not of mutual respect or acceptance, and not an understanding of what Calhoun (1994) refers to as the phenomenon of identity formation. Calhoun argues that legitimacy is more than tolerance. Moreover the politics of difference should not be studied by scholars within an essentialist identity or categorical identities, but rather the “complex notions of

persons or networks of concrete social relations” (p. 26) should be reexamined. It is, therefore, critical to look at the politics of identity as one that is complex, where both the politics of personal identity and the politics of the collective are studied jointly. For example, Collins (1998) states that many black women understand themselves as both feminists and African-Americans, and that personal tensions exist with both of these identities within the black nationalist movement. This also holds true for the Latino(a) collective. Identities are not just objective social positions for such constructs do not take into account the dynamic tension that exists within individuals. Calhoun (1994) states that “identities are often personal and political objects in which we participate, empower to greater or lesser extents by resources of experience and ability, culture and social organization” (p. 28).

Darder and Torres (1998) argue ethnicity must be also contextualized within a political and economic framework. Therefore, identity politics should be studied with the understanding of how individuals give meaning to their lives and work in a society with widening class differences and ever increasing inequality. Blauner (1992) and other scholars argue that as long as “we place cultural identities into a neat discrete number of hierarchically ranked races, we are continuously trapped within the historical product of Western colonialism” (p. 61). Contemporary theorists call for new theories to move away from the “monocultural, monolithic, and hegemonic conceptualizations of cultural identity, which more often than not have been predicated upon the active suppression or exclusion of the various forms of cultural diversity that we find in all of our societies.” (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 1998, p. 29).

In this study, my attempt is to avoid ethnic essentialism by conducting a qualitative work that provides opportunities for students to voice the manner in which they understand their surrounding environment. Avoiding ethnic essentialism presents challenges and inconveniences for many social scientists to accept; Latinos(a) and, more specifically, students of Mexican origin have different identities. By not singling these differences, one is entrapped into reproducing a singular monolithic identity as objectified reality for people of color to remain oppressed (Stanfield II, 1993). Stanfield further claims that to acknowledge the particularity of these identities threatens the dominant political, social and economic arrangements, which in this study I refer to as the post-secondary higher education structure.

Hispanics or Latinos(as) have been labeled under one collective that merge the different histories, nationalities and cultural experiences. There is even disregard by the U.S. census to treat differently those recent immigrants versus those born and raised in the U.S. Instead, they merge the experiences as one. Some researchers argue (Acosta-Belen & Santiago, 1998) that there is a growing resistance to seeing Hispanics or Latinos(as) as different groupings, and that instead, many prefer that they be regarded as one pan-ethnic label, because the emphasis on commonalities provides them with a more effective political voice. The reality is that the pan-ethnic Latino(a) is far from real, and this can mainly be attributed to the multi-dimensional environmental factors that Latino(a) groups have encountered as they migrated to this country. For as much as the media, educational institutions (i.e., universities), and the government try to consolidate these differences, the underlying feeling among many

Latinos(as) when surveyed is that they do not care to acknowledge the generality of who they are.

This study reinforces this sentiment that students claim their identity. Yet how it is claimed differs and is manifested differently—again based on socio-cultural factors that they bring to campus. As researchers, our mindset must be open to seeing that social reality is not one that is constructed by a non-existing world imposed by the researcher or observer, but is constructed by members of the life world and how they interpret and produce their reality (Schutz, 1964), and how I (the interpreter) interpret these students' (the interpreted) life stories.

Mexican Americans

The Mexican American population, the data confirm, is growing faster in total numbers than any other ethnic minority group, including other Latino(a) groups. Bernal, Knight, Ocampo, Garza, and Cota (1993) claim that the percentage of births in the Hispanic population is currently about 11 percent and will increase to 19 percent by year 2030—roughly two thirds of these children will be Mexican American (p. 31). Bean and Tienda (1987) state that not only is the Mexican ancestry population the largest of the Spanish-speaking nationalities, but also, “the most heterogeneous in socioeconomic characteristics and generational composition” (p. 208).

Surprisingly, still today, there is continued, sustained prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes of people of Mexican-origin that suggest that they are generally

passive and present-oriented, want immediate gratification, have low levels of aspirations, and are non-success oriented (Reyes & Halcón, 1991). More alarming is that social researchers often perpetuate these myths. Casas and Atkinson (1981) state social researchers collect data from

a small select subject population and further extrapolations and generalizations are made that represent the increasing millions of people of Mexican descent. There is a tendency not to deal with the variations within those of Mexican descent. Therefore, the monolithic view of Mexican Americans is subsequently reinforced. (p. 473)

Often researchers do not document the intragroup differences which include socio-economic, regional, communal and generational differences when discussing Mexican American life styles and values. Casas and Atkinson further argue that another common flaw among researchers is that when they describe Mexican Americans, there is a tendency to assume that their lack of socio-economic empowerment is due to their failure to seek opportunities. This “blaming the victim” or “culture blame syndrome,” Casas and Atkinson argue (1981), limits our understanding, instead of examining the environmental, institutional, psychological, and cultural determinants of behavior.

More recent empirical findings have challenged some of the current stereotypical impressions of people of Mexican origin that are maintained by the general public and academia. Lucas and Stone (1994) conducted a quantitative study where 55 Mexican-American students from high school, community college and undergraduate student samples were asked to fill out the Work and Family Orientation Questionnaire to assess competitiveness as it is traditionally defined. The primary goal was to compare Mexican American male and female students on measures of goal-

oriented competitiveness and interpersonal competitiveness. They found that theoretical constructs used by psychologists to define certain ethnic groups (i.e., those of Mexican origin) were culturally biased, and likewise, found that earlier studies that had found Mexican-American students to be lacking in competitiveness when compared to students from the majority culture were incorrect. Instead, the results demonstrated that Mexican American students were competitive.

Much of the literature in the 1970's supports cultural stereotypes that represent Mexican Americans as less competitive, less individualistic, and more cooperative than Anglo-Americans. They found that "theoretical constructs used to compare competitiveness in Mexican Americans and Anglo Americans are unidimensional and possibly culturally biased in their definition of competitiveness" (Lucas & Stone, 1994, p. 129). Other scholarly work (i.e., Gándara, 1982, 1995) has shown that low socioeconomic and educational factors have a direct influence on student educational attainment, but not generally negative in all cases. Gándara further claims that theories that have been used to explain the low educational attainment of Mexican Americans have focused on underachievers. Factors such as low socioeconomic status, cultural traditions, limited English skills, lack of motivation, racism, sexism, segregation, have been used as attributable factors for Mexican American students not achieving. These studies (California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC), 1980; U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 1971-1974), according to Gandara, have "yielded a litany of reasons for educational failure, but have produced few insights into the process of educational success" (1982, p. 168), and therefore, one concludes that

Latinos'(as') lack of school achievement in high school and college are based on low economic and educational skills from parents that create barriers for younger adults to succeed educationally.

Gandara's work is unique in that it deconstructs the notions that educational attainment is highly dependent on socio-economic class. She interviewed 17 Mexican American women between the ages of 28 and 40 years who came from lower socio-economic backgrounds, where in many cases, parents had not completed their high school education, yet succeeded in completing Ph.D., M.D., or J.D. degrees. Her study, as well as my own, addresses the complexity of school achievement and attributable factors that often times, as Gándara further explains, can be "located in the nexus of the person, the group and the macro-society, that is academic achievement as an expression of social self-consciousness" (p. 11) and not mainly determined by group culture.

Again, postmodernism emphasizes differences and deconstructs the existing categories prescribed by the traditional, Eurocentric, scientific establishment. Moreover, many would argue that as social scientists we should not try to understand identity because we become absorbed in the narrow definitions. But I argue along with Giroux (1992), Hesford (1999), Macedo (1994), McLaren (1991), and Tierney (1993) that the emphasis should not be to create new categories, but to understand the "fluidity" of the categories. The focus is to further examine the interrelatedness and interdependency of culture, politics, gender, class, and demographics. Also, that these socio-cultural factors are not static, and are not solely influenced by location, time,

and acquaintance.

An example of the fluidity principle is reflected in the position expressed by Lorde (1985), referring to her Lesbian identity and feels silenced among her black sisters: “some of the ways in which I identify myself make it difficult for you to hear me, for unity does not require that we be identical to each other” (p. 3). Tierney (1993) clarifies that “postmodernists in their attempt to protect our individualness, fail to recognize that we do have permeable boundaries that can be crossed.” Anzaldua (1987) argues that similarly we all live in borderlands which she further describes as a “place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary which is in a constant state of transition” (p. 3). Tierney further describes these as cultural areas that are “a set of symbolic processes, ideologies, and sociohistorical contexts that are situated in an arena of struggle and multiple interpretations” (p. 7).

Ethnic Identity

In the 70's, beginning with the groundbreaking research of Grebler, Moore and Guzman (1970), many studies have examined the ethnic-labeling choices of adult Mexican-descent populations. For example, the word “Mexicano” is a term often used and preferred by the mestizo people of Mexico. However, in this country, there are different labels that describe the ethnic identity of people of Mexican descent. Garcia (1981), Stoddard (1973), and others have studied the significance of ethnic self-labels among Mexican origin populations and argue that there exists a range of ethnic labels from people of Mexican origin which includes: Hispanos, Mexican

American, Mexicano, Spanish-speaking, and Chicano.

In general, studies have found that the label “Mexican American” was the most preferred, and “Chicano” was usually the least preferred (Buriel & Cardoza, 1993, p. 198). Overall, “ethnic identity is a salient issue for Mexican American students regardless of their level of acculturation” (Arbona, Flores, & Novy, 1995, p. 613). In their study, they surveyed 364 Mexican American students who attended either a technical college or state university in Texas. The goodness of fit of the factor model for the Cultural Awareness (knowledge and practice of cultural traits) and Ethnic Loyalty (an individual’s preference for one’s cultural orientation over the other) scales was tested using confirmatory factor analyses (p. 612). The results based on students’ responses suggest that cultural variables among Mexican American college students may be described in terms of the aforementioned two dimensions.

Nevertheless it is not just an acknowledgment of other ethnic groups that defines one’s own ethnic identity; instead, “it is the personal ownership of ethnic group membership and its correlated knowledge, understanding, values, behaviors, and feelings that are direct implications of that ownership” (Bernal et al., 1993, p. 33). It is highly influenced by the normative socialization process as well as by intergroup relations. Therefore, the biological, cultural, psychological and social domains are interrelated. Yet, Buriel and Cardoza (1993) argue that ethnic identity is heavily psychological, because regardless of the biological, cultural and social dimensions, if a person self identifies as a member of a particular group, then he or she is willing to be perceived and treated as a member of that group. Part of this development is the fact

that many variables influence ethnic identity formation, including gender, socioeconomic status, family variables, and contextual factors such as ethnically homogenous versus heterogenous environments. Based on students' voices in this study, language, cultural ties to Mexico, personal interactions, residency, generational level, income, and education affected how they self identified.

Buriel and Cardoza (1993) have found in their research that generic labels such as Hispanic and Latino are not often used by students and parents. These labels conceal the particularities of people of Mexican descent. They conducted an empirical study that consisted of seventh graders and their parents of Mexican-descent living in southern California. A primary purpose of their study was to examine the intrafamilial transmission of ethnic labels. They found from a sample of 278 Latino students that filled out a questionnaire, followed by interviews with 181 of their mothers and fathers that the overwhelming majority of parents preferred the label Mexican. Mexican American was the next most popular choice. With students, however, there was a fairly even split between the choice of Mexican and Mexican American. They noted that in areas where there is a concentration of culturally and historically Mexican people, there is an inclination for them to adopt less generic labels that diffuse their ethnic identity (p. 207). Therefore, they found that residency or the geographical boundaries is critical with individuals of Mexican descent when they self disclose. They also found that 78 percent of the students labeling themselves Mexican came from families where both parents labeled themselves as Mexican. Among students labeling themselves Mexican American, 65% came from families where both parents

used the label Mexican.

Garcia (1981) was interested in examining the self-labeling choices of individuals of Mexican descent in the Southwest and the extent to which socio demographics influence the various ethnic label choices that individuals choose. Moreover, in his study, he examined ethnic labels in the context “of the assimilation process, social identity groupings and the attitudinal and behavioral linkages to sociopolitical settings” (i.e., political consciousness, cultural loyalty personal interaction, mobilization, language use) (p. 89). One’s social identity, according to Garcia, is related to one’s personal life, history, ancestry and behavior. Other background characteristics should also be included such as age, state of residence, and language use. Using secondary analysis of the Survey of Income and Education (1976), Garcia chose five southwestern states (Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico and Texas). From these states, 100 percent of the population of Mexican-origin persons age 14 and older were pulled out. Seven background variables were related to ethnic labels: (1) metropolitan versus nonmetropolitan residence, (2) age, (3) state of residence, (4) United States versus Mexican born, (5) sex, (6) income, and (7) educational attainment. His findings demonstrated that the “Mexican American” label was the label most frequently selected, especially by individuals that belong to the 35-50 age group, with a high school education and with higher incomes. There was also great variability within geographical region. Fifty-eight percent of those residing in Texas preferred the term *Mexicano*, followed by 40 percent who were also comfortable with the term Mexican American, while 43 percent of those residing in New Mexico preferred

the label Chicano. Therefore, no consensus emerged—demonstrating perhaps the wide variation among Mexican-origin persons in their choices (Garcia, 1981, p. 90). Garcia also found background traits and sensitivity to one's label was evident. He concluded that ethnic identity exists, but the question of saliency and intensity is unknown. Background traits do not substantially predict what type of ethnic identity they selected.

Another study by Gutierrez and Hirsch (1973) examined the link between self-identity and social and political perspectives of the Chicano. Their sample included 786 students (54 percent males and 46 percent females) from 7 through 12 grades. They found that adolescents who self-identified as “Chicano” were more aware and critical of overt forms of institutional racism than adolescents that called themselves “Mexican American.” However, they found that there were no significant differences between Chicanos and Mexican Americans in the American ethos that hard work would lead to success and that they had the same opportunity (p. 837).

Research conducted in the early 80's focused on stereotyping that occurs from individuals of Euro-American background and also individuals of Mexican descent regarding their attitudes of ethnic labels such as: Chicanos, Hispanics and Mexican Americans. However, one finds as early as the late 1960s research was conducted. Studies (Dworkin, 1965; Knight, Kagan, Nelson, & Gumbiner, 1978) have suggested that Mexican Americans that have lived longer in the United States have a less favorable self image than those either born in Mexico or recently migrated.

Buriel and Vazquez (1982) in their study of 120 high school adolescents also

found that successive generations of Mexican Americans hold group stereotypes that increasingly resemble those held by Anglo Americans (p. 66). The population was drawn from first-, second-, third-generation Mexican Americans and an Anglo American population which served as a fourth group from California. A checklist containing 10 positive and 10 negative adjectives was used to measure stereotypes. For those of Mexican descent, they found that as their ties with their traditional culture weaken over generations, Mexican Americans may become increasingly susceptible to the influence of society's negative stereotypes about members of their group. These attitudes may be largely influenced by the norms of Anglo American society that they use to evaluate themselves. They argue that there might be two explanations for this. One is that first generation Mexican immigrants may still use Mexico as a frame of reference for social comparisons while Mexican Americans used the norms of Anglo culture that they have been brought up with. For example, the subjects of Fairchild and Cozens (1981) included 119 university undergraduates who identified themselves as white or Anglo. About 41% percent identified themselves as female. They were administered a survey and they found that the term Chicano was connected to people who were cruel and ignorant, Mexican Americans were seen as faithful, and Hispanic were described as talkative and tradition loving—providing an interethnic dimension about ethnic identity and self-labeling that was not included in my study, yet a topic that is worth further investigation.

Another characteristic that influences ethnic identity and self-labeling is generational distance from time of immigration. Buriel and Vasquez (1982) believe

that “generational status can serve as a useful index of cultural integration or identity with traditional Mexican American culture” (p. 60). In the same study on stereotypes of Mexican descent persons aforementioned, one observation they made was that first- and second-generation Mexican Americans more closely identified with traditional Mexican American culture than third-generation Mexican Americans. There is a tendency for successive generations to become more distanced from their core Mexican “traditional” values and norms.

Lamare (1982) found that first-generation students born in Mexico, overwhelmingly preferred the label Mexican, whereas second- and third-generations least preferred the Mexican label. Among the second generation of U.S.-born students of Mexico-born parents, most preferred the Chicano label. By the third generation, U.S. born students and parents identified as Mexican American and/or American. With successive generations they found that there is a greater disconnection with the core values and norms that form a “traditional” Mexican American culture, and also found—similar to other studies—that among Mexican Americans, generations was the most important variable in predicting degree of acculturation (Buriel & Vasquez, 1982, p. 60).

To also understand the formation of a group’s political identity, there needs to be a further examination of the assimilation process a group experiences once they arrive in a country. As migrants leave their homelands and enter a new country, each group adapts and acculturates in different ways according to how that country receives them. Theoretically, groups want to assimilate and, at the same time,

maintain their ethnic identity and culture. Rex (1996) states that nation states respond to immigrants on the basis of either racial and ethnic exclusion or with assimilationist attitudes. However, the ideal state is one where multiculturalism is welcomed. Multiculturalism provides the most “space” for the immigrant minority to attain its own goals, as long as the nation state or larger society is not threatened. Each ethnic group or individual determines how much of their ethnicity is sacrificed for the good of the nation state. Rex argues further that ethnic minority members negotiate this exchange and accept some form of contract. Oftentimes new immigrants see it as part of the cost for living in a particular society or settlement which has to be balanced by the real gains which migration brings. Some immigrants who are more committed to their cultures of origin will negotiate more and others less. Moreover, he argues that through time some ethnic groups change their position. As long as they have achieved equality and cultural respect from the adopted nation state, they are more tolerant and less disengaged with the nation state. Therefore, they maintain ethnic nationalism or pride through symbolic traditions like ethnic festivals and/or preservation of their language (Rex, 1996, p. 283).

Students from the Texas cohort were raised in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands that consists of a 2000-mile political border and 52 million persons living in ten Mexican and U.S. border states (Velez-Ibañez, 1993, p. 195). The region is described by many (McKee, 1989; Stoddard, 1978) as a “border subeconomy that is part of the internationalization of production and the exchange of populations” (Velez-Ibanez, 1993, p. 198). For example, Valdez (1993) argues that Mexicans growing up near the

Mexican/Texas border are subjected to high poverty and unemployment due to their race and class. In Laredo--one of the larger border U.S. cities--90 percent of the population is Mexican American, and of this group a high percentage are jobless and live in chronic poverty. Many of the residents are migrant workers who travel to the Midwest in the summer for work and return in the winter. Although one will find Mexican Americans throughout the class structure, most are poor and marginally integrated into the local economy, primarily as unskilled workers (Valdez, 1993, p. 177).

Another phenomenon that exists with other U.S. border cities along the Rio Grande Valley is that Mexican residents that live just outside the U.S. border have special legal status to shop and visit in U.S. border regions. However, many work on the U.S. side which is prohibited by U.S. immigration laws. It is estimated that approximately 20 percent of this population work in Laredo, oftentimes employed at salaries and under conditions unacceptable to Mexican Americans; this is likewise a reality in other border towns like Weslaco, Rio Grande City and McAllen. Although English is the official language, Spanish is the spoken language in the city. Many Mexican Americans throughout the class structure claim never to have experienced ethnic prejudice and/or discrimination, however, class differences dominate. "In 1990, thirty-seven percent of the total population of Laredo lived below the official poverty line as compared to thirty four point five percent in 1980" (Valdez, 1993, p. 182). Poverty levels are directly related to human capital skills. The median years of school completed in 1970 and 1980 in Laredo were 7.6 and 9.5. The number of people on federal aid has increased considerably based on data collected in 1989.

Persistent poverty has caused some to be involved in illicit commerce and contraband. This phenomena occurs particularly in border communities where countries—in this case the United States and Mexico—tend to restrict their economic markets with the exchange of certain goods and services. Therefore, stolen cars, guns, the trafficking of undocumented immigrants, and trafficking of drugs permeate Laredo. Again, a disproportionate number of families with incomes below the poverty line, female-headed households, teenage pregnancies, and welfare dependency are not only endemic to Laredo's Mexican American community, but also to the other border communities where the Texas students in this study reside. The students acknowledged these conditions and saw them as realities in their own neighborhoods. McKee (1989) reports that approximately 39 percent of the inhabitants aged 25 and over have graduated from high schools in Laredo compared to 65 percent for the state of Texas. While the high school graduate figure might be higher for some other regions (i.e., Weslaco, Donna, Rio Grande), the social symptoms are very similar. Nevertheless, McKee discovered in her study that, while there is a keen understanding of the impoverished circumstances that these people live in, there was an overwhelming belief “in the efficacy of education in unlocking the doors of poverty” (1989, p. 311). Her respondents shared opinions such as “Children must stay in school and study hard so that they can get a job and protect themselves” (p. 311). She further states that the sentiment for getting an education was so intense that it showed up in many responses to questions that did not specifically mention it. Some of the respondents further added that “No, the rich person can go to school and become whatever he wants; the

poor, no,” or “No, the rich and poor aren’t equal, because the rich can study heavily, and the poor may not.”

Based on McKee’s analyses of ethnicity and migration, people of Mexican descent in Michigan respond to their situations as an ethnic group differently because they are placed in a predominantly white environment where discrimination may be more prevalent than in the border. As reflected in the comments of some of the adults interviewed by McKee, there was a cultural attachment to the border that was hard to relinquish. Her study reflected the voices of a third of the households in La Fabrica, Laredo, a barrio in which the author has been both visitor and resident off and on for 18 years. The study was based on an open-ended questionnaire that was distributed, and followed with interviews. One respondent mentioned: “Here, if you have no work, you’re alone. It’s better for everyone in the North: schools, programs, aid” (McKee, 1989, p. 320). However, many stated that the reason why they ended up not migrating was due to the ethnic prejudice directed against them for the first time in their lives. One woman responded, “There’s a lot of discrimination in the north. They don’t want to hire Mexicans or rent houses to them. But there’s lots of work, and lots of money and program” (p. 320).

Some individuals in McKee’s study recognized that they had a sense of “belonging” to Laredo that could not be duplicated in the North. One young woman in the study mentioned,

I was raised here, and my people (La Raza) are here, but I aspire to live elsewhere because of the economy. I have property here and an emotional

attachment. My heart is in Laredo, but I should try to convince my family to leave for their well being. (1989, p. 321)

Mexican Americans living in Michigan or further away from the Mexican United States border face similar challenges; however, their environment offers other unique challenges. In the early 1970s, Mexican Americans in Michigan were described in the literature (Adams, 1970; Choldin, 1969) as primarily urban, having large households and moderate incomes. They migrated primarily to Detroit in the early 1920s to early 1930s. Many factors influenced the settlement trends of Mexicans in Detroit. One was the political and socio-economic conditions that existed at the time in Mexico that caused many to emigrate to the north which McWilliams (1949) describes as the “push and pull factors”—push factors are those that set people in motion, whereas pull factors are those that attract them to a particular place (Murillo, 1981, p. 11). The industrial as well as the agricultural development of the American Southwest and Michigan provided an impetus for the gradual increase of Mexican immigration. The sugar beet industry was one that Michigan found quite lucrative and was heavily dependent on Mexican laborers as far south as Laredo—often illegally (Murrillo, p.13). It has been estimated that half of the workers brought to Michigan during the first two decades of the twentieth century entered the United States illegally. Although discrepancies exist regarding the actual number of Mexican migrants that settled in Michigan after leaving jobs in sugar-related industries, nevertheless the Mexican representation in this industry was enormous. The railroad, mining, and steel industries were other sources for employment for unskilled Mexican laborers.

Moreover, the economic and political struggles which lead to the Mexican revolution created a large push that resulted in a massive emigration to the United States: many moved to Detroit, Michigan not only for the sugar beet industry but for the growing work opportunities in the various auto-related industries. Subsequently many who had begun in the sugar beet industry left because it could not offer them steady employment. Ford Motor Company also initiated a recruitment effort which brought several hundred Mexican students to Detroit to learn the automobile industry, many of whom came with high school diplomas and some with college degrees. Many of the adults already established in Michigan did not want to pursue an education though.

According to Murillo (1981), traditional Mexican values gradually changed as American-born children of Mexican immigrants took on “a more meaningful role in the changing family structure” (p. 55). Mexican parents that chose not to engage in Americanization programs to learn English depended on their children to act as translators and interpreters for them. Undoubtedly, this created cultural conflict between the child and the household for the child, unlike his/her parents, needed to find a new way to culturally adapt to the dominant American culture and lifestyle without regard to his family’s background and culture. To summarize, Humphrey (1944) states that the structure of the Mexican family in Detroit changed in three ways:

the status-role and the corresponding self-concept of the father declined relative to that of the women and children; the wife tended to retain her previous status-role position through the greater retention of Mexican meanings and understandings, although in some instances the wife came to occupy a position of social superordination; the status-role of the children largely reversed itself, especially in the case of the oldest boy, who played an entirely new role as

mentor to later born siblings and a position in the family hierarchical structure equal to that of the father. (Murillo, 1981, p. 62)

In the 1990's, Hispanics represent only 2.2 percent of Michigan's total population. Approximately 69 percent of this population are of Mexican descent and are currently employed in manufacturing, services and retail trade. Agricultural workers or farm laborers constitute only 3 percent of the Latino labor force and this does not include the migrant worker population since they are not present at the time of the census (Aponte, 1994).

Acculturation

Acculturation to U.S. culture was the second social factor that I chose to examine, along with the extent to which acculturation issues exist that impact freshmen students' performance in college. Escobar, Karno, Burnam, and Hough (1988) state:

Acculturation is the process by which an immigrant's attitudes and behaviors change toward those of the dominant cultural group as a result of exposure to the new cultural system, and has been identified as a factor affecting the performance of Hispanics on measures of psychological functioning. (p. 149)

Orozco, Thompson, Kapes, and Montgomery (1993) studied the measures of acculturation of Mexican Americans and argue that we cannot assume that all Mexican Americans are identical with respect to acculturation and its resulting impacts. This study further claims that Keefe and Padilla's (1987) current research on acculturation looks at various multidimensional processes in which acceptance of new cultural traits and loss of native cultural traits varies from dimension to dimension. Therefore, retention of the Spanish language, celebration with traditional folkways and

practices, contacts with relatives in Mexico, association of friends and foods, and the salience of their ethnic identity as discussed above all influence the level of acculturation of Mexican Americans living in the United States.

There are studies that have also examined the personality development and identity formation issues of children born to parents of mixed heritage and their level of acculturation. Rotherum-Borus (1993) confirms that the term bicultural is a controversial topic and has multiple definitions ranging from the integration of two sets of cultural norms to one behavior pattern (unique blending) to the process of switching one's behavior across situations (code switching) (p. 82). With unique blending for example (Ramirez, 1983; Sue, Sue, & Sue, 1983), a second generation Mexican American may retain his/her strong orientation to his family, and yet demonstrate a more competitive stance at a job and highly value his individual success at school, demonstrating that he has also assimilated many norms of mainstream U.S. culture. On the other hand with code switching, for example, many Latino/a adults may insist that their daughters be chaperoned when dating, and yet their daughters live in a culture where this is not the norm. Parents interpret their daughters' lack of a chaperone as disrespect. Rotherum-Borus further explains that "bicultural competence typically implies an understanding of the varying social norms of at least two groups" (1993, p. 86). Root (1992) and other scholars writing on biracial or multiracial issues argue that research on how biracial or bicultural people cope with their heritages is limited—especially "given the negative social, legal, and cultural history of race, ethnicity, and inter-marriage in this century" (Root, p. 304)

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Arbona et al. (1995) conducted a study to test the accuracy of Keefe and Padilla's model of acculturation orientation. Their findings demonstrated that as the generational level increases, Spanish language preference, ethnic social orientation, and social pride decrease. However, they found "that cultural identification or awareness decreased at a faster pace from the first to the fourth generation, but ethnic loyalty remained relatively stable from the second to the fourth generations" (p. 613). They also found that their ethnic social orientation did not change much from the first to the second generation; however, it gradually decreased for successive generations. This study, as well as Keefe and Padilla's model of cultural orientation, suggests that third- or fourth-generation students who might not be familiar with Mexican culture and traditions, and who might prefer to speak English rather than Spanish, may nevertheless identify with their Mexican heritage. This suggests that acculturation and generational status may not be good predictors of ethnic identity as was originally predicted because respondents who were third- or fourth-generation in Arbona et al.'s study still identified with their ethnic heritage.

Acculturation and Success in College

An individual's migratory pattern to this country, location, and cultural identity do influence their transition from high school and adaptation to college. Padilla (1992) acknowledges that today college students of Mexican descent are undergoing major challenges in their social roles compared to their parents' generation. As more of them adopt roles that were previously reserved for Anglos, Padilla argues that this

creates stressful situations for them. They are having to reassess their preferred ways of relating to and identifying with both the ethnic culture and the majority culture. On one hand, they are pressured to demonstrate their allegiance to their culture; at the same time, equal pressure is placed on them by the majority culture to assimilate. Padilla (1992) argues that this dialectic “exerts strong influences on Chicano student behavior that have implications for the social and academic functioning of Chicano students on campus” (p. 181).

Manaster, Chan, and Safady (1992) in another study examined two groups of successful and unsuccessful high risk Mexican American migrant high school students compared on sociological and psychological indicators of acculturation, urbanization, and socioeconomic status (SES). They predicted that subjects and their parents who were born in the United States should adapt psychosocially to the majority cultural environment with greater ease, and would have a higher likelihood of academic success than those subjects who were born in Mexico. One hundred and fifty-one migrant high school students were sampled. The first group were academically promising poverty-level migrant students who participated in a summer enrichment program at St. Edward’s University in Austin, Texas called the Rural Upward Bound (RUB) program, which chooses poverty-level migrant students who show promise of being able to benefit from college preparation educational opportunities (which their school districts are unable to provide). The unsuccessful group was composed of students of the same background who had been retained once or twice and had not passed the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills test. They were enrolled

in the State Migrant Program (SMP). They found that the unsuccessful group came from families that were larger, poorer, more rural, and more foreign to U.S. culture. The more successful group was found to be more stably acculturated, to have a clearer sense of themselves, to have higher occupational aspirations and expectations, and tended to desire jobs with greater responsibility and stability (p. 125). Their findings implied that the more acculturated to the host culture and to personal effort and motivation, the more success would come to successive generations. On the other hand, for those who do not integrate the beliefs of the host culture and who are not socially and occupationally mobile, their future success is limited.

Another study by Vásquez and Vásquez (1995) on Mexican American students and their success in college was conducted on 120 undergraduates. Their findings revealed that generational level, acculturation and acculturative stress did not affect GPA. Instead, parents' economic levels, parents' educational levels, students' knowledge of native culture, or students' preparatory and ethnic studies courses may create the difference in their success.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

The object of ethnographic research by anthropologists is to discover “the cultural knowledge that people hold in their minds, how it is employed in social interaction, and the consequences of its employment” (Spindler & Splindler, 1992, p. 70).

In this study, my field of inquiry relied on both a naturalistic and a multi-methodological approach that included unstructured interviews and participant observation. The end result was an ethnography with the intent (a) to discover and report the students’ beliefs and experiences; (b) to examine the interaction of persons as social actors in social settings; and (c) to be a confessional narrative that outlined my biases, ethical challenges, and subjectivities.

As I mentioned in Chapter II, my epistemology was constructed within a critical, postmodern theoretical framework. The critical ethnographic literature (Apple & Carspecken, 1992; McLaren, 1991; Weis & Fine, 1993) states that the focus is not to “present some objective or emic representation of a particular culture, but is to clarify the myriad ways in which historical relations become manifested in cultural constructions” (Quantz, 1992, p. 471). Therefore, the role of empirical study is to understand how material relations become manifested with different life experiences. These life experiences—particularly with subgroups—are often marginalized, and

therefore, need to be given a voice.

In this study, I was interested in representing the culture, the consciousness, or the lived experiences of people living in asymmetrical power relations (Quantz, 1992, p. 448). Before going into the field I presumed, based on personal observations that I had made about Latino/a students in college and also what I found cited in the literature on critical theory and ethnography, that majority students of color, particularly those of Mexican descent, continue to be in a state of socio-cultural and political struggle (Fuertes & Sedlack, 1993; Hurtado, 1993; Reyes & Halcon, 1991). I thought that by unveiling their concerns, issues, and postures, by having them deconstruct their political, social and material disenfranchisement through their personal narratives, that I would be liberating them from their “cells”. I believed I was the transformative agent that would allow them to tell their story, and that in turn, through this collection of narratives, the administration would realize the tension and conclude that change needed to occur.

On another level, I understood that qualitative research is historically and politically constituted in specific power relations. Therefore, I depended on the critical ethnographic discourse to assist and support my methodological examination of how my roles of researcher, administrator and Latina influenced my understanding and interpretation of these students’ experiences. I knew because of my different roles, methodological shortcomings and biases would exist that would impact my research design and collection of data, but in what way? Other methodological questions that I posed before and during the fieldwork were the following:

1. Knowing that roles were set in the context of privilege and power, what impact would they have on the students and how they responded?

2. How could I come to terms with my subjectivity and biases within my position of power to those that I was studying?

3. What impact would observing these students as marginalized students of color have on the findings?

I was surprised to find that the literature and studies in critical ethnography were not addressing these issues, and concluded that the critical ethnographic literature seemed “too academic, too removed, too oriented toward the life of the academy, and not enough toward the politics of the researcher’s everyday life in the field” (Quantz, 1992, p. 497). Also, there was not much mention on how the researcher begin to challenge traditional research epistemologies that emphasize the objectivity of one’s work (Agar, 1980; Harding, 1986, 1987a; Roman, 1992; Rubin, 1981). By objectivity, Harding means:

the stance often taken by researchers in attempts to remove, minimize, or make invisible their own subjectivities, beliefs, and practices, while simultaneously directing attention to the subjectivities, beliefs, and practices of their research subjects as the sole objects of scrutiny. (Roman, p. 556)

Although I do not consider my work or epistemology to be a feminist materialist approach, I found that several of my questions and concerns were being addressed and critiqued in Roman’s discourse. She concluded more profoundly that research cannot be conducted in a value-neutral way. For example, Roman (1987) studied how middle- and working-class Punk young women form their gender and

class identities in relation with the extramural curriculum and rituals of their subculture in a midwestern city (p. 561). Thirty-two Punks participated in an ethno-graphic field research that represented both middle-class and working-class that included participant observation, and informal and formal interviewing. In her study, she narrated the practical and ethical dilemmas produced by her first forays into the subculture, in which she claimed she failed miserably at attempts to “go native,” that is to “dress Punk.” She states that by refusing to go native, she found herself unintentionally going to the other extreme, the “fly on the wall” approach to fieldwork. She realized further that this posture presented other ethical dilemmas. Roman (1987) claims that the issues of practice and ethics surrounding her research did not emerge out of conformity or rigidity to feminist materialist theory. Instead, her ethnographic practices and ethics emerged and were transformed as she attempted to settle the conflicts and contradictions that were presented in her training as a naturalistic ethnographer and her prior conscious political beliefs as a feminist materialist. It was dialectic based on the interaction of her practice with her political beliefs and theoretical constructs. As practical dilemmas emerged, these in turn transformed her feminist materialism. The emerging theory in turn allowed her to rethink her ethical stances toward the young women she researched.

Participant observation, which for the purposes of this study I call “informal encounters” was practiced in a less traditional sense. The method was less ethnographic in that I did not spend prolonged, direct, on-the-scene observation in the field, collecting data, and taking field notes as most anthropologists do. Yet my style of

inquiry still maintained many of the qualities of anthropological research in that it was not predetermined what the research problem and hypotheses would be. Moreover, as an “involved observer” (Clark, 1965) due to my role as recruiter and advocate for these students’ well being prior to and during the study, I was unable, as Clark (1965) states, to fully detach myself as a scholar and/or participant observer. I was involved in their everyday events which included advisory meetings and university sponsored events (i.e., Hispanic Student Organization [HSO] meetings and picnics) and eventually they became involved in my personal life. Moreover, ten years of my life has been devoted to the well being and success of Latino/a students on campus. I found that being an involved observer helped me, at times, to test the reliability of responses during the unstructured interviews by observing their behavior while I participated in events and functions. For example, during our conversations, one of the topics that we discussed was their impressions of Mexicans that live in Texas versus those that were raised in Michigan. Some of their responses paralleled behaviors that I observed while I attended the meetings and events in which many of these students participated. For example, at these students’ organizational meetings students had different levels of cultural understanding of what it means to be Mexican. This inter-cultural diversity created tensions within the group. Moreover, I found, as Clark had discovered while involved with the Haryou planning project in Harlem in the 1960s, that as one becomes more involved in their lives, as I did when I participated in their student organizational meetings, their personal college struggles, and their interactions with their parents, that this brought me into the vortex of the Hispanic/Latino(a) student

community. More importantly, I became a witness to the feelings, the thoughts, the strengths, and weaknesses of these students as college freshmen.

I conducted my research at Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan, which was the most convenient site, as I worked in the Admissions Office and had access to documents, personnel, faculty, and students. Initially it was my intent to make contact with all twelve students that had received the Texas Initiative Scholarship (TRI). This group was well defined because I had recruited them and had made several contacts and visits prior to their arrival at WMU. While my original plans were to interview all 11 students, only 10 volunteered. The one who decided not to participate felt that the study was too personal.

Early in the study I wanted to involve the students' parents in this study because they had a fuller grasp of their families' cultural histories than their students. However, instead, I decided to pursue this interest at another time. A primary challenge was the distance factor and not having more time to immerse myself in the lives of the parents and the community.

With the Michigan cohort, I initially planned to interview 14 students because I believed I had not spent as much time with them and had less contact with them. These were students that I had not personally recruited, and they did not belong to any collective group that was as easily identifiable as the Texas group. Again, as with the Texas cohort, there was an interest in involving their parents because they had more knowledge of their families' histories, migratory patterns, and reasons for moving up north. However, I decided not to pursue this route at the time.

I decided later in the study to create a third cohort, the Michigan/Texas cohort, consisting of one student. She was born in Michigan, but was raised in Texas. However, she became very attached to many of the students from the Texas cohort. This was probably due to the fact that while she, as a migrant, had spent her later years seasonally in and out of Michigan, she still identified herself as a Texan.

Most of the data collected relied on face-to-face, semiunstructured, tape recorded interviews. One student preferred not to be taped and another decided to communicate via email due to his speech impediment. This became a challenge because I was not able to engage in the conversation, which was less dialogical than the other conversations. However, because I was involved with him in other ways, I learned a lot about who he was through direct contact and relied on the writing as supporting documentation. Five TRI students preferred group interviews, so I decided to conduct two. Initially, my intent was to not conduct group interviews, but some students felt more comfortable with the group format. I did not expect to find any significant differences. However, the dynamics of the group interview allowed some of the students to be opinionated and dominate the conversation, while others were more reserved. For those who were less communicative, I found it was particularly critical that I follow up with individual interviews in order to further document their experiences and opinions that might vary from those shared by others in the group.

One of the group interviews took place in the university's student union. At another time, two other TRI students chose to be interviewed in their room in the resi-

dence hall. The locations that we chose to conduct interviews included students' residence hall rooms, restaurants, my office (very few times), their homes and mine. At these and other settings, observations were made and notes were taken. Yet at the same time, I continued to conduct informal conversations or interviews.

Individual interviews lasted between 1 to 1½ hours, whereas group interviews lasted generally 2 to 2½ hours. Many students were interviewed twice, and in some cases three times because some of the topics that we discussed were not fully explored in the initial interviews.

Based on the literature review, my research design relied on general themes that I wanted to pursue in order to initiate a conversation. Unstructured questions were developed to elicit the following information:

1. Do socio-cultural differences exist between the Texas, Michigan and Michigan/Texas freshmen cohorts? If so, how are these manifested?
2. If these exist, do these differences have any impact on students' transition to college, including parents' background and upbringing?
3. What was the college search process like for all groups prior to enrolling on campus?
4. What does it mean to be of Mexican origin?
5. Did students find that their culture was an impediment which affected their academic success at the institution?
6. Because students shared the same Mexican heritage, did all groups identify themselves the same way?

7. Were there more significant differences than similarities due to their different acculturation processes in this country (see Appendix A for topics and questions)?

8. How did high school preparation effect their transition to college?

I found in most instances that these students were very willing to share their stories. Therefore, I rarely had to terminate an interview because we had exhausted the range of topics to discuss; however, I found that students chose to focus on different topics. Whereas some enjoyed talking about their families, others preferred to talk more about their high school experiences. This difference in focus from student to student had much to do with their relationships with their families. In some cases, some students missed their friends much more than their parents, and therefore, felt a greater need to speak about those they missed the most. This was true for all three cohorts. By the second and/or third interviews, I felt more confident and comfortable with interrupting them less and allowing them to talk more freely about what they saw as important—always keeping them somewhat on track regarding some of the topics that I thought were critical to the study. There were times when respondents went on a tangent that was not directly related to the topic chosen. Again, many used me as their counselor to vent the frustrations that they were experiencing with their families and courses. I had to remind myself often that my role in the interviews was that of researcher. We could discuss personal issues on another occasion.

The pre-contact phone call reiterated the importance of the study and thanked them for their willingness to participate in the study. Later in the scheduled interview,

I reiterated the significance of the study and the significance of their participation. The importance of confidentiality was also clearly explained. They were later asked to sign a document that explained the purpose of the study and how the information would be used. Pseudonyms were created to protect their identity. I found it interesting that in most cases, students found the confidential statement humorous, especially the part that discussed the possibilities of mental anguish.

After the collection of data was completed, all conversations were transcribed by the researcher. Transcribed transcripts for each respondent were analyzed and themes were extracted which included: cultural identification, cultural awareness, family relationships, college environment (including classes, residence halls, room-mates, friends, missing family), intra and inter group conflict, high school experience, prejudice and racism. Because these non-structured interviews were treated more as conversations, there was significant information that did not relate to the themes that were addressed in this study. Therefore, the data were excluded.

Contacting the Sample Texas Cohort

Contact with the Texas students began at the end of their senior year in high school in 1996. I knew them by name, yet met them for the first time in May, 1996 when I decided to visit them in Texas to review their scholarship packages with them and their parents. I also wanted to answer any other questions they had about the university. For many parents, this was their only opportunity to meet with someone from WMU since many of them were unable to visit the campus. In fact, I was

surprised that so many trusted the school administration and me, and concluded that WMU was a good and safe place for their children. Weslaco High School and the school district was very supportive by doing fund raisers in order to contribute to the cost of flying these students to WMU. As I mentioned earlier, selecting the students was easy because practically all who had accepted the scholarship decided to participate.

Once they arrived, I kept in close contact with them. We planned gatherings at my home, monthly meetings to check on their progress while at WMU, and I also had assigned many of them to host families in Kalamazoo as another support. Out of the 11 students that had agreed to get involved in the project, 3 of them had work study positions in the Admissions Office. Many had chosen to work in the Division of Minority Affairs because they had made contact with administrators that were of Mexican descent whom they felt comfortable around. Undoubtedly, my daily involvement with the majority of these students made it convenient, but more importantly, comfortable for both the students and myself.

Out of the 10 participants, 2 were males, and the rest were females. Many of them lived in the lower Valley of Texas that borders Mexico (i.e., Weslaco, Rio Grande and Donna, Harlingen), although some identify their hometowns as located in Mexico instead of Texas. They all came from low socio-economic backgrounds. This was evident from the large financial grants they received from the federal government indicating that the majority of them had a "0" family contribution on their Federal Aid Financial Student Application (FAFSA). Over half of these students' families were

seasonal migrant farm workers, or had been at one time.

While recruiting in Texas over the last two years, I was invited to several of these families' homes where they expressed great appreciation for all the work and care that I had given their sons and daughters. For many of these families, they lived in very small homes and it was obvious that they came from low socio-economic income levels. In two cases, however, I was surprised to find that the students' families (there could have been more since I did not visit all of their homes) who were also migrant workers lived in very comfortable, larger homes. In all cases, parents had not completed a postsecondary education, and the majority had not completed high school. Most of the students lived with both parents; however, in two cases the mothers were divorced. In another situation, the mother was widowed at the same time that the student enrolled at WMU. Another female's mother had committed suicide and the student was then living with guardian parents who were her biological aunt and uncle.

Nine of the students were from Weslaco High School and the remaining one was from Rio Grande City. All students had been academically successful in high school. Four students were eligible to receive a two-year scholarship because they received a 3.5 GPA or higher. The other six received a one-year scholarship because they had received minimally a 3.0 GPA. Their standardized test results were reviewed, but no minimum composite scores were required to meet scholarship eligibility. Many of them were also involved in extracurricular activities (e.g., athletics, Spanish Club, government). They were all bilingual, except one of the students who

could understand when someone spoke Spanish, but did not feel comfortable speaking it herself. All of them, with one exception, felt very loyal to their school and had difficulty leaving their hometown and friends. The one student only missed her friends, and did not have many positive things to say about her school.

Michigan Cohort

Identifying potential students from Michigan was more challenging than those from Texas. I networked with current WMU Latino(a) students, administrators, and faculty because there was no identifiable way to know if they were of Mexican descent. For example, on the admissions application, racial and ethnic information was requested, but it was still optional. When I researched to find how these students had chosen to identify ethnically when they filled out their application, all of them had checked Hispanic. However, there was no place on the application for a student to be more specific (e.g., Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban). Therefore, other than their freshmen status, it was impossible to identify them using their admissions application or any other document.

I found the HSO to be very resourceful and spoke with the president to find freshmen of Mexican descent. Three students names were provided by the president and some other students whom I later followed up with. Others that proved to be very resourceful were the admissions staff. Two of the admissions counselors provided me with names of two students they had personally recruited to WMU. I followed up with them and they in turn provided me with other names. I called 15

students and 11 agreed to participate. Of the four that did not participate, three were reluctant and never returned my phone calls after several attempts; one talked to me briefly over the phone and shared some of the difficulties which lead her to decide not to return to WMU. She felt the campus was not diverse and students were not politically involved with Latino/a and other issues.

Although particularities exist with each student, some general characteristics were found for this group. There were three males and seven females. Some graduated from high schools in the inner city (e.g., Detroit, Grand Rapids, Saginaw), but most were raised in rural communities (e.g., Holt, Mendon, Fenville). Their overall grade point averages in high school varied across the group with four falling between a 2.33-4.17 range, and the rest were slightly below this range. Their standardized ACT scores ranged from 15-27 composite scores. They were also very successful and involved in extracurricular activities (e.g., Honors Society, athletics, Spanish Club, government). Many enjoyed their high school experience and felt very loyal to the teachers and administrators. However, one student felt he was always being compared to his older brother who had a higher GPA and was a better athlete.

Over half of the students in this cohort came from inter-racially/culturally mixed marriages, except in four cases where both father and mother were of Mexican origin. While some did understand Spanish, many did not have the verbal Spanish skills, and therefore, felt more comfortable speaking English. There was only one student who was fluent in both languages. Only three of the students still lived with their biological parents; over half had parents that were divorced.

The Michigan/Texas Cohort

This student had attended Harlingen High School in Texas, yet graduated from Hartford, Michigan. She received the Incentive Scholarship. She was bilingual and was socio-culturally connected to her Texas home, family, and friends. However, she had spent a significant number of years in Michigan, attending high school and acculturating to a white, Anglo environment that the other Texas students had not experienced. Again, because she was comfortable with many of the students from the Texas cohort, she was involved in the TRI events, meetings, and gatherings at my home. Also, she was involved in the several group interviews with the Texas cohort.

Researcher's Roles

The Latina

As a Latina, my interest in the study and understanding of Latino/a college students stems from (a) my cultural upbringing in Puerto Rico; (b) my experiences migrating to the United States; and (c) experiencing many of the injustices that students of color face in this country—particularly in college environments. Although at the time of entering this country I did not have the Spanish accent and stereotypical Negroid/ Indian features that often distinguish people of Hispanic descent and often are racially discriminated against, I found that my surname “Rodriguez” aroused enough interest for some to question my academic capabilities and potential for success. While quite successful in the academic and social arena, my personal

struggles with racism (overt and covert) psychological scars that remain to this day. I also remember my undergraduate schooling. I remember the disproportionate number of Latino/a students in my classes and throughout college. I remember reading college textbooks and wanting to know more about me in the sociology and history books, but not finding much there. While I progressed, I felt silenced because there was not enough of me anywhere that I looked. I began to think that the problems were attributable to the lack of parenting and support of these students because I knew that while my parents did not have a college education, and we were not financially comfortable, I still went. Responsibility and accountability did not lie with the college, but with Latino/a: (a) parents who lacked the self motivation to have their sons and daughters pursue a college education, and (b) students who lacked the academic preparedness and/or persistence to survive in such an environment.

Years later, when hired as an advocate for the Latino community here in Kalamazoo, I found that there were other socio-cultural factors (i.e., income, lack of parents' education, their ethnicity, political status) influencing whether a young adult would pursue a college education. Consequently, I realized that pursuing an education for a Latino/a had less to do with their lack of motivation and/or interest or their parents, and more to do with their low socio-economic background and lack of political power.

This cultural experience, I feel, made me more involved and connected to the struggle of many Latino/a students in high school and in college. I felt that understanding what it meant to see and experience struggle, to negotiate one's culture at the

expense of fitting in, to defend my successes based on my skills and not an affirmative action decision, made me fit in.

The Administrator

As an administrator working in the admissions office at Western Michigan University, I observed that the numbers of Latinos/a being recruited, admitted and enrolled were proportionally low compared to other minority and majority students. I and others in the Admissions Office began to increase our recruitment efforts throughout the state of Michigan. But more importantly, I understood that in order to make a successful impact on minority recruitment, we would have to move away from traditional marketing techniques that worked for the recruitment of majority students—we would have to reach out to their communities. Therefore, commitments with financial/ scholarships were established in Holland, Grand Rapids, Fenville, and Van Buren County. While these initiatives were very promising, we found that many of the highly academically talented students were not enrolling at WMU and sought other college alternatives (e.g., University of Michigan, Michigan State University, Grand Valley State University). Therefore, the decision was made to create a special university initiative that would seek out these students. The two areas that were targeted were Puerto Rico and Texas because of the predominantly higher number of students of Latino/a descent, and also because many of these students were eager to study out-of-state if the scholarship money was also available. This was how the TRI program was initiated.

TRI Recruiter/Coordinator

As the program coordinator for this initiative, I became very involved in these students' lives. A major challenge was to convince the parents that their sons and daughters would be placed in a safe, caring environment where I assured them their children would do well. However, I must admit that the university, like many predominantly white college campuses, had a reputation for not making great strides in retaining or being sensitive to Latino/a students. Currently enrolled WMU Latino/a students had expressed that the administration was not sensitive to their concerns and that often their issues were contextualized within the black student experience. A lack of Latino/a faculty and a lack of cultural programming, among others, were concerns that had not been addressed. They concluded that they had no advocates to support their issues.

I knew that I had a challenge ahead of me and knew that in order for the students from Texas to be successful, it would also be necessary for the university community to be committed. Since the TRI was a university initiative, I felt that we were moving in the right direction of increasing their odds of success.

Prior to, and throughout this study, my feelings and closeness varied with each group. Because of my role as recruiter, adviser and host family to the Texas Incentive Scholars, I had become quite involved with their feelings, needs, and desires. Also, my acquaintance with their high school counselors, social workers, and parents throughout their enrollment at WMU strengthened my rapport with them, creating

intimate and trusting relationships.

In particular, the families and high school counselors saw me as their students, sons, and daughters' advocate. I had recruited them to the university, but more importantly, I had befriended each of them. Therefore, I did not see myself as the marginal native (Friedrich, 1970) or the professional stranger (Agar, 1980). Again, I had become an involved observer. Because of their living far away from home away from their families, the university's administration and I knew challenges would exist for them that would be unique compared to the Latino(a) students from Michigan. Consequently, I spent more time with them than the students from Michigan. Another critical factor at the time was that the recruiter, who had been assigned to recruit in Texas prior to my involvement, left the university before the students arrived in the fall. This was a potentially stressful situation because she had initially recruited many of these students and parents, and therefore, they relied on her assistance. Personally, I was afraid that they would decide not to come because they did know anyone else. Once she left, I knew that I was the only viable candidate that could take on this responsibility. Moreover, the recruiter had entrusted the program to me, so with no other choice I stepped in.

Being Latina and having worked with many Latino(a) students, I felt comfortable that I could take on the challenge. However, I did not know much about Texas, and much less about Mexican Americans from the Valley. In my initial visits I was a stranger to the state, their schools, and the overall environment. I also became very concerned and questioned whether these students would still enroll at the university

knowing that their only advocate, with whom they had become well acquainted and comfortable, had left and would no longer be their liaison to the university. I found it necessary to respond immediately. Consequently, I took charge and became their new advocate and made certain that they understood that while things had changed, the program and the students were going to be cared for and that the students would become my responsibility. The word “responsibility” was one that their parents fully appreciated. This was a large commitment and much to ask of myself and my family. But I knew that if I did not commit myself to them in this way, many of the parents would have made alternate plans and had their children stay in Texas.

The students were leaving their homes and families, and I knew, based on past recruitment experiences in Texas, that Latino/a students did not stay for long. This time it was different. Because of the large financial support and recruitment costs involved in this program, departments like Financial Aid, the Division of Minority Affairs, and Admissions made these students a priority. These departments became the critical players at the university and I knew that they would have to make a concerted effort to assist with these students’ special needs and challenges (e.g., loneliness, being away from their families), similar to what international students also experienced. The “host family” program was also established to provide students with surrogate parents or families, preferably Latino(a), that could attend to other needs that the university could not fulfill.

It became apparent to the Texas students and their families that I had become their main advocate, and if there were concerns, they should seek me out. Initially I

had concerns whether being Puerto Rican would impact the relationship and their trust in me, but I found this was not the case. What was critical for their parents was that I spoke Spanish and would care for their sons and daughters' needs. "Mi casa" became "their casa" (My house became their house). Their lives became my life. My house became their get away from the residence halls, their home away from home--the place to celebrate special holiday festivities. When they were lonely, sick, or were tired of studying and wanted to be off campus, I became their friend, confidant, parent figure, and advocate. I became very protective of the group and oftentimes served as their only source of comfort, though of the students sought out their assigned host families. Gradually, I began to empower them to resolve their problems without my having to intervene at all levels. The students eventually realized that they were clearly being supported by the university, and sometimes felt they received special privileges that other students at the university did not have. Some said that they liked being referred to as the "Texas" students and felt special. Some even mentioned that if they had attended a college in Texas, they would not have received as much attention and support from those schools as they did here.

Advantages did exist with having established myself in the various roles aforementioned prior to my role of researcher. The students had enormous trust in my abilities as an administrator, but more importantly, as someone who genuinely cared for them, and desired to see them succeed. However, after I decided to involve them in this study I became challenged by my role as researcher. This opinion and challenge came from within, from my insecurities of not knowing what to expect. I was not sure

if the students felt comfortable with my new role. I assured them that my relationship with them had not changed and that this project was an attempt to provide a “space” where they could voice their opinions to the university. Some participated because of their respect and devotion to me. Others may have felt that they “owed” me and needed to reciprocate for all the work that I had done for them. While I did not ask them directly, I believe none felt intimidated because I was an administrator or that they had no other choice. It was obvious that those who chose not to get involved felt that there would be no repercussions.

When the project began, I found that some of the students jokingly mentioned that they had become my guinea pigs. I was bothered by this because, as I mentioned earlier, I did not want them to think that anything had changed between us--that I was taking advantage of the relationship I had established with them before this study was initiated. Reflecting on these experiences, I must admit this was naïve, and blame this guilt trip on inexperience. After interviewing them, I felt the need to spend more time with them, and invited them to my house and to other social occasions. Needless to say this had an impact on my relations with my family and friends. Even at work, I established an open door policy where they could come and talk to me. This often meant delaying projects that needed to get done. I should have known that the relationship would change and it did. In many cases, the relationships became stronger because I shared more time with them.

During the first interviews both the students and I were nervous, and they were hesitant to share. With one student, this was a great surprise because we had

always had a personal and open relationship. I believe that in this case, the student realized that our conversation was different from the others. While the tape recorder may have gotten in the way, I believe for many it was the fact that they did not know what to expect and felt they had to perform or behave differently. In most cases this was not a difficulty. Some continued to joke about the fact that they were “guinea pigs” being studied in the laboratory; others treated the interview similar to many other encounters we had had before. For the most part, the interview became our special time where they could update me on what was happening in their classes, their homework and friends. I found I could spend quality time with them versus having to deal with all twelve at a picnic or at social event in my home with all of them demanding my time. It was apparent that when they did not get my attention, they were jealous and somewhat resentful. My time with them was more limited when I became more involved with the Michigan cohort and with the second year Texas group that I also recruited to WMU.

Involvement With Michigan Cohort

My introduction to the Michigan cohort was very different. Because these students were from Michigan, some of their challenges as they acculturated to campus were less pronounced compared to those faced by the Texas students. For one, these students could go home more regularly. Undoubtedly, these students were less dependent than the Texas students and had other admissions recruiters that they could seek out in case they needed assistance. Prior to the initiation of the project, I found it

less necessary to immerse myself with them as I had done with the Texas students. For one, since I had lived my later years in a predominantly white environment while in Florida, I felt that I had a more emic understanding of their experiences as “minorities” in their home towns, schools, and friendships. Also, after working as a Latina advocate in Kalamazoo, establishing professional relationships with high school and bilingual counselors; and recruiting Latino(a) students in the state, I was less concerned that I had not spent as much time with them prior to the interviews. As a consequence of my personal and professional life, I believed I knew and understood this cohort in ways I did not know the Texas group.

I had made contact with some of them prior to the study because we met at the HSO meetings and at other university-sponsored Latino(a) events. Also, some of them had in their senior year attended our Medallion and HEIS Scholarship competitions and remembered me. I did not know any of their backgrounds with the exception of one student that I personally recruited to WMU—I knew her high school counselor very well. In seeking participants for this study, I relied heavily on the admissions counselors that recruited in the territories where these students live, the current WMU Latino(a) students, and referrals from the Michigan group. I believe that many decided to participate because they just wanted to help me. Again, while I did not ask them why they chose to participate, I do not believe they felt intimidated because I was an administrator or felt they had no choice. On the contrary, because this group had less contact and involvement with me, they could have more easily refused to participate than the Texas students. When I called, they were polite and formal during

the phone conversations, but they became less formal during the second interviews which is what I expected.

At one point in the study I became concerned that the Michigan group (with few exceptions) did not know me as well as the Texas students, and consequently, there could be methodological shortcomings in my later findings. Therefore, I felt the need to overcompensate, so during my interviews I selected sites that were less formal. I also invited them for dinner or lunch at the house because, unlike the Texas group, I had not had an opportunity to do this with them as often. Restaurants were a common place for these initial gatherings. However, in retrospect I realized that often the noise levels would make it difficult to transcribe and understand the conversation. As the students became more comfortable, which in some cases was immediate, we began to meet at other locations (i.e., students' apartments and homes). In only one case the student and I first met at my office and then I was invited to her house for the second interview. Overall, I found that based on my genuine interest and concern for them, my role as stranger was minimized. Moreover, my initial concerns about their being less familiar with me making a difference in the findings was no longer a concern.

The number of interviews ranged from one-to-two. However, in some cases we went to three. I found it necessary to do this in order to establish more immediate rapport and trust. I also did not want to be perceived as a traveling tourist that had intruded in their lives without much regard for their personal lives. While my role as administrator and researcher provided some credibility to my identity and the purpose

of the study, I wanted to be viewed as more than just that. On the other hand, I had to come to terms with the fact that my relationship would not be the same. It was obvious that the relationship with the Texas students which took approximately six months to develop could not be replicated in a month with the Michigan group. Therefore, to compensate for the limited time, I found it more rewarding personally to initiate informal conversations, and I avoided using the tape recorder. I also concluded that I would need more time, and therefore, I extended the time period and asked the students if they would be interested in meeting with me throughout the spring and summer months. They were very flexible and agreed to do so. As I reflect, a significant factor that may have impacted the number of participants in the study was the time frame. It was late March, early April when students were immersed in their research projects and final exams.

Again, it was surprising that these students, who did not know me very well, enjoyed the conversations and were very excited to meet with me. In two cases, I became their friend and someone they could share their personal problems with. In a few cases, because I was an administrator and quite resourceful, I was able to assist them in getting the Financial Aid Office to reinstate their scholarships.

With all groups I discovered that many of my perceptions of how the social world and higher education work would in many cases be proven false. There were many overlapping and sometimes conflicting assumptions between how I as researcher, and they as students or informants, interpret the social world.

CHAPTER IV

THE PORTRAITURES

This chapter presents the edited portraitures of 21 students. The letter that requested their participation indicated that their real names would not be disclosed; thus, each student is identified with a random pseudonym which has no meaning to the student or myself. These portraitures were borrowed from a colleague, Freddy Webb-Pettett, in the Sociology Department who was also working on her dissertation at the time I was drafting this study. I was very impressed with this model because it allowed me to tell a story from both the researcher and student's perspective and yet retain the identity of the speakers. The portraitures reveals both the intradiversity within groups and interdiversity between the groups and individuals.

Texas Cohort

To summarize, the Texas cohort consisted of ten participants: two were males and eight were females. Many of them lived in the lower Valley of Texas that borders Mexico (i.e., Weslaco, Rio Grande and Donna, Harlingen), although some identified their hometown in Mexico instead of Texas. They all came from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This was evident from the large financial aid package they received from the federal government indicating that the majority of them had a "0"

family contribution on their Federal Aid Financial Student Application (FAFSA). Over half of these students' families were seasonal migrant farm workers, or had been at one time.

Texas Portraits

Portraits for the following ten Texas students are presented: (1) Horacio, (2) Gardenia, (3) Noria, (4), Tania, (5) Melissa, (6) Elsa, (7) Pamela, (8) Sonora, (9) Adolfo, and (10) Carolina.

Profile of Horacio

I first met Horacio at Weslaco High School in Texas May, 1996. Although born in Texas, he lived with his divorced mother who had never remarried and remained in Northern Mexico, in a small town bordering the United States. When I asked him if he identified as a Chicano, he responded by saying "what is that?" He identified very strongly as a Mexican and recognized that because of his identity, he had experienced forms of racism. He shared that his white girlfriend's family may not have liked him because of his skin color since he discovered that the boyfriend of his girlfriend's sister was not liked because he was black. However, Horacio decided to date her anyway and remained with her. He acknowledged that she felt uncomfortable with him hanging out with Latinos(a)—particularly the guys. I suspect that this had something to do with spending less time with her. Horacio also acknowledged that she was jealous. Horacio shared that he had to be careful to wear his cowboy boots

because people might see him differently.

He came from a low socio-economic background where his mother worked odd jobs in Mexico, and he was supported through financial aid. He agreed that it was very difficult to get a job in Mexico and in Valley, Texas. He was raised entirely by his mother, and even though he knows his dad, he does not have much of a relationship with him and felt he has disappointed him because he never followed up on his word. However, being an only child, he felt that he has been privileged and very much cared for by his mother, grandmother, aunts and one uncle whom he respected very much. Being raised in a predominantly female household, he valued and respected women, and thought that they should be treated as equals in relationship to men. He recognized that many of his male relatives did not share his point of view, and he guessed that it could be that women are perceived as weaker because of their emotions; therefore, men felt like they had to protect them. Males on the other hand were less emotional. Overall, Horacio had a strong commitment to his family, especially his mother who did not speak English. Horacio was fluent in both languages.

Based on his academic credentials of a 3.5 GPA and ACT of 21, he received the two-year TRI scholarship which paid for his tuition, room and board and other fees. Because he came from a lower socioeconomic level, he received full aid from the government.

Although his mother never continued her postsecondary schooling, she was very supportive of him continuing his education. I was impressed with how

responsive she was to having him leave Mexico and come to Michigan, especially knowing that this was her only son. But she entrusted him to me and made me responsible for his livelihood and well being, which at the time seemed to be an enormous responsibility.

Initially, I found Horacio to be a very quiet person who seemed to rely much on his mother. I was, however, quite surprised that he was more personal and responsive to all people regardless of their ethnic background. I found that he had been raised in a traditional family in Mexico and had not been exposed to the variety of ethnic groups that others experience in larger cities (i.e., Dallas, New York). Some of his closest friends included his roommate from Texas and other Latin American countries. He also enjoyed meeting and hanging out with International students. Sometimes I ran into him and his friends and most of them were non-white Americans. Also, Horacio did share in one of his interviews that he felt more comfortable with non-white students. In one of our many conversations, he referred to being more comfortable at a Hispanic gathering than at an Anglo fraternity. Even though he roomed with another TRI scholar by the name of Adolfo--which one would think would make them more compatible--Horacio did not enjoy his company and often complained about some of his roommate's attitudes and behaviors. For example, he discovered that his roommate perceived women as second-class citizens, even though he claimed to read the Bible and practice a "Christian" life; therefore Horacio found him to be hypocritical because he was practicing differently.

Horacio's college experience was very similar to other freshmen. He studied

some, but really liked the liberty to go whenever and wherever he wished. However, he did not feel this freedom as anything new because in high school he lived alone in Texas while his mother was in Mexico, and they would see each other during the weekends. Unlike other high school students, he became accustomed to an independent life style and learned to be somewhat responsible for his well-being.

His adjustments to college seemed minimal. Throughout his first year, he missed his family and mom's cooking, but adjusted more quickly than what I initially expected. His second semester became more of a challenge with his psychology and biology classes where for the first time he found himself flunking exams. He also seemed to complain more about the weather and being cooped up in the residence halls. Classes were more of a challenge his second semester because (a) the first semester had been too easy, and (b) there were higher expectations from professors. I believe his problem was that he did not manage his time as well as he should.

Horacio was one of the most emotionally dependent of the Texas students and constantly needed to be reinforced and supported. In spite of that, one generally found him on most days to be cheerful and humorous. However, when a problem arose, he was quick to seek me out or anybody that would listen to him. Even though I was not his host family, I acted as one and found oftentimes I became his surrogate mom.

Horacio eventually became my "adopted" son. His pain and anguish over girlfriends, classes, and work became very routine and I found myself continuously counseling him through these struggles. Throughout his first semester, we had

frequent contacts because he worked in the Admissions Office. He became one of the frequent visitors to my home, and I introduced him to my close acquaintances.

Because of our trusting relationship, my role as researcher and his involvement in the project became less formal and I became more of an involved observer than participant observer. After three conversations, here is his story.

Horacio in His Own Words

Being a freshman at Western Michigan University means meeting new people and not just hanging out with the Texas group. Although some of my closer friends are either international or Hispanic, I mostly hang out with my girlfriend. I can't understand why most of the Texas students don't want to socialize with other non-Texas students. I like to hang out with my Hispanic male friends, but I can't because of my girlfriend. She doesn't like it when I hang out with the guys.

For the most part, I have no complaints living in the dorms because you get to meet people, but I don't like when they play their music loud and I am frustrated with my roommate. Like, this is what ticks me about him. He reads the Bible and I have no problem with that. I have no problem at all. But then again, he starts talking bad about people, especially the girls. And then he says, yeah I want to do her so bad. That's all he thinks about is sex. I also can't understand why he studies so much and doesn't do other things like go to parties and hang out. I feel that it would be better to room with someone that's right here, from here. Cause there's things that they have like TV and stuff like that. And they know they have more people that they

know, so through them, one can go out to do different things. And it's like most of us know what's here already. So they can help you get up there right away. But, if two people are from the same place, they're going to have to go through everything, step by step.

Overall, I like it here, other than the winters. There are times when I get depressed because there is no sun. Also, I don't like work study in the Admissions Office and want to change. I feel being here has changed me, but I need to be more isolated. I do better when I'm isolated because that's what I was used to back in Texas. That is why I prefer to have my own room because I'm use to being isolated.

When I went down to Texas and talked to the seniors, I warned them that they needed to prepare themselves to study because they would feel homesick. If you're really, really homesick, be prepared to struggle the first couple of months. You're not going to want to do your homework and will be worried and miss your family. And you will not have fun doing that. When I see other Texas students here, they are too isolated. Either you're homesick, you come home a lot, or don't have any fun. Cause when you're having fun you forget about all those other things. And you also need someone that you can really trust. And I can really trust. I really miss home, but never felt the urge to go back. Yet, I do miss the times going with my mom to town, running around, cooking and the food.

I am definitely challenged this second semester and will be attending classes. Last semester the classes were more lecture, unlike this second semester. Classes are more of a struggle, but I am concerned that I will not be able to maintain a 2.5 GPA

for the second semester and luckily was able to get a 3.1 the first semester. Before in high school, I found time to study. I would go home and do my homework, watch TV. That's it. Now I can't. Now I go home, go to school, go to work, then do that school work. Some classes like economics and government did help me for college, but the rest were easy. Other things that could have helped me in preparation for college would be more lectures and less writing on the board.

I was raised in a single parent home as the only child. I don't miss having any brothers and sisters because I had lot of cousins and those that I viewed as my brothers. I have no relationship with my father even though we recently connected, but he didn't even bother to show up until I was eighteen. You know, like now what? I don't need him because mom took care of me. I really haven't shared my feelings with him and only with my mom as to how I feel towards him. I don't think I miss out on a lot because I had my uncle, grandparents, friends and counselors.

There are differences between being raised as a Hispanic and an Anglo. It's mostly respect. Also the connection with parents. Family is real close and we talk about values. It doesn't matter, if you're bad in Texas or Mexico, you still tend to have some values. Here if you're bad, you're bad and that's it. In Mexico, people don't listen to their parents but they still respect them. I don't see any of that here. Now, here if you go to church you're close. There are some Anglo families that are close, but not many.

When I came to campus, I didn't think that because I was a Hispanic, things were going to be different. I just stay away from those people that want to cause

harm. I have never experienced any acts of racism or prejudices on campus, but I know it's out there. I have one friend that kids around about things, but I know he's only kidding. I don't see any prejudices in the schools in Texas. Well, maybe with Blacks. I don't believe that you have to have Hispanic role models to feel successful. I felt as comfortable going to a white counselor or teacher to get help. Now I don't feel comfortable going to the advisor in the Criminal Justice Department here. She talks to you like you're retarded or something.

I identify myself differently depending who asks. With the Bolios (Whites) I say I am from Texas, to others I am from Mexico. I do this because Anglos see me as an outsider if I say that I am from Mexico. With an International student they are okay with it. For example, if I am with an Anglo and I say I am from Mexico, they are going to be like, oh, you know. I don't know how, but I see it differently. They don't view you like you are from the same place, I suppose, and call you an outsider. With an International, they're going to feel, like oh, okay. When I compare Mexican Americans from Texas and Michigan, I believe they are all the same. The people that are now in Michigan have parents that are mostly from Mexico. So, it's the same. I don't see the difference. But there are those that are born and raised in Michigan who don't speak Spanish and those are different Hispanics. There are some Hispanics that live in Texas who also have lost their Spanish. I mean, if they look Hispanic and they don't, if they are, and they don't talk Spanish it's like, oh.

Profile of Gardenia

I met Gardenia when she came to summer Orientation in July, 1996. I found her to be rather friendly and talkative. However, her fellow Texas friends had a different opinion of her. I later found that her peers felt that she was one of the most opinionated, stubborn, and critical individuals they had ever met. She was not too concerned about what they thought of her, and had decided early on that she was not going to be part of that group. However, I respected her determination and strength to move on. She was the first out of the cohort who decided to live off campus, and remain at the university for the spring and summer semesters instead of return home. Overall, she managed to position herself at the university—as large as it was—as strong and ready to take on a challenge.

Initially, I had my personal challenges with Gardenia. I was assigned to her as a host family and at that time would have preferred someone else. Again, she seemed to be negative and non-trusting. Nevertheless, over time, the relationship became extremely close, and she remains close to my heart as a daughter and friend.

Gardenia always found something to complain about (i.e., cafeteria food, headaches, stomach aches, Texas students). I do not want to minimize some of her concerns, but they seemed to escalate and I seldom saw her feeling good about herself and being at WMU. There were times I thought she would transfer back to a university in Texas, but she did not. I believe in many ways it was due to her strength, persistence, and yes, stubbornness to pursue the challenge and remain at WMU.

Gardenia was born in Mexico and had two sisters and one brother. Her mother was forced to marry at the early age of sixteen or seventeen (Gardenia was unsure of the age). As her mother did not marry her father out of love, they later divorced. She remarried years later to an older gentleman that the children initially did not accept. Gardenia adored her mother, yet did not have much of a relationship with her father. After approximately twenty years of separation and divorce, she did not want to stay in contact, even though there were times she wished that things could be different between her and her father.

Her childhood was one that was filled with challenging stories. Her parents were handicapped by being very poor, having no English speaking skills, and having uneducated parents, which created barriers for them when they decided to cross the border to the United States. Gardenia recalled very painful childhood memories of when her parents decided to leave Mexico without the children due to economic constraints. In Mexico, Gardenia remembered staying with her aunt and not receiving much care from her. She recognized that the separation from her parents strengthened her bond with her brother and sisters. When her parents were settled in the U.S. they brought the children. However, Gardenia's memories of moving to Weslaco, Texas were even more painful. One included her first experience with classism. She remembered that many, especially Mexican Americans who had been born and raised in Texas, stereotyped her as a "mojada" (undocumented, poor, illegal) who came to Texas. She felt very uncomfortable and I believe her anger and frustration stemmed from this perception that many had of her, and she constantly struggled with it.

I remember visiting her house one fall and in shock I realized the economic struggles she and her family had undergone. Gardenia, as well her parents, never complained about their economic distress and always turned to God and Christianity as a way of comfort and hope that things would get better. One of their underlying principles was that with hard work, one could supercede economic hardship. Having their own home, living in the United States, and having children in college were many examples of how life was good. With all the family's economic struggles, they found ways to support her and have her continue with her studies. Her mother did not want her to study out of state, but Gardenia decided to enroll at WMU because of the scholarship. Her struggle has been one of pain, yet triumph! One of pain because she had to endure greater academic challenges than other freshmen in college due to her poor high school academic preparation, and her weak English writing and verbal skills. It had been a triumph because she knew that there were not many students like her from her socioeconomic background that were in college and this brought enormous pride to her and her family.

Although Gardenia claims schoolwork was never fun, she maintained a 3.0 GPA in high school and was involved in extracurricular activities such as track, the Spanish Club, Business Club, and Student Government. Her work ethic and determination to overcome her economic adversity provided the impetus to continue a college education.

Her transition to WMU was not easy at first. Although she was a recipient of the one year TRI, she was registered in remedial classes and struggled academically

her first semester while at WMU. Often times she commented that some of her professors struggled with her limited writing and oral English skills, but she could not understand why this was so when she had done so well in high school. As time passed in her first semester, she became increasingly frustrated, and I found her coming to me many times asking for advice. Her visits and frequent phone calls increasingly became a challenge for me. But I know she needed guidance and assurance. Undoubtedly, the distance from her family was also very trying. However, she did find comfort in many of the friends she met in her residence hall and at work. On the other hand, she made it clear she wanted no association with the Texas students. She did not relate either to other Latino(a) students, and decided that she would not participate in the Hispanic Student Organization (HSO) because things were very disorganized. Another challenge that she spoke of often was breaking up with her boyfriend. Having different roommates in the first semester also added to her stress and frustration. For example, in the first semester, she had two different roommates, and would have preferred to live alone but could not afford it. At one point in her second semester, she considered transferring to Grand Valley State University as she was looking at other financial resources and assistance. However, she decided to stay, and was very instrumental in getting her sister to come to WMU the following year.

I believe one of her best experiences was having the opportunity to work in WMU's Division of Minority Affairs. She established a strong working relationship with one of the coordinators who was a Mexican American from the same area that she had grown up. She became involved in Alma Latina, WMU's radio station which

broadcasted on Sundays. She also assisted with other Hispanic/Latino cultural programming on campus. These and other opportunities provided her with great insight into the university's internal structure. As she became more involved, she also became somewhat cynical and critical of the university's lack of commitment to improve the conditions of Latinos(a) on campus. For example, often times she found that when it came to public recognition, sponsored Latino(a) events, or participation from administrators or faculty in their programming, Hispanics came second to Blacks and sometimes were not even mentioned. While working in the Division of Minority Affairs at the university, this became even more obvious because she was one of the very few students that worked in that department. She also felt there was stronger recognition and support for black students instead of others.

Gardenia's story was a most critical, eye-opening experience for me. It was she who made me more aware of my biases and apriori assumptions before beginning the project. She brought to my attention how faulty my initial assumptions were of the Texas students' cultural identities. For one, I had used the term Mexican American/Chicano to identify the students in my study. However, she made it clear from the outset that she did not feel comfortable with that label. Gardenia respected the different voices on campus by meeting and becoming good friends with different ethnically diverse students; yet she was keenly aware of what she called racism that existed with many ethnic groups and Whites, as well as between Mexicans and Mexican Americans in Texas. She was one of the few students who recognized this early in this study without being asked the question. Whereas many of the students

from Texas did not feel as strong about the differences as Gardenia, when asked the question.

Overall, her in-depth analysis and experiences that I collected as an involved observer and my three taped conversations (conducted in Spanish and English) were invaluable. Therefore much gratitude is reciprocated to her. While the relationship initially was trying and confrontative, with patience and trust, it evolved into one of love and care. We both helped each other and I found her invaluable to the recruitment of other Texas students in my second year of recruitment in the Valley. She became part of the family and was very involved in my personal life and continued to do so. After three conversations, here is her story.

Gardenia in Her Own Words

I came to Western because of the scholarship. I didn't want to get free rides from the government by going to Southwestern. I wanted to get things on my own. Because I don't want people to say, oh yeah, those Mexicans just come here to get money from us and everything. Yet, I pay taxes like everybody else. I like Western because it's pretty. The Valley in Texas is a good place, but they don't have any green hills.

At Western, classes were very difficult the first semester. Because when I have tests, I get confused with everything. I need to buy like a radio or something so I can take notes. Because I mean they go so fast, and I'm like I'm taking notes. I feel so embarrassed. I feel so bad because my professor, I was doing notes, and

everything and she's like, she asked me a question. And I'm like, huh? She's not hard, but she goes so fast with the notes. I think I'm going to get a tape recorder. I also have some tough classes like math and geology. In math I communicate in a way that she doesn't understand. The faculty are so demanding, and I find that I'm always trying to write and please five different faculty. Some of my professors seem to care like my geology and reading professors.

I have made some good friends here. I am one of the few Texas people that hangs out with other people that are not from Texas or other Mexican Americans. I have a very negative attitude towards the Texas students. They never talk to me, but this goes way back to high school. I am independent and don't feel like I have to follow the crowd. I have been involved with things on campus like the Alma Latina radio station, and involved in this Christian organization which I have decided to go with for Spring Break to Florida and build homes for the poor.

I am worried about how am I going to pay for Spring classes. Oh, and I wasn't aware that I was getting aid from the government. If I would have gone to Southwestern Texas I would have not received aid from the government. I didn't want the government to pay for anything. Cause I didn't want to. I just have this thing with the government. I mean they come here and blame us for coming here to live off welfare. They blame us. When my family was not working we needed the money from the government. That is because we really need it, you know, to buy food, and my mother was like behind with her payments and everything. I really didn't want my mother to go there. I don't know if it makes sense. I don't know how

to explain.

Gente no trabajando necesitan los recursos en que sea algo; me entiendes (People who don't work need economic resources that can help us out; do you understand?) Yo no lo quiero para todo mi vida o por un año, nada (I don't want it for life, or for a year). I couldn't understand how the only way we could get food stamps was to not work, but my mom wanted to work, but needed some financial relief. And I don't want to live off the government. See, I am not a citizen of the United States and only a legal resident, and I know that if I am too involved with the government, there will be consequences later on. (During this time, the federal government was planning to remove assistance to all those who were not naturalized).

I miss my family a lot, but I was ready to leave home and be away from them, even though we are close and everything. I think about the food that my mother makes for me and I miss it. Pero si extraño mucho la comida (I miss the food a lot). Los pasteles, las galletitas (the cakes and cookies). I also worry a lot about the financial strain that my family is going through and know that I would like to help out. But again, I like where I'm at, even though I miss them terribly. Me gusta mucho, mucho todo (I like it a lot, everything, a lot). I am concerned about my family, especially my sister Maria. I don't know if she has applied yet. I know she took her ACT, but she doesn't think she did well. I mean we have good grades and everything. I just get nervous when I take the test anytime and I know she has not taken the ACT test.

Yes, I miss my friends in high school, Suzanne, Dora and Maria Elena; also my

track coach. One thing that I will always remember was my cross country meet. I got first place. I could have been in the varsity team for districts, but stupid me got sick in the meet and I didn't run very good. But I still got first place in the district and got to go with my friends to regional. My mom was there and got to see me run. My step dad and sisters also. But I don't miss my teachers. I didn't have any supportive teachers. The Spanish teacher never taught and always expected the students to come up with the answers. My toughest class was English and I believe that is the reason why I am struggling with it in college.

I identify as a Mexican. At first, I was concerned that you would not include me in the study because in the title you referred to Mexican Americans and Chicanas. I learned about the term Chicano from Manuel. I mean, when you used the word Chicano, I thought you were saying, oh, you Mexican. You see, because in eighth grade I had this Mexican American who would put us down. And all they did was call me names and this and that. And then he called me a wetback.

See, while going to school when I was young, I ran into some problems because of being considered a *mojada* (wetback). There was a lot of prejudice in the schools towards Mexicans because anyone crossing the border was considered a *mojada*. I also remember another incident with a boy who made sure that I knew that the reason why I got the *guajalote* (turkey) was because I was poor. I told the boy, *si tu no eres pobre y estas bendecido, pero yo si soy pobre*. (Yes, you're not poor and you're blessed, but I am poor). Because of the money situation, I wanted to leave school at one point and my mom told me to stick with it because she wanted me to

graduate from high school and not work. But I know she didn't want me going away and finally realized that out of all the colleges that I applied to, this was my best bet.

There was an incident in my residence hall where this girl was talking about how sometimes they feel left out because they don't get all the benefits that all those minorities people and Mexicans get. I'm like, you know that those programs are not just for her. Those programs are for everybody. Okay, you can go there and they can help you. It's not just for them. All they want is for you to finish this university. She's like, but yeah, we miss a lot and all these scholarships for minorities and financial aid cannot help us like. I guess she didn't see it that I was upset. What I can't understand is that my other friend is Arab and she didn't say anything to defend herself against this girl. I also found a student who was Mexican saying negative things about the *mojados*. See, these Mexicans behave this way because *se sienten mas importante*. *Se sienten asi porque son americanos* (These Mexicans behave this way because they feel more important. They feel this way because they are American). Go to Weslaco in the high school. You'll see the difference from Mexican Americans who are, you know, Mexicans, who are "los cholitos," you know? And you will see a Mexican American that is "mojado"—wetback, you know, just like that. You can tell the difference between them by the way they dress. Los cholitos *visten mas apretados* (the cholitos or Americans dress in tighter clothes, whereas the wetbacks dress in looser clothes). See, they blame us for coming here just to live off welfare. They blame us in the high school. If you go back to our family records, they went on welfare because they weren't working because we really needed it to buy

food and my mother was like behind with her payments and everything.

The way I define success is going back to my family and showing them that I graduated instead of being married and pregnant. I haven't like, I could have been married you know, but I mean pregnant. Whatever, but I wasn't pregnant when I was 18. I wasn't when I was 21 or 20.

Profile of Noria

I met Noria in March of 1996 at one of the earlier Orientation programs that our office had specifically set up for her and three other TRI scholars. She came with her father and was quite excited to be on campus. She was extremely energetic and motivated to come to WMU. I had great hope for her and once the semester began she became involved in some of the social activities around campus. She also worked in the Admissions Office and took the initiative to know people and help out. At twenty years old, she was admitted to the university with a 3.5 GPA and a 15 ACT. Therefore, she was eligible to receive the two-year scholarship.

Although many attempts were made to have a host family assigned to Noria, she ended up not having one for the first year because it was difficult to find Latino(a) volunteers. So, for the most part, I took on that role. Noria received work study and selected the Admissions Office where she was well-known and liked. I saw her practically every other day, and that became somewhat cumbersome because of the many interruptions that I had from her, which made it difficult to get my work done in the office. Noria was well liked by many. I also thought that her roommate from Texas

might help in alleviating some of the homesickness that she might feel the first couple of months.

However, Noria's roommate did not spend much time with her and preferred to "hang out" with other Anglo friends, and eventually joined a sorority. So Noria did not see much of her. Eventually, other conflicts began to surface. Noria did not like that her roommate was spoiled financially by her aunts, and was also bossy and moody. By the time the semester ended, Noria was thinking about moving out. She missed her family very much and often shared wonderful stories about her family. Her adoration for her father was immeasurable. She also missed some of the simple things that reminded her of her homes in both Texas and Mexico. A fond memory that I have was her request for me to bring a scrubbing board from Texas for her to use in order to better clean her socks—since the washer in the halls was not cleaning them to her satisfaction.

She was challenged in other areas too—her classes. Classes became quite difficult and oftentimes I found her talking about the amount of work that she had to do. I would hear some of the Texas students say that all she did was study. Academically, her major struggles were in chemistry and reading. Being careful to not discourage her, I prompted her to think about whether she had chosen the right major. Her struggles with the sciences were obvious, and I asked her to re-think other alternative areas of study before her GPA fell low enough to jeopardize her scholarship.

Another major preoccupation was her family, and what would people think. She often would talk about what would happen if she had to return to Texas if she

could not make it. Throughout the first semester, I believed that her problem was homesickness and that this would be relieved once she returned home for the holiday break. But by February of the second semester, she was feeling homesick and wishing to go back. One of the concerns I had for Noria was that she spent practically all of her time going to classes and studying. She had a limited circle of friends, and her social involvement in other activities was non-existent.

Later in the semester, things did change for her. She met a male friend who eventually became her boyfriend. She saw him as her “charming prince” that took her away from the dreadful, everyday routine. He would visit on the weekends and she looked forward to his visits and company. While they were involved, she continued to not socialize much in the residence halls. However, she did spend some time with some of her Texas friends. Her new roommate was from Texas and she spent a lot of time with her too. But over the months, she grew more frustrated due to her separation from her family, as well as the continued struggle with her classes and second roommate. At one point, Noria shared with me that one part of the university she did not like was the lack of family or home in the halls. She wanted to be in a house where she could clean, cook, and feel there was support. It was obvious that by April, she was heading back to Texas.

Noria identified as a Mexican. All of her family was born in Mexico in a northern, rural town called Efe Gonzales that borders with the United States. As a child while living in Mexico, she remembered her parents owned a convenience store. However, her parents realized that they could not economically sustain their family,

and therefore, decided to migrate to the United States as migrant farm workers. She remembered throughout her childhood traveling around the United States picking pickles, beets, and fruits.

Her family did not speak English and depended largely on Noria to translate for them. She was raised in the family with the responsibility of maintaining the family's economic affairs because she was very organized and had command of both languages. Her parents never completed high school, yet always encouraged their son and two daughters to pursue an education because they did not want them living the life they had led all those years as farm workers. Being migrants presented challenges to the school system and to Noria. Often she and her siblings had to leave school mid-year because employment was scarce, and therefore, they had to migrate to where there were jobs and money. Eventually Noria received her high school degree at the age of 21.

While visiting Texas and recruiting students, I met her mother and was attracted to her calmness and great love for her family. In the brief time that I was in their house, it was obvious that her mother's role was to support and care for the family. It was also obvious that the father was the decision maker for the family. For example, when Noria decided to come to WMU, it was her father who visited campus with her and not her mother. It was her father who decided that WMU was the best university for her. While visiting them, I was quite impressed that though they were farm laborers, they lived in a comfortable, newly built home. I often wondered if there was another source of income.

I noticed in my conversations with the family, especially with Noria and her father, that they were preoccupied with money. Her father once mentioned that when Noria married, her spouse would have to have the finances to support his daughter. Part of this constant preoccupation with money was the concern with high unemployment in the Valley, and Noria commented that they often moved from state to state looking for seasonal work both in the factory and in the fields. Noria, as well as her family, seemed to enjoy migrant life. However, Noria's mother did see some inconveniences. One was the constant moving; another was the concern for the safety of her children every time they settled in a new environment that she did not know. While at WMU, Noria also shared her preoccupation with her family's finances, and the fact that she was not there to support them economically by working in the fields. Yet, to my surprise, when I went shopping with her, she spent generously on clothes, and did not see anything wrong with paying \$70 for sunglasses.

For Noria, migrant life had its struggles. Having to pick crops regardless of weather—snow, rain—and working fourteen to fifteen hours a day were all inconveniences. However, there were fond memories too! She saw that migrant work brought one freedom to move around and be with her family. From 6:00 a.m. to sundown, the family was always together. She remembers the wonderful stories her father would recount. However, while these were good times, her family believed the children needed to pursue an education and go to college.

Noria never openly talked about how she felt toward different races, even though she was asked during one of our conversations. She had mentioned though

that she noticed that there was a significant number of Blacks living in Michigan versus Texas. However, my colleague and I were quite surprised that when we finally found a host mom who was a physician (Noria was excited to find out that her host mom was in medicine because she was studying to be a nurse) in the community. After Noria visited her the first time though, she lost interest. I confronted her and asked her why, and she claimed that the host parent seemed to be too busy and not interested. Nevertheless, I was not sure if part of her reason was her discomfort with people of darker skin, for the host mom was a Latina from the Dominican Republic.

She did feel very strongly that there was a significant difference between Mexicans born and raised in Mexico and those from Texas. In her mind, the Mexicans from Mexico had maintained stronger family and traditional Mexican values. I found that as a freshmen she also tended to surround herself with more of the Texas group that culturally identified more strongly with Mexico than Texas.

Looking back, Noria was very secure with me and I believe a large part of this was her need to have a mother figure to provide the moral support she constantly needed. Another characteristic that she did not share with many of the Texas students was her strong cultural identity with Mexico. Obviously, she missed her immediate family. But there was a strong attachment to her mom and dad's relatives too. Noria strongly identified with her cultural heritage and family network. The family gatherings and parties were a major part of who Noria was. Having her involved in the study was very natural and easy because she demanded so much of my time. The taped interviews and going out to eat were other ways for her to get my attention

without any interruptions from the office or other students. I believe she saw these taped conversations as a way to let go of her stress and enjoy someone who could spend quality time with her. Unfortunately, she transferred to Texas after the first year. She stayed in contact and missed WMU, but was happy that she was close to and supported by her family. After three conversations, here is her story.

Noria in Her Own Words

I am from Monterey, Mexico. My mother and father were born in Efe Gonzales, a small town on the outskirts of Monterey where everyone is related. My mother and father have the same grandfather and they are distant cousins. The town is so small that the school only went up to the fourth grade. My father was a migrant farmer at an early age and traveled to California. They both met in Efe Gonzales, married and moved to Monterey. For most of my childhood, my mother and father ran a small grocery store. I miss this town because of its smallness and simple life. No one there is concerned about time. When I'm there no one looks at their watch. Everyone gets along and is captured by the nature and panoramic view. Even though my dad's mother was born in the U.S. she later married and went back to Mexico to live. On both sides, the families are large. My dad has eight uncles and one aunt, and my mother has five aunts and three uncles.

Being Mexican is having the "nopal en el frente." It means in other words that one has hopes of continuing life. "El mexicano es fuerte con ganas de superarse y salir adelante" and will do anything just for him to be happy. (The Mexican is strong and

has the will to have a better life and continue the struggle). I feel the Mexican is more united than the one in the United States. The neighbors get together and talk. I also find that the Mexicans in Texas think they are better than those in Mexico. Our values are about family and being united, because if you don't have a strong foundation with your family, you don't have anything. One criticism about Mexicans is that they go on worrying about what people will say "el que dira." Since we're like a small community, you're kind of afraid of doing something cause you're afraid, oh, my God, what are they going to say? But I believe you have to break this and not worry about what they think. I know one worry that many families have over there is the woman leaving far away from home and might come back pregnant. This is a concern my father also has.

I think that there are also differences between how Mexicans live in Mexico and the U.S. One big difference is the commitment that parents have toward their children's education. In Mexico, the parents tend to be more directive in having their sons and daughters finish school and go to college. In Texas, the feelings are more to rely on the government to get them through. My parents pushed me, and I also pushed myself.

We left Mexico because of financial reasons. Although we had a humongous, two-story house there, my parents were worried about the value of the peso (the value of the dollar). We finally left and even though it was difficult the first year, we limited ourselves and worked hard to save. So we've been like earning a lot of money. Gracias a Dios (Thanks to God) actually. And I have an uncle. He is so funny cause

every time he needs money he calls my dad because he buys and sells cars and sometimes, you know, he can't go to the bank and get money. So he's like, can I borrow like about a \$1,000 from you. And my dad is like, don't talk to me, talk to Noria. And he's like, can I borrow a \$1,000 from your dad? Sure tio (uncle), just come on over. And uhm, I lend him money. Yeah, we're considered the rich family. Out of the eight brother and sisters on my dad's side, we're like the rich family. I mean even though, you know, we do have money. I admit but we're not like, oh yeah, wealthy -- oh yeah, let's take a vacation, you know. We're not that wealthy. But they still think we're like, that way.

The woman is the one responsible for maintaining the house. Also, being a good housewife and also having a good job. Like not be an "arrastrada" (not being dependent). Be able to do many things and then again have a happy face and say I'm happy for what I've done. This is the way I see my mom. All my female cousins have an education and they also have careers. At my house, my mom is the mediator, but dad makes the decisions and leads the family.

Being a migrant has always been difficult while I was going to high school because we always had to move around. We would start in the Texas schools and by the end of they year, I would be pulled out to work in the fields. This is the reason why I was twenty when I graduated. Although I could have graduated a semester earlier at the age of nineteen, I didn't want to graduate early because of my brother, and also I wanted to finish with a higher class rank. My parents would always use themselves as an example as to why we should go to school. They would say, "don't

be like us, go to school.” “Just look at me,” my Dad would say, “look at me, look at my hands.” *Todas llenas de callos*” (All covered with calluses). I’m not embarrassed to be a migrant. I do want to be like him. Actually, I am like my parents, but in a different way. I’m taking the stand. I’m making a change in the migrating cycle. My brother and sisters feel the same way, but probably a little bit lazier. Some of my aunts and uncles have an education. Three of my relatives are dentists and one is a border patrol.

I can’t say that I have experienced prejudices as a migrant at WMU, but sometimes I feel in school they underestimate my ability. Yeah, they’re like, we can’t do this because you’re a migrant. I’m like, excuse me. They asked me if I could do the job? I said, look miss, I graduated from high school. I have a two-year scholarship. I would like tell them, look, just because I’m a migrant, that doesn’t mean I’m dumb. You know, I do have my goals. I have my mind set straight on of what I want to do. Everybody’s equal.

At WMU, classes are challenging, but I feel that high school prepared me. I think that high school was more difficult than college. I mean I was taking AP Biology, AP Spanish and other AP courses and it was a lot of work and even more than here. What I find different is the pace. It’s just going at a faster rate and there’s no review before the exam. Your review sheets are your own notes. In high school the teacher would say “open up your book, lets read out loud and by tomorrow you need to read two or three pages.” We probably covered a chapter a week, maybe two weeks. But, here it’s like, by the next class period, they expect you to have read all of

the chapter. Chapters are covered a day. In high school like, before the exam, the teacher will hand you a review sheet to review. Here it's like your notes become your review sheet. It's all about note taking. If you're good at it, you have it made. If not, you're in trouble. It all depends on the person. Here at WMU, the first semester was difficult. I felt like a failure when I didn't pass my chemistry. See, in high school I felt so successful and to later come here and feel there was a lot of struggle. But I retook the class and got a C. My classes second semester are going much better than first semester and I now have Cs and Bs. I didn't tell my parents what I got on my grades the first semester. I believe my struggle was that I was missing my parents so much and was away from home. I always have a lot of support from my parents. I'm not saying that I don't right now, but I guess they would just push me more you know. I admit that having a boyfriend has helped this semester because he has a car and we can go places. But this semester, I'm trying to concentrate on my grades so that I can eventually get admitted into Occupational Therapy. If I don't get admitted, then I will go somewhere else. Initially, I didn't think my teachers here would get to know me personally. Even the teaching assistants were very helpful. They help you a lot because they were going thorough your same experience not too long ago.

When I first came here I didn't think the professors were going to be friendly. When they said a big school of 25,000, I thought okay, I'm going to sit, like, way in the corner. They're going to seat me by alphabetical order and the teacher would just say 1328. When I got to the rooms, I saw 20-25 students and professors asked me all the time how I was doing.

I have not been that involved here. Like in high school I was involved in PALS, which is a Christian student organization through my entire high school. I also liked Theatre and was the House Manager. There is one play that I was involved in called Ten Little Indians. Another organization entitled HOSA (Health Occupation Students of America) was one of my other interests and it got me interested in Occupational Therapy, along with the Spanish Club. Some of the Texas students that are now here, I knew from high school because they were in the high school Spanish Club, but we weren't close then. Here, I consider myself the party pooper. Although the weather doesn't help. But really, I don't have problems connecting with people. The problem is if I start connecting with them, they're going to invite me to do things and then its going to distract me from my studies. So I just keep myself occupied with my studies. It has helped, though it helps to have a roommate from Texas because of that familiar connection. But living in the halls can be very noisy and there is not much to do here. Also, the weather doesn't help. At home, I felt more motivated to do more. Here with no car and the weather made the residence hall experience feel like a prison.

Overall, I have gained so much being in a different environment and meeting different people. It's hard to feel like part of this school because we will always be from Texas. No way are we going to be from Michigan. But towards the end I think you can consider me from Michigan, more like a home, because I am spending the most wonderful years of my life here. Things that I would change about WMU are having more scholarships for migrants and longer holidays.

Success for me is coming to college, getting all my classes in order to get to my career, and to get good grades in my classes. Not to struggle too much. Get it done as soon as possible. Try to get a job as soon as possible. And after some time, just look back and say, I've made it. I have accomplished. I feel successful. Now, to succeed in all the things is not going to be easy, but then again, if I really put my mind to it, it's not going to be hard either.

Profile of Tania

I first met Tania the day before classes began. She was unable to make it to any of the summer Orientation sessions. She was confused, afraid, quiet and reserved. One did not know what was on her mind unless one asked her a question. A contributing factor to her demeanor was that she had graduated early from high school at the age of 16, and therefore, seemed highly dependent on the group and the university. Nevertheless, she became quickly acclimated and, for the most part, hung out with her roommate, Melissa, from Texas and the Admissions Office, since it was where she found kindness and support. Her working in the Admissions Office made her easily accessible. She also found this convenient because it was easy to reach me if she needed to. I also thought that her rooming with a student that was from the same state with whom she had a cultural understanding, and both being Latinas, would provide a supportive environment for her first year in college.

Later in the first semester, I found Tania more independent of me and we did not converse as much. However, she began to experience some struggle with her

roommate and was also having some academic challenges. Conflicts with the roommate increased and she began to come to me often and shared her frustrations before the winter break. While they shared some common traits, their upbringing was very different. Tania was born and raised in Mexico while Melissa was born and raised in Texas. Melissa had acculturated to a more Americanized style of living, while Tania had not. For example, Melissa's liberal lifestyle included alcohol drinking, sexual promiscuity, and the use of abusive language. Tania would often complain that she did not understand how Melissa could be so disrespectful to her parents. She was much more aggressive with men, which Tania was not accustomed to. Tania often thought that Melissa did not hold to Mexican values and was too Americanized. She was especially critical of Melissa not speaking Spanish.

The conflict between them escalated close to the end of the first semester. I had suggested to Tania that she confront Melissa and that, if both felt a mediator would allow for easier conversation, I would volunteer to sit through and mediate. However, she chose not to say much because she did not like confronting people. Things got worse, and eventually everything came to a halt after the holidays. Tania's host family called and asked me to intervene and speak with Tania's mother who had returned after the holiday break wanting to understand what was going on between her daughter and the roommate. After several discussions with the Residence Hall Director and Housing Director, the situation was resolved and Tania became Noria's roommate.

My involvement in this difficult time in Tania's life allowed her to come more

often and talk to me about how things were going. The more we met and discussed, the closer we became. Her parents knew that I had helped her to reach this point in her college career, and began to trust and call me when they or their daughter needed guidance.

As I mentioned earlier, Tania identified with her Mexican culture. She was born in Monterey, Mexico and currently lived in a small town outside of the city. While in high school, she was sent to live with her mother's sister to study English in Texas, and she eventually graduated from Weslaco High School. Tania has a sister and brother who are younger than her. Tania had a very traditional and strict upbringing. While she was raised in a very structured environment, I was surprised that her parents were willing to have her go to a college so far away. However, both parents wanted the best education possible for Tania and believed that this was a great opportunity.

Tania and her family were migrant farm workers and had migrated to Minnesota to work in the fields in the summer time. While she did not like the work, she saw the need to support her family. Financially, they considered themselves rather fortunate. Based on the home that they lived in, they seemed to be socio-economically more stable than many of the migrant farm workers who live in Michigan. However, based on the FAFSA (Financial Aid Federal Support Application) she was eligible for full federal financial support.

Although Tania respected her parents and cherished her upbringing, she often criticized aspects of her family's lifestyle. She did not like the gossip that went around

with the relatives. Also, she remembered her father's strict upbringing, and at times, could not tolerate her father's behavior toward her and her mother. She often said that she would never marry someone as jealous or strict as her father. A part of her was ready to leave this behind and enjoy the freedom she had as a young adult. She commented that her first semester was particularly difficult because any time she did something that was not acceptable by her dad's standards she felt enormous guilt. For example, she never told her family that she dated at the age of sixteen, while most of her friends had dated as early as eleven or twelve years old. In Mexico, she claimed that if you dated young or even kissed you were seen as a loose girl. However, she recognized that when she lived in the United States, dating or kissing at an earlier age was completely acceptable.

Tania was admitted to WMU with a 3.00 high school GPA and a 15 ACT composite, and was eligible for the one-year TRI Scholarship. Tania was not very involved in her high school, other than going to classes and enjoying her friends. She even graduated early to get a head start in college. However, once she got to college, she faced many challenges.

Classes seemed to be the least important part of her life. She struggled her first semester--she was flunking psychology. She was notorious for dropping and adding classes and never seemed to end up with a full schedule of classes each semester. She and her family became concerned with her finances and the fact that she already owed significant school loans.

Throughout her first second semester, there was serious conversation

regarding whether she should transfer back to Texas or to Washington, since she had relatives living in both states. However, after full consideration, including financial costs, comfort, and adaptation to Kalamazoo and the university, she decided to stay at WMU the second semester.

Tania's initial experience was full of challenges and I thought she would eventually transfer to another school back home. On the one hand, she was very excited to be doing different things than she was accustomed to in Texas. She fully enjoyed her host family and felt very connected to her job and the people. She also had an ex-boyfriend from Texas who was attending Michigan State University and they had remained good friends. But as I mentioned earlier, the struggle remained in her academics. In her conversations, she blamed her low grades partially on missing her family and being so far away from them. Moreover, she was not as focused with her studies as some of the other students from Texas.

As she experienced more loneliness due to the distance from her family, she sought more of my advice and company. During the second semester, Tania often visited at my house, asking for help or advice with her income taxes, boyfriends and roommates, and classes. We grew very close and often went on excursions to shop, or she would come over for dinner. As much as she depended on me, I depended on her to help out with hosting Texas students that visited campus. She also volunteered numerous times to help recruit by phoning or visiting some of the schools in Texas when I visited in April of 1997. She enriched me with stories that well described her constant struggle, and her determination to overcome her problems. After two

conversations, here is her story.

Tania in Her Own Words

Both of my parents are from Texas. They both know English, but prefer to speak in Spanish. Coming from Mexico, people from the U.S. tend to see you as a wetback. I'd be like no, I don't come from that part of Mexico. Or they would think that just because you're coming from Mexico, you're coming from Reynosa or Progreso that are towns right across the border. And that usually is the bad part of Mexico. And I'm not from there. Like, I'm more down South. And it's a little town. I grew up in Ramones, Mexico until I was fifteen. I am also American. I'm an American citizen. People ask me how can I be an American and born in Monterey? I tell them that my parents were born in Texas. So I'm American even though I was born in Monterey. But in my heart, I'm Mexican. We now live in Mexico, but we also have a P.O. box in Texas.

My mom and father have always believed in my education and were determined for me to learn English. They were like, "no, you have to go to school. You have to do something." In Mexico I went to a school that was stricter than here. We had to use uniforms. I also had the opportunity to teach English. When I was ready to start high school, my parents decided to have me live with my aunt in Weslaco, Texas so that I could improve my English. Because I knew English at an early age, it wasn't hard for me to make the transition to the United States. Many other kids that come to the U.S. at elementary or high school are not able to read and write good

English. That was not my case. When I went to Weslaco High School, I was not lowered a grade level, and therefore, was able to graduate early. That's why I didn't want to stay in Texas unless I needed it. If I were still in Texas, I still believe that my English would not be that good and I would still just speak Spanish, and that is one of the main reasons why I wanted to go out of state.

Even though I was looking at other universities like the University of Texas, the University of Texas-San Antonio, and Pan Am in Texas, I felt that staying in Texas would be the same thing. One of my aunts wanted me to go to Pan Am and I could have stayed with her. But it's the same thing, the same race. I mean everybody goes there after they graduate. It's like *todo es lo mismo* (everything is the same). I didn't want to be in the same place that everybody else is. I didn't want to be hanging out with the same old friends. I also felt that moving away from Texas would increase my English skills. When I moved to Weslaco, it was to learn more English and I discovered that everyone spoke Spanish. So going to Michigan I felt would expand my skills to be more fluent in English. I knew being away from the family would be difficult, but I was ready for a change. I also had an aunt that went to Baylor, so this was not unknown for a woman in the family to go off and pursue a degree.

I have to admit that when I decided to go off to college, one of my major concerns was finances. I was attracted to WMU because of the one-year scholarship and everything was paid for. My family was very concerned about loans. A lot of their fear also was that my aunt at Baylor left owing \$5,000 in loans. I didn't want to take out loans from the government; instead I would ask Mom and Dad or my uncle for a

loan and repay them later. I have a cousin who went to a school in Washington State and she didn't have any loans. That school paid for her schooling because she was a migrant. I can't understand why some schools support migrants with money and WMU doesn't. Looking back, if I would have gone to a school in Texas, I wouldn't have been treated the same as here because over there everybody is Hispanic--well, 90 percent of us. And here it's like, there's not enough Hispanics around here. So, I feel that when they see you or when they talk to you, I mean, not just because you're Hispanic, but you're just, "I'm from Texas," and they say, "really, you're from Texas?" Because I've noticed, like in Minnesota, they're like "oh, so you're Hispanic." And they just give you a look like, you Mexican, or dirty Mexican, or whatever. Pero (But) here, it's not (like that). I mean, the thing that I've noticed here is that even though you're Hispanic, they don't see you that way. They see you like, you know, two languages? Because, I mean they're a lot como (like) Sonora. She's Mexican or whatever. Or she's Hispanic. But she doesn't speak Spanish at all. She doesn't even understand. I think it's a difference to know two languages at least. I would love to learn another one. Pero (But) to know two languages, it's like, I don't want to sound like I am better than someone who doesn't have the two languages, but it helps. I started around ten when I learned English and they don't believe me as to how I learned. I only learned English because of going to migrant school every summer. And when I went to high school, everybody was impressed with me because of the way I talked. My counselor asked me "where are you from?" And I said, Mexico. She was like, "Wow! Your English accent is really good."

As a migrant, I have experienced racism. I remember last year going into this gasoline station in Minnesota and the lady came out and said that we had to pay first. My dad said, "I know." And she continued to say, "but you have to pay first." And my dad looked at her again and said, "I know I have to pay." She's like, "well, you are Mexican and I thought you were going to leave." I looked at her and turned around. I didn't realize it because I was too young then. I mean, we came here to work or whatever and I hadn't like really put thought into it. Even when we would go into restaurants, everybody is Anglo in Minnesota. There's probably like, I don't know, one or two percent black at the most. Hispanics only go there for like two months out of the summer or whatever to work. And they all leave. So like we go to a restaurant, they take the other person's order, even if we got there first. Or, they think we are not going to pay. They don't treat you the same as an American.

At Western, I don't remember any experiences where they treated me differently. I was warned that everybody was going to be white, but my Dad warned me that there were Blacks also. I remember one time that I experience some racism. Melissa and I were at the bus station. They had given us a discount because we were students. Well, there was this black girl and she said that they had not given her a student discount. We said to the girl to just go there and tell them. She went up and asked why they didn't give her a student discount. And the guy told her that she was black. And I said to the guy that I wasn't white. The girl started to cry. And I felt so bad because I knew I was not white. You know that's not right. She's a student. At least you know you have to give her the chance or whatever. Okay, of course the guy

was Anglo. I like put myself in her place and was like, wait a minute, no. I mean we're all the same. We all have a nose, eyes and hair. It's the same thing, but they don't take it that way, you know.

When I was in Mexico I wasn't allowed to go out. And in Texas the kids are like, "ah, do you want to go out with me this weekend?" And I would be like, "no, I don't go out." And they were like, "why?" "Because I'm not allowed to do that. I can't, you know." I just, I wasn't brought up that way. It was tougher for me because I was living with my aunt, and I mean she knew that I wasn't raised that way so why should I want to do something like that too, you know. It was really different for me to like experience all this stuff. I had a lot of help from my cousins too.

In Mexico, I was a pretty straight A student. When I came to Weslaco my grades were not as high and I had some Cs. Maybe it was because of the change of not living with my family or something. While at high school, I really didn't like my economics teacher. She was rude; she was just mean. But there was still a lot of support. A lot of people liked me. When I went to visit this last time, a lot of teachers said they missed me. I also liked my counselor because she was like my mom. She gave me a lot of support because she was also from Mexico. I admire her a lot. Another adjustment I had to make while I was in high school was that my aunt was very protective and I had to be on guard. It wasn't like Mexico that one could leave the car doors open and nobody would steal anything. In high school, I remember one of my friends stealing my calling card. You can't trust anyone. That's what I'm trying to say, different than like when I was in Mexico. I mean I had a lot of friends that

you could like just tell everything. And they wouldn't, you know, they would help me out. And yeah, in Weslaco I had a lot of friends, but there were a lot that you couldn't trust.

Regarding the men, they do whatever they want. Whomever I end up with will not have that machismo like my dad. There are a lot of things I don't like about hair. Mexican men don't like their woman to wear too much make-up or wear the skirts too short. I remember as a child my father telling me not to cut my hair until I was fifteen, and I started to wear make-up when I was fifteen. My Dad is a traditionalist especially when it comes to dating. I thank my family for being strict with their beliefs about not going out or not sleeping with someone. Because I mean everyone in Texas loses their virginity when they're probably in the seventh grade. I know that while here in college, people talk about me being pregnant. I get frustrated at kids that already have had three abortions. There's a lot of concern about what the woman should or should not be doing. "Pues un hombre, puede hacer lo que quiera" (But a guy, he can do whatever he wants).

Here in Michigan, I don't find a lot of differences between Mexicans here and those in Mexico. For example, with my friend Bill, the way that I see it is that they have brought him up more like the Mexican way in the way he treats his dad and the way his dad treats him. I don't know too many other Mexicans from Michigan. But like Marta, I guess it's an attitude. She's more Americanized. She just wants to say that she's probably Hispanic because of her last name or something. Pero si, es más la tradición Americana (But yes, she is more traditionally American). Por que ella como

Melissa dicen que son Americanas y dicen (Because she, like Melissa, says that they are Americans and they say) "I'm not a Mexican, I'm American." You acknowledge your American and not your Mexican side, like Melissa. But Aldo and Alicante always keep their tradition. They have money. Y aunque Aldo o sea tiene mucho dinero y tiene una casa muy bonita y un carro, pero todavia abres las puertas al quien sea (Even though Aldo has money, a nice house and car, he still opens his door to anyone). And I mean, muchas familias Mexicanas no mas porque ya tienen dinero, ya (lots of Mexican families have money and say, "this is it, this is mine"). And "I own this and that."

My cousins have been brought up this way. They're all Mexican, but they want to become American. Cause there's a lot of people that as soon as they cross the border, they think that they are all American. They have the nopal en el frente (symbol for saying that they maintain their Mexican traditions), yet they think they're American. And they start speaking English and everything. And they're like "yeah, I'm American." They do this because they don't want to be treated as a Mexican. They feel that just because they crossed the border, they are home. Oh, like I'm American. Even though they're not. Yo he visto muchos casos cuando por decir familias que se van a vivir aca y luego ya no regresan. Y cuando vuelven a ir otra vez a Mexico estan completamente cambiados. Como que ya no se acuerdan que lavaban a mano y que ya no se acuerdan de que no tenian estufa. Ya no se recuerdan de su tradición (They come here and then when they return to Mexico, they are completely changed). They don't remember at one time they washed their clothes by

hand, or not having a stove. They don't remember their traditions. And it hurts me because I mean, I don't know. Mexico has been put down too many times. Se ve mal (It looks bad). Por eso cuando yo fui a la escuela en Weslaco, yo les dije que venia de Mexico (That is why when I went to the school in Weslaco, I told them that I was from Mexico). They kept asking if I was from Reynosa. And I said, no I'm from Northeast Mexico. And they look at you better. Cause if you were to say that you're from Reynosa, then you are considered a *mojada* (a wetback). And I'm like no, I come from the pretty part of Mexico.

Latinos more than Anglos feel that way about Mexicans being *mojados* (wetbacks). Because an Anglo doesn't tell you that you are a *mojada*, but los mismos Mexicanos te dicen (your own people tell you that you are a wetback). Como no más se van de Mexico ellos piensan que son dueños de todo el mundo (as soon as they leave Mexico, they think they are owners of the world). I guess just because they are in America. I think that these feelings have something to do with Mexico todo el tiempo ha sido, o lo conocen como un pais pobre (Mexico is perceived as a poor country). When Mexicans who are born or raised in Texas come to visit Mexico, natives see them as still Mexicans. Cuando ellos cruzan el puente a Reynosa y ven a los mexicanos vendiendo algo, ellos dicen, "andale dame esto" (When they cross the bridge to Reynosa and see the Mexicans selling things, they say, "sell this to me.") And I'm like, wait a minute, you're from here, this is your race. It's the same thing. Why are you treating him differently just because you live in the States?

During my first semester at WMU, one of my biggest challenges was writing.

It has been because I still struggle to get my ideas together in English. Like, in writing a paper, like it's better for me to think in Spanish. It sounds perfect in Spanish, but then when I translate it to English, and it's like, it doesn't make sense, you know. Now I think in Spanish and then I write in English. However, my professors have been helpful.

Another challenge has been the larger classes. Like I was stunned when I went to a class. I had to go to class in an auditorium. I was like wow, who is going to pay attention to me here? Yet, in my English class there were only fifteen students. And the teacher was like talking to all of us and got to know every single one of us. In my history class, there was like 300 people. The professor was like talking, talking, and talking. My largest class size was in music with 400. After the first semester was over, I was really down when I saw my GPA. It was just that I hadn't put a lot of time in, though I thought I had. But I thought of high school and did it there too. I always had the first semester that was harder for me. Having such a good GPA in high school, well, not a real good one because I never had been a straight A student like in Mexico. But I realized that I was away from home. And when I was there, I always had support from my parents. I'm doing okay, still struggling, but pushing myself. Second semester is tough cause I haven't found a way to connect with others. Also, you look outside and it's really nasty with the weather. In Texas it would be in the 70's. Here it gets me down and makes me feel depressed sometimes. But I enjoy going to work, going to class, working out. Living in the residence halls is noisy. And again, I still think about home. I would get to the point of being okay, and then

again I would think about home. You start to wonder what they're doing. See studying, when I was home, was that you would work on the weekdays and have the weekends to do stuff with your family. But here a Friday is like any other day. Because here there is nothing that you can do on the weekends. Sunday is the worst because that was church day and the family would go, go to eat, and then take off shopping. If we had the business open, we would go visit our relatives, friends. Here the church is like a mile away and I'm not going to walk in this kind of weather. Being with your host family helps because I'm out of here. It feels like something different. Cause you're seeing a dad, a mom and daughter that reminds you of your own family back home. Like I feel en familia (I'm with family) when I'm with them.

Living in the halls doesn't help. Es como cuando dicen los prisioneros que estan en la carcel. Dicen ahi estoy, mirando no mas las cuatro mismas paredes (It's like the prisoners in jail, they just stare at the same four walls). It's the routine here that bothers me, and you do the same over and over again. Because like the prisoner, I wake up at 8:00 a.m. and go to class. I go back to work and then I come back from work. I do something else, and I go to class again. I go to work and work out. I'm doing the same thing that he's doing, you know. And he doesn't have any liberty. The room gets to me but also the residence hall. I've been to other residence halls that seemed less dirty.

But right now I wake up every single morning and I have to wear this mask on my face that shows a smile. Even though deep inside my heart says that I'm down. I am depressed because I look outside and there are only gray skies. And I live in this

room and I've been in here, and my family is really far away, and I can't see them, and stuff like that. I told Noria that if I stay here one more weekend I'm going to go nuts. I don't know how to break the cycle. Maybe going back home would be, you know, helpful. I know having a boyfriend does help, like what Noria has. Because I remember last semester when I had a boyfriend, I would look forward to that and would even do better in my classes. So I would have everything done by Friday and then would go. Right now I feel lonely cause I don't have anybody. I think it would help to also have some relatives that live close by. O sea que sea un primo o una tia que diga no hijita pos voy por ti el fin de semana (It would be nice to have a cousin or aunt that would say, I will come and pick you up for the weekend). The host family helps, but it's not the same like visiting your relatives.

I don't believe high school prepared me for college. Like I didn't know that I could take AP classes and get college credit. I could have graduated last year with more opportunities in college. It wasn't their fault I wanted to graduate early from high school.

My goals are to graduate and have a good career.

Profile of Melissa

I met Melissa the day before classes started in August of 1996. Self assured, confident, attractive, bright and directed are just some of the words that come to mind to describe Melissa. Even though she had never been to or seen campus, she knew how to take care of business.

She was admitted to the university with a 3.76 and a 20 ACT composite, and therefore was awarded a two-year TRI Scholarship. She had graduated from a small town, Rio Grande City in the United States close to the Mexican/U.S. border. She was one of the top students in her class and was extremely popular with her friends, and at the same time, seemed to be very involved in many extracurricular activities, such as band, government, and other volunteer projects.

She differed from the other Texas students in not being afraid to break away from social norms or expectations. At WMU, some of the students from Texas categorized her as the promiscuous Texan girl who everybody wanted to take to bed because she was so “loose” and “easy.” Melissa felt that she was shunned by the Texas group because she was more liberal and open-minded than they were. While she appeared not to care, at times underneath her breath she would comment on how unfriendly the group was with her. She felt excluded and not part of the group when it came to events or special activities that they were involved in. Undoubtedly, she was ostracized. However, Melissa was not willing to become too close to the group, because she found them to be very close-minded and judgmental. Instead, she wanted to reach out and meet other students. Her motto was “let people live their life, as you want them to let you live your life.”

Her father was Mexican American and her mother was an Anglo of German descent. While Melissa claimed her Hispanic identity, she was not at all connected with her Mexican heritage and was not compelled to associate herself with only Mexican Americans on campus. Although she belonged to the Texas cohort, she

tended to share common characteristics with the Michigan group because she was more assimilated to the Anglo culture, spoke less Spanish, and identified less with her Mexican heritage and more with her American heritage. Her mother and father did not speak Spanish at home, there was a stronger attachment to her Hispanic heritage versus her Mexican heritage, and not a strong desire to be a visible minority. Instead, she preferred to be more assimilated.

Her desire to connect with the Latino(a)/Hispanic student community was minimal, if not altogether absent. While she enjoyed her Hispanic host family, she did not go to them because she needed to associate with Latinas(o), though more for emotional support. I found that Melissa felt less of a need to identify as a Mexican American when compared to the other Texas students who were more strongly identified with their Mexican traditions. She did however, join a Hispanic sorority the second semester. Her reasons for joining this sorority versus others was that she liked the multicultural aspect, even though it was founded as a Hispanic sorority. She also liked the social interactions that one could have with other sororities and fraternities on campus. In her second semester, she became involved in the sorority and continued to be devoted to the organization.

Melissa always seemed to take more advantage of the many opportunities offered by the university than other students. Because of financial constraints, she decided to take employment as a residence hall advisor (RA) in one of the residence halls where she could get free room and board, and later, she became an Assistant Residence Hall Director.

Compared to other students in the cohort, I saw less of Melissa, even though she worked in the Admissions Office's Campus Visit Center. Although I saw her in the hallways and she always responded that things were going well, there was always a comment or two about some of the difficult courses in the biology department as her major was pre-medicine. The opinion expressed by many Texas students was that she worked hard and was organized, but people did not like her attitude. She was the type of person that would readily tell you how she felt about anything and sometimes came off as abrasive. I did not have a chance to talk to her or build any sense of relationship until her roommate Tania told her, after the holidays in the beginning of the second semester, that she was moving out.

This was a very trying time for both Melissa and Tania. I had told Melissa that I could help out if needed. Later I had no other choice but to intervene because both she and Tania worked in the Admissions Office, and it was obvious to many of the employees that there was tension between them. So I scheduled a time with their approval to meet and talk. After the meeting, I had an opportunity to meet with them separately. I believe it was the first time Melissa felt that I cared for her and not just Tania whom, unlike Melissa, everyone loved because she was more social. I also had a chance to speak with Melissa's parents. They were concerned that they were not at WMU to console and help her, and they asked for my support and involvement. Melissa's father also warned me that Melissa was the type of individual who would never let anyone know that she was hurting or needed to be loved and cared for. After this incident, I became more involved in her life. She also became more

involved in mine by helping me recruit more students from her high school the following year. She would phone and later host students once they arrived on campus. She also went down with me during Spring Break and visited with students.

My personal relationship with Melissa was not as strong as with the other Texas students, but there always seemed to be respect. I admired her for her many talents which included her critical skills about life in general. Although I saw less of her during the year, my interviews with her were rich with insight and critical analysis of herself and how she fit into the world. She was bright, and what was most exciting was her rebellious nature, the desire to be a change agent, her perception of how her town, family, boyfriends and friends perceived women and Hispanics. She continually challenged those around her and I wish that we were still in contact. I admire her most for seeking to break traditional barriers within her culture and environment. After three conversations, here is her story.

Melissa in Her Own Words

I don't know much about my family background and when they came to the United States. I believe my father's grandparents were born in Mexico, but came as orphans. My mother's parents were born in Mexico, but my grandfather's mother on her mother's side was German. I don't claim my German side when people ask me. I could identify as multiracial, but we are all mutts. My parents for the most part have lived a very traditional life style. Mom did the typical thing and raised the children, cleaned and took care of the house, while dad worked and was completely dependent

on her. Mom dropped out of high school at sixteen and married my dad who was eighteen. But she recently decided to go back to school and finish her high school, and then found a job because they needed the money when I was young. None of her sisters finished high school, so I feel I'm the only one that is breaking the cycle. I respect my mom's struggle with my dad because not only did she get a job but she decided to go back to college. I realize that my mom was being oppressed by my dad. I am very determined to not follow in my mother's shoes. I have experienced some boyfriends that tried to tie me down. One didn't want me to go to Michigan. I once told an ex, "you don't boss yet." Go to school, get your degree so it's economically safe, then you marry. Maybe have children, maybe not. I don't want to be living in a trailer, barefoot and pregnant. I also don't believe graduating from high school and college is that big of a deal, but graduating with a master's is something bigger. At home, my family is religious, but I'm not and don't go to church even though I do believe in God. I just don't believe in all the things the Catholic church believes in.

I am not Mexican American. I'm Hispanic. Mexican American means that your parents are born in Mexico and you're the first generation American. That's Mexican American. I'm like fourth. I consider myself Hispanic and I'm also American. I'm American with Hispanic descent. My mom is German or at least part. My dad is American and he's Hispanic. My dad was born here. Yes, they have Mexican in them, but my mother's maiden name was Brown. That is why I don't say I'm Mexican American, cause I'm not. The correct definition of Mexican American is that you're first-generation American and I'm not. I also don't agree with the racial

classifications on applications. It is ridiculous to think of people with racial classifications. They don't realize that Mexicans are Indians and Spanish. There were Indians in Mexico and then the Spaniards came and mixed up with the, you know, the Indians. So it created a darker, darker skin person. It's stupid to put emphasis on color. The only reason that Mexicans are darker is because of the Indians. So obviously, I guess I could say that I have more Spanish than Indian. All my family is white. I'd rather be Indian than Spanish, cause that's not right what they did. But I am like my grandfather with blue eyes and blonde, blonde hair and white skin. I don't even like the word minority. I remember when I was working in the Campus Visit Center and they asked me to give a tour because they needed a minority tour guide. I was offended. Personally, I don't like minority. It sounds like, it sounds like a subordinate group or something like. I mean we're all people. Minority makes me feel like a subordinate, something less of--less of the majority. But it's about power, and slowly Hispanics are getting up there. I do believe in Affirmative Action because it levels the playing field, and without it the cycle of inequality is going to continue. That is why I believe in an education because it is the way out for many families in Texas. If they don't seek this, they revert to doing illegal things.

Racial tension exists, but I don't surround myself with those morons. Cause I like to speak Spanish and they ask if I'm from Mexico, and I say no. They look at you and they have this definition of Mexican American. I don't like these categories. What's the use of them? How come some don't say they're Irish, German or say that they are Irish American or Polish American? See, at home my family didn't speak and

I didn't speak Spanish. They believed it would be a language barrier when I went to school. So they never spoke Spanish to me. And in private schools, the nuns would slap us if we spoke Spanish.

I would agree that living in Texas is different than from Michigan. In Texas no one would think that I had an accent. I don't think there is racial tension in Texas, but I remember when I was in the eighth grade at the public school, if I didn't speak Spanish, they would call me a coconut. You know, cause I'm still brown on the outside, but white on the inside. And they would make fun of me, so I had to pick up rather quickly.

Looking back, the transition from high school to college was difficult. My college expectation was of fear. People back home thought I'd be back the first semester. I had the backing of my family, but my father sometimes doubted me. Anytime someone has doubts about me, it only motivates me more to do it. That angers me when someone tells me that I won't be able to do it. It's kind of bad cause I'm not doing it for myself, but I'm doing it to prove to them that they are wrong. I really care for my family but to a certain extent. They are there, and you're here. I do not miss Rio Grande City. If anything, I hate it because of their small, close-mindedness. The more I study, the more I become a different person. I feel that there is stifling oppression. Like I can't speak my voice. I can't, I can't really say what I'm thinking because I'm criticized. I often hear how I have to find a man that will take care of me. I'll never go back to Texas. Leaving home out of state, it's not easy to go back home. It's not the norm to leave your family. If you're brought up, it goes back to the

churches. You know that Hispanic thing. You're not really suppose to leave your family. You're supposed to stay here. But if you're not brought up with that, it's easier to leave home.

With a new roommate things are now settled and my attitude is different. I know others get homesick, but the way I deal with being away from home is I'm here and I got to do what I got to do. I think that the first semester I felt more homesick because my roommate Tania was also homesick and missing her family a lot. I believe living in the residence halls and away from my family made me more responsible.

Academically, I don't think I did well my first semester in my classes. I procrastinated and missed my family a lot and felt alone in the beginning. I didn't have the support of my friends that I had in high school. I also don't think high school prepared me well, even though I was considered very smart in high school. The only good teacher was in history. But the rest of the school was not that great, and I don't have much good to say about the counseling staff. They never helped me out with finding scholarships, and I always had to bug them. I don't think that they place enough emphasis on academics. There was one teacher who complained that she couldn't find paper for her classes because they hadn't ordered it, but yet they could find new uniforms for the band. I was ranked seventh in my class, and then I come here. Biology and math were over my head. I had to get tutoring. My other classes, oceanography and history, were not difficult. I could have done better in my oceanography class, but I broke up with a guy that was in that class.

I didn't get involved the first semester because of my major. But I did miss the

competition that I had in school with band and debate. But this semester I am more involved in Sigma Lambda Gamma, the Hispanic sorority. At first I was the only Texas student that was a member because you needed to have a 2.5 GPA and many of the other Texas students didn't have it. I love the sorority. I enjoy hanging out with the other sisters in the Hispanic fraternity. I could have joined other sororities, but I decided on this one because I like the commitment that the girls have towards the sorority. I'm very proud of the sorority. I like the fact that they don't promote themselves as only a Latina chapter like the others at other schools. Our motto is "culture is pride and pride is success." We all represent different cultures, unlike others that are more homogenous. I like the social aspect, and we get plugged into the Greek system, meet a lot of people, and have a lot of fun. There is this common sisterhood when I visit other chapters at other institutions. I feel at home. I feel like I'm back home in Texas. The only part I don't like about the sorority is the role of women who continue to be traditional Hispanics. That crap, you know, men, machismo, that kind of crap. For example, when we have our Hispanic picnics they remind me of Christmas at home. The women cook and then you feed the men. Women sit on one side of the table and the men on the other. And as a female you don't dare move on the male's side because then you are treated like a harlot.

See, I will not join HSO because they are too disorganized and unfocused. I've made lots of new friend--that has helped. But I am not connected with these kids from Texas. Like I went through this whole year thinking like I was terrible. Thinking that I was so horrible. And I started to meet other people and found out that

I'm the same they are. That's why I think all the Texas students' roommates should be mixed because that would force them to get out of that little shell. Get out of that comfort zone. You have to and go out with other people. And all of them are very hypocritical. They are also babies always talking about how much they miss their families. You're here. Do what you got to do. Again, for me to survive I had to get out of the mainstream.

I would agree that there are some differences between Hispanics living in Texas and those in Michigan. Many of my observations are based on the Latinas I see in the sorority. For one, in Michigan many don't speak Spanish and don't know many of the traditions and celebrations like "cascarones" (Easter Holiday tradition). A factor is where you're brought up. Like, I could be in my area and my parents would not bring me up that way.

Profile of Elsa

I met Elsa in Orientation prior to classes starting. Like all of the students in the Texas cohort, Elsa had visited my home many times. As well, I with her in many university gatherings (i.e., Latino Picnic, bailes [dances]). However, I did see less of her during the second semester. One reason was that she had established a close relationship with one of the administrators in the university's Division of Minority Affairs. However, Elsa had learned to be independent at an early age.

Often times it was a challenge to know what was on Elsa's mind. She seldom shared how she was feeling, regardless of the situation. When asked, she always

responded, "I'm fine." I remember, only days after classes had started the first semester, she found out that her father had passed away. I took her to the airport, and I was surprised to find no signs of sorrow or mourning. During the ride, she even commented that she had not planned on going to the funeral, but her sister advised her that this was the right thing to do. I believe part of this reaction was that she was a practical person, and understood that classes had started and she had just arrived from Texas. Another possible explanation was that she was not very close to her father. She shared in one of our conversations that she never had a relationship with her father. Her strong, stoic nature regarding her father's death and other situations was not unusual, as I later found out.

The Texas students even understood it and often would go to her for advice, help, and moral support. Many of the students commented that while she was in high school, she was a strong student leader and was involved in many activities. For as much as people depended on her, I never knew who she turned to for advice or help. She clearly acted much older than her age. In one of our conversations, I remember her saying "my close friends don't even know me."

Most of our conversations revolved around high school life, but she seldom talked about her home life and her cultural heritage. She claimed she did not know much about her past.

College life seemed to be fine. Elsa was content to be at WMU and could not understand why others felt lonely and missed their families so much. However, Elsa felt alone by not having enough Latinos(as), and more specifically some of her friends

from Weslaco High school on campus. She tried very hard to recruit more of her friends to come up the following year, and thereafter, always seemed interested in helping the Admissions Office recruit students from the Valley. She always felt a responsibility to promote higher education for Hispanics, and enjoyed it.

Elsa was a top leader in her high school class. She was President of the Student Government and was involved in several activities. However, Elsa did not take this same initiative at WMU. In one of her conversation she mentioned that the reason why she was not involved was because she felt no allegiance to Western, whereas she had to her high school.

She was a fighter and undoubtedly would graduate and continue her dream to own her own business one day. I had the opportunity to meet with her once individually and twice in group interviews. It was probably one of the most difficult interviews because by nature she was not inclined to open up and share.

After one individual and two group conversations, here is Elsa's story.

Elsa in Her Own Words

I came to Western because I just wanted to, you know, prove to everybody that I could come over here, and I did. Cause I think about it and I just decided to do it. Both my mother and father challenged me and I like to take challenges. And I just took it. And you know, I never once read that little book about WMU. Dan, my high school counselor, just said it's good there. Like they just talked no más (only) about the scholarship. That's it. Es todo lo que me dijeron (It's all they told me)--the

scholarship. I mean I didn't know anything. Like well, because my dad thought it was a neat school. See, many of the students there haven't been exposed to other areas. And like the diversity here, they don't have that over there.

I am the type of person that prepares and prevents everything. I know what I do, and like, whenever I'm doing something, like I have to do it. I examine everything that there is to it. Like I mean, I don't just do it. Every little thing I do, I have to think for everything. Come to find my way around everything you know. I have always done that. So it's like, if I'm going to do something wrong, I know I'm doing it and if I do, I do it for a reason. If I'm down, I make myself go up. I do use religion to help me. That is my inner strength.

I feel so responsible for like anybody that comes from Weslaco High School to do well here. Because Dan was the one that told me "you know you need to take care of everybody and I know you can do it." And like *con más ganas* (with more energy). I still feel this responsibility with Gabriela and Carolina who never went to class and never showed up to work at the Division of Minority Affairs.

I also think that it's better to room with Texas students your first year than with someone else. If you come here, you don't know what kind of person they are and what they might do. We can at least talk to Texas students and argue with them. But you cannot talk the same way with others. Overall, the residence hall has been positive. The only thing is that I can't talk. When they come and tell me to keep it down, I just don't like that. I hate that. We live next to the RA (Residence Hall Adviser) and whatever little noise we make, she comes knocking. Other people in the

hall have their music twice as loud and they are talking twice as loud and they won't tell them anything. And that's not cool. Even though there are things to do in the hall, we chose not to do anything because we were always busy. We would like to get a house even though I know that it's not convenient to live off campus.

I believe the biggest challenge at WMU are the classes. I don't think I tried as hard the first semester. I didn't try hard enough and didn't concentrate enough. Because high school did prepare me for college. This semester, I'm getting B's, BA's. Also, while some see the snow as a challenge, I don't mind it. I don't know, I wouldn't mind it if it snowed all year. I'm already used to it.

What I would change about this university would be to bring more Hispanics and make them feel more at home by having like more like Mexican stuff, or having little get-togethers that are sort of like, you know, Mexican or like Hispanic. Or like have a little club or a little place that they can go to that gives them that Hispanic atmosphere. It was so nice to see so many Hispanics from Weslaco come to the Medallion Competition. There was a sense of community. Cause like everything here you know, like the rooms you go to are typically American. Like you know, like stuff like that. Encourage them to come in. Then, you know, once you have some of them here, and if they give good feedback to others, others are going to come, you know. Cause sometimes they feel that white people think they are better than them. They underestimate themselves. Like in my class in high school with Antonio, he would make us think and would say, "pues y que tu crees" (and what do you think)? "You think he's smarter than you?" "Tu crees que él lo puede hacer mejor que tú?" ("What

do you think? You think he can do it better than you?") Another thing I would change would be the dorm--to have more support for the students. Sometimes the advisors are like too busy doing something. What I wouldn't change would be the teacher's office hours. I mean everything is pretty much, everything is good, but you know there are some things that always need que (to) improve or whatever.

No, I don't see that there is a lot of discrimination here. But professors here and in Texas underestimate Hispanics. Like sometimes they think that we can't do the work as good as others, or that you deserve more time. I think people are testing me to see if I can do it, though I don't feel like I'm being tested. See, in Texas you don't feel tested because everybody is basically the same. Over there the racial diversity is ninety percent Hispanic and ten percent Anglo and other. Like Hispanics are in a high position, like in the community and everything. Here it's different because they are overpowered by everybody. We don't count here you know. Our voice, you know, doesn't count. We don't have enough people to go against them. Ya se dieron por vencidos (They gave up).

Here, the high school counselors pay more attention to a white student. And they would be taking care of what classes they should be taking. But, like with the Hispanics, they think that they don't care about their education. Students will take any class and won't argue against it. What is different over there is if you are the daughter of the school board president. Oh, that kid would get so many advantages compared to the other ones. So it's like if you're not somebody, or you don't know somebody, like you're a nothing. Overall, people underestimate them, and like, they

wouldn't take them like seriously. For example, like if they let us run for state president or something, nobody would vote for them of course. They would vote for somebody else. Like here on campus, Petra would have been the first Mexican or Native American in the position of homecoming queen.

There are differences between Texas and Michigan Mexican Americans in the way they speak, joke, and gesture. Even though some here speak the language, they really don't know their culture, though they think that they are more Mexican American than we are. Here, the wedding and dances are less formal. Here, the nationalism is much greater where they display the Mexican flag, whereas in Texas, they don't want to necessarily be called Mexican because many of them are *mojados* (wetbacks).

My parents were born in Mexico and grandparents are from Iowa. I have two sisters and one brother. I have an older sister who is twenty-four, the other sister is seven and my brother is fourteen. My older sister is living in California. I think she is jealous of me because of all the school awards, participation and scholarships I received. There is no push for them to go to school, and they don't want to go to school. My parents didn't like school either and they didn't have any interest in me graduating from high school, or going to college. Like sometimes in high school I needed for my parents to go and argue on the students' behalf, and my mom wouldn't do it. Like, she's not very social. She doesn't like meeting new people. So I got a lot of support from Mr. Maldonado and Mr. Domingo. Like, I'm the one who disciplines the children in the house. I get after my parents, cause they don't know what to

do. They have no control over the children.

I never talked to my dad. I mean seriously. Like if I just talked oh, you know, uhm, the car's sick or something's wrong with the car. Or, can I borrow this? Or can I, you know? Like, he'd say "oh, deja las llaves" (leave the keys). We'd avoid each other in the house. So like we never talked. Like I probably talked like more to Hernando and you than with him. Like, I wouldn't see him. I just wouldn't. We wouldn't talk, you know, people wouldn't talk. We just wouldn't. Not even with my mom. I talked to her out of respect. The only adults that I have some relationship with is you guys. But I don't let things out in the public.

If someone asked me where I am from, I say from Texas and then Mexican. Like they never really asked me, so I've never answered before. Although selecting between Mexican or Mexican American, I would answer Mexican American. Because like I remember being exposed to Mexico. I hated going over there. I hated being Mexican in my family. I didn't like it. I don't have a lot of family in Mexico and don't care to know if there were. No se, nunca me habia gustado (I don't know, I never liked it).

I don't think of anything in particular when I think of being Mexican. Well, parties, the weddings. Making the tamales at Christmas time and they kill the pig and make chicharrones (pig skins) and the pig's blood which I don't eat. We have the posada (Mexican Christmas tradition) at Christmas time and the final stop with the baby Jesus is at mom's house. When it comes to values, like your boyfriend can't come frequently or unexpectedly to your house. Only if you're going to marry him.

You can't go out with your boyfriend unless your sister goes. That's just the way it is. There is no way I'm going to take a guy to my house. It's not my parents who say no--it's just I don't like it, like taking different guys, nunca (never). Nunca me gusto (I never liked it). I don't like it. You bring the guy to the house when you are ready to marry and then you take them to the house. There are chaperons, but I've never dated. But I've chaperoned Pamela. No guy is deserving of me. And I'm not going to take any guy to the house if they are not worth something. I'm not going to go out with him, and I am not going to let myself be seen with him until I'm sure that he's the one, and he's good enough, and he's going to be with me forever, then I'll go. This attitude is not about Mexican culture, but this is me. I'm picky.

Yeah, I think being connected to the family is also very important. We have family gatherings, but sometimes I won't go. It's like I don't feel like going. My mom is always, "you have to go to your grandma's, you have to go to mass." I told her, I'm not going to go. Some families do insist que tienes que ir (that you have to go), you can't cause they're going to say this and they're going to say that. Pues que digan (Let them talk). I'm not going to go.

Since I've been here, I've never, ever, ever, felt the need to go back home. Never that urgency that I want to go home now.

Some of my major accomplishments are graduating from high school and being Senior Class President of my graduating class. And my future goal is to have my own business. And I want to get through a degree. You know, I deserve what I have, you know. And I want that and just to go out and, you know, just prove to everybody

that I did it and everything. I would tell other students that they need to be ready and don't give up easily. And I would tell counselors not to send anybody who is not prepared. I can't believe that Sonora is going back home. She hasn't given Western a chance and I'll tell her mother this. I consider her right now a drop-out. And if she thinks that she's going to get a higher grade because it's Pan Am (four-year college in the Valley, Texas), she's wrong. I'm going to laugh at her when she drops out over there.

For next year, of course things are going to be different. Because yeah, I'm already used to it. I like it already. And like, it's cooler here. I am still confident with whatever I do. And like I already know the campus and everything else. I think it's going to be cooler. And there's going to be new people and I am going to show the new Texas students around.

Profile of Pamela

I found Pamela to be the quiet and introverted student of the group. It was very difficult to know who Pamela was because often times she just followed the crowd. When asked questions, she seemed to rely on Elsa's thoughts or opinions. Other Texas students had the same opinion of Pamela. They found Pamela and Elsa inseparable. Another comment often made was that Pamela could not function without being in Elsa's shadow. I remember, Pamela had come over for Thanksgiving with the rest of the students, she got sick and spent three days at the house. However, she decided to leave, even though she still did not look well, but she had talked to

Elsa, and consequently saw herself as well enough to leave. This was evident when I was unable to find a time to interview where Pamela did not feel the need to include Elsa. Regardless of the time or place, I always found them together.

Interviewing Pamela seemed difficult, and as I transcribed the tapes and wrote my notes, I was not sure who the real Pamela was. Was it her story, or Elsa's? I did one group interview and Elsa was involved and dominated the interview. However, there were times that I saw Pamela quite opinionated and responsive, and it was usually on subjects that dealt with discrimination and racism on campus.

During the interviews, Pamela seldom elaborated or offered in-depth analysis or continued conversation of the topics that were presented and discussed. Although very difficult, after one group and one individual conversation, here is a glimpse of Pamela's story.

Pamela in Her Own Words

No, there really is nothing that I would change for next semester. I think it's going to be the same. I'm going to come here and just do whatever happens. There are things out there, but I don't know. Maybe I'll go and take advantage of all those things that are going on, but as of right now, I'm fine just the way I am.

People have this idea of Latinas that they sit at home, get pregnant, and cook and just think that all of them, all of us, are like that. You know because, like I guess they are just like not going to take us seriously because they think we don't have the knowledge to do what we can do. I know part of the fault is the person, but I still

think that people think of us in this way. But not everyone, not all Latinas are like that. They don't or they don't see. They just don't know, but they just say it, you know.

I really can't think of other stereotypes. Cause where we were raised, we are the majority. So, I've never had to experience, or like someone comes up to me and says, "oh, you can't do this because you're Latina." Because everybody there is Latina. Well, coming here is different, you know. I really can't answer because I'm, like in all my life I've just been raised over there and just thinking, "no, I can't bring this down cause we are of the same race."

Over here, it's different. The families here believe that the counselors don't help their children. In the King Chavez Program that we help out with, the parents say that the counselors put their children in the lowest classes. And we told them that back home in our high school Weslaco, they have a program where there are advanced classes and stuff like that, and our counselors are not like here. And we told them that day that their children should take initiative. If the counselors are not going to be there for them, you and your child should go to them and tell them I want this and want that.

On campus, I experienced some racism. I was confronted by a girl wondering why Texas students are getting all these scholarships. I was studying and she asked me if I was one of the Texas students. I was like "yeah." And she then said, "well, how did you get your scholarship?" And I was like "because of my grade point average and stuff like that." And they were like "oh, well did you have left over money to

spend?" And I was like, "no, I had to pay out of my pocket too." They were later talking about it and saying that it wasn't fair that they are from Michigan, and weren't getting it, and we were getting the scholarship. This same girl later accused me of stealing her pants when we were washing our clothes because she couldn't find them and we were the only ones there.

I believe in Affirmative Action. They really shouldn't take it away. In the Valley, we really don't need it because all of them are Hispanics. But up here, if they take it away, I don't know what the Hispanics are going to do. I think they can take it away because I don't know. I really don't know if there is discrimination in Texas. But if they are discriminated, they won't let them. They're not going to let them, you know, control them there because there are other people there that are going to help them support them. And up here they have like those Latinos, if they are discriminated, they don't really have much to say. Well, they feel they don't have much to say because they are by themselves, you know. But over there I see, the way I feel is if they are discriminated, they are not going to let them-selves, you know, be let down. Personally, I don't think I'm being discriminated down there because I'm Latina. I haven't any experiences. I think that I haven't been exposed to the real world, you know, if I've been discriminated yet.

As a woman, if I want to go out on a date, I need to have Elsa around because of my father, but if I were a guy he wouldn't have to have this.

If I would have stayed in the Valley it would have been harder. Cause here you have the library, computer science. And you can go anywhere to study. And

back home if I wanted to go to the library I had to like go away or whatever, and then they would close earlier, and it wasn't good at home. Although I did miss it in the beginning. After I graduate, I see myself back in Texas closer to my family.

Profile of Sonora

I did not get to know Sonora very well until the second semester of her freshmen year. She was very independent, and I did not see much of her during her first semester. It was not until the holiday break when she went back to Texas that I had discovered that she had not done well in her classes. Out of concern, I called her house and asked her what her plans were for her second semester, since she had failed two classes. I was surprised that she was not defensive, but rather, quite responsible for her actions, and was ready to turn it around and come back. She mentioned that she already talked to her parents, and she realized that a large portion of her academic struggle was related to her conflict with her roommate, Catarina, who was a relative of her's.

Sonora went through an entire semester, telling no one except her boyfriend how difficult it was to room with her cousin who lived a lifestyle that was so different from hers. Catarina's being a relative made it even more difficult. Ready for a challenge the second semester, Sonora knew she had to find another roommate. My other advice to her was to retake some of the classes where she had performed poorly.

However, her academic challenges continued the second semester. Although Sonora always seemed to have a positive outlook on life and always prayed about her

situation, underneath this layer of hope and strength there continued to exist a deep-seated loneliness due to her missing her family and boyfriend. Her grades continued to drop. She went back to Texas at the end of her first year.

Sonora had one brother and two sisters. Undoubtedly, she missed her family very much and often commented about her loneliness. Elsa commented often that one of Sonora's struggles was that she cried too much, even though she then had new roommates, Pamela and Elsa.

Sonora was very proud of her parents and also of being Hispanic, though she was the only student from the cohort who could not speak Spanish and acknowledged that this embarrassed her. She seemed to be more Anglicized than the other students who were more connected to their Mexican traditions. However, she viewed herself more Mexican than any of the Mexicans from Michigan, and described the differences between Mexican and Anglo families. To her the major difference was family. Mexican American families place a higher value and respect on family than Anglo families. After one group interview and one individual conversation, here is her story.

Sonora in Her Own Words

Hispanics here in Michigan are afraid. I was on this panel in Muskegon speaking to Hispanic students and parents, and a question was raised whether any of the students were going to college. Nobody raised his hand. I was so mad. Nobody wanted to say anything.

Hispanics here are different from Texas. Like here, they know what a

Mexican is, you know, but they act like, not like me. And it bothers me, because it's like, no, you don't do it like that. No, you don't know. No. And I'll tell them, but it's like, then afterwards I feel bad. Like with a friend of mine, I told her that she wasn't dancing the cumbias (Mexican dances) the right way. Like no, you don't do it like that. Oh, my God, what planet did you come from?

I don't know what Chicano means. All I know is Latina/Latino. I know the difference between the Mexican and the Mexican American. Because a Mexican, you know you're from Mexico or whatever. But then again, I see Mexican American like you're all from Mexico, you know, and then you're supporting America. And I'm not like that. Because I don't follow the real, true down deep Mexican thing. I don't, cause I'm not raised that way. I'm raised with the beans and all, but I'm not raised with like Elsa. Elsa is very different than me. Very different. And the music that we listen to. Like, she listens to real Mexican music. I'll listen to music that is different, more, more International. I do feel different and I say okay, fine, you're more into the culture and I don't care. But it makes me feel bad because it's like she knows about it and I don't.

So far I love Western. It's really a neat campus. You know everybody and they are so nice. I'm growing up every day. You're growing stronger every day because you have to. You know, I don't have my mom here which is really hard, but you know, I have to adjust. You know, I have to get up in the morning and say, "Sonora, you know, don't be a big baby anymore. You know, you're not going to have mom and dad forever." So, you know, that is why I'm limiting myself. I'll call

five times a week instead of five times a day.

What I have enjoyed most about Western are all the different people, all the different cultures. Ever since I was smaller, I've always wanted to see, you know, or experience, you know, like different cultures. And I was never afraid of the racial thing. My mom always taught me that everyone is an individual. There are mean people and there are nice people. Just because there is one mean person from that culture or race, it doesn't mean that they're all going to be that way

Over in Texas, about ninety percent in high school are Hispanic and then white, and then Orientals, which are about seven percent, and then a real small percentage are African American. Here at Western, I do feel like a minority especially in class. Like I'm the only like Brown here and there. I am. It's like in my Sociology class. I don't see it get in the way, but there is this one guy whose got a problem with me. He just can't stand me, and I've never made eye contact with him. He doesn't say anything to me, but he just looks at me. And I get hurt about it, and cried to my mother, and she said that it is because I'm a minority here. But she said that there is nothing to prove to him, but show him that you are smart and have as much right to be in the class. All my other classes are fine. I also feel that there are not a lot of Hispanics where I work. Because sometimes you just have like the three of us. I sometimes go in alone and there's a lot of another race in the room or whatever and you feel like, God, I'm like the only one here you know. It's like you feel kind of weird.

I used to be so quiet, and now I have this huge mouth. Here, you know,

everybody is out for his own. If you're not like this, they're going to walk all over you, and then you're the one that is going to get hurt. It is more competitive here than in high school. In high school, I was so much more quiet. I never knew any of the Texas students that are here over there in high school.

My toughest experience has been living in the residence hall last semester. Every time I see my cousin and her friend, I feel they hate me. I don't even go to the cafeteria anymore. There are a lot of people here and I still don't feel comfortable, cause I never have had anybody hate me. And then when I go back home, I have to face my cousin, Carolina. And what's really, really terrible is that we have to pretend to be friends. And I hate it--I hate it because we do it for our grandmother. In the beginning, I wanted to room with somebody from a different world or whatever. But since Carolina was my cousin and my aunt knew this administrator on campus, they were like "no, put them together, put them together." So, I really didn't have a choice. I struggled my second semester with my other roommate cause she would bring some of her friends over, and guy friends, and they would stay there. I still like being roommates with someone from Texas because you have more support, especially if it's like so far away, you need a lot of support.

I didn't get too involved with activities on campus, other than Hall Council. I did get involved with the Division of Minority Affairs.

I don't think I want to live off campus because I don't have a car. I'm real tight with money because my parents can't afford to send me money or anything. There's no problem because my job pays for everything. But if I were to live in an

apartment, getting the food and all of that. It's expensive because when I tried helping my boyfriend, please don't tell my mom, but I was living with him for three weeks. I was living with him and I would help him out with food and all of that. Although living off campus would be more comfortable for us, I think my friends and I would have more time to spend with each other.

Classes are going much better this semester. So far I like my math, sociology, political science. I'm doing really well. I'm still struggling with child psychology.

Sometimes I feel very lonely here, cause my mother and I talk about me going back home. I feel so alone sometimes, cause sure, I got all these friends and everything here, but like I told her, everybody is on their own. My goodness, sometimes I sit outside and I see home just right behind there. You know, and sometimes I just want to run. My closest friends are Elsa and Pamela. But Elsa is the one that I've told her everything and she's real honest with me and tells me "you know, you're stupid for doing that." Or you know, "you're wrong in doing that." She's like my mom and it's so weird cause my mom speaks as she does. She does. She brings out the Bible and everything. And it's like, "okay, okay. I'll do it."

I do believe that the weather has an influence on your emotions. Sometimes, I'm just like, I don't want to talk to anybody. Like what's wrong, "oh, nothing." But it's cause, you know, like you don't have any motivation from outside, you know. It's like, you know, you want to go outside but are you going to go outside when it's so cold? I also love to wear shorts and my sandals and paint my toenails.

I have two brothers and two sisters. They are 17, 15, 11, and 7. My

seventeen-year-old sister wants to come to Western when she graduates. I love my parents. They are my core of me. They are, they are everything to me. Because I love the way that they brought me up. Because I see other parents and I feel so bad. Like it hurts to hear about other people. My mother has always encouraged me to be my own per-son. You know, never let anybody run your life. Also, being Mexican American means that family comes first. This is at the heart of Mexican families, because when you talk to like white families here or whatever they're like, they're not close. I don't see them close. I don't. They are very much like on their own. They don't have like family reunions or whatever. Like more in the family than what we do. We do every-thing together. You know when one needs help or whatever, we are there to help them. Like if someone got pregnant, they would send their daughter to another country or whatever, they don't. My family doesn't. They believe it happened.

My father had a high school career and my mom dropped out as a freshmen, cause she had me at fifteen and my dad was twenty-one. My father now is a grocery store manager and my mom is a secretary in a construction business that is run by the family. And what is so funny is that my mother and father have always worked. So, I was the one that took care of the children. At two years, I was already washing dishes and later started helping my mother change diapers. At the age of seven, I had to be an adult. That's why they are so attached to me.

Profile of Carolina

Carolina, a talented student, yet tormented by her childhood, struggled throughout her freshmen year. I was cautioned by her high school counselor, social worker and guardian, that she had gone through many struggles, but had persevered and was college-ready. Many would have predicted earlier on in her educational career that she would have been the least likely to succeed.

My first impression when I met her at Weslaco High School, Texas was that she was a polite, bright and determined young lady. She was very eager to leave and start college. When she first arrived at Orientation in the summer of 1996, I found her excitement and interest to meet other people very encouraging. After classes started, I did not see much of her. She was very involved with other friends and when I asked other Texas students of her well-being and whereabouts, some seemed to think that she was doing fine.

I began to worry when close to the end of the first semester one of the administrators called me and wanted to know if things were well with Carolina since she had not been to work for some time. Carolina's guardian was concerned for whenever she called, she never could reach Carolina. She had therefore called the administrator. I became personally concerned because I was her assigned host family and found her not responding to my phone calls and/or mail.

There was not much contact with her the first semester and at the end, after she had left for the holiday break, I checked on her grades and was surprised that she

had receive a 0.00 GPA--she had failed all of her classes. I immediately called and had a chance to speak with her. She claimed things had to change once she returned the second semester. I suggested that she speak to her aunt (her guardian) and explain her poor grades. She agreed she would.

Carolina continued to struggle her second semester and needed more counseling than I was able to give. Rumors that I heard from other Texas students were that she was not going to classes and hung out with "strange" people. The truth was that she was failing and living an alternative lifestyle. And what made matters worse was that she never let her guardian know that she was hopelessly failing. It was not until the day that I received a phone call from her guardian that I realized that Carolina had lied to her and said that she was doing fine. When her guardian asked Carolina about her grades, she continued to lie.

Her struggle in college largely stemmed from her childhood struggles. She claimed that it was due to the size of the university and that there were too many options. She led a fatalistic life and was very depressed. Her inner conflict with her lesbian identity, a family that loved her but could not accept her alternative lifestyle, and a disruptive upbringing were all reasons for her fragile identity. Regardless of my lack of professional training, she often sought my support and counsel.

My relationship with Carolina was constantly in question, for there were times I did not know what was true and what was false. She was always searching for answers, but never found them at WMU, and left at the end of the second semester to join the army.

Her main reason for coming to college was to escape Texas and family. On one hand, she loved and missed them, on the other, she was free to express herself openly away from the family indoctrination.

After two conversations, Carolina speaks louder!

Carolina in Her Own Words

I have three sisters and one brother. My older sister lives on her own, Lolita sixteen, Debra, fourteen, and Nogal, eleven, who now lives with my father. I'm only close to my older sister.

My mother was an alcoholic and died at the early age of thirty-four. She spent a lot of time drinking in bars. My dad didn't help much either. My mom and dad separated when I was young. I really resented my mom for the enormous responsibility she placed on me when I had to take care of my younger brother and sisters. I remember one incident where my mother had lost consciousness because she was stoned. I don't know to this day how I managed to drive her and my sisters and brother to my aunt's house. At my mom's cemetery, I finally was able to let go and say goodbye. However, with my father, I had no respect for him, and I do not speak to him. He had custody over my siblings. I have my older sister that I can go to who is now twenty-one and also my aunt and uncle who are current guardians.

I still cannot believe I'm in college. But I really didn't want to be on welfare and dependent on the state and society for the rest of my life. My initial plans were to go to Pan Am University in Texas. But instead, I thought of Western because of my

school social worker that had given my name to one of the counselors. I mean, in my sophomore year of high school, my survival was to drink and take drugs. I remember going to my locker everyday and filling my glass up with coke and some Jack Daniels or whatever I had available. No one knew because they thought that me being high was because of my personality and not because of my drugs. I am amazed that I graduated in three years and was ready to start again.

Another thing that I didn't like was working in the Division of Minority Affairs my first semester at WMU. It was boring. I never had anything to do. I ended up not going. We even got tired of the lecture for not going and eventually got fired. But I found work in the Student Art Gallery which I enjoyed much more.

I always have been interested in drawing. I like making blueprints and designing homes to fit the landscape. Overall, my classes are going well. I enjoy my Introduction to Design lab, but the class is boring. Spanish class seems to be going well.

While on campus, I was involved in the lesbian/gay/bisexual issues organization called *Outspoken*. I wanted to get in because there was so much apathy before. I am comfortable with who I am, but I do not openly share this with others or the family unless they ask. I am also not too demonstrative with my partner in front of a crowd. At one time I thought I was bisexual, but found out that when I went out with men, I was not comfortable with them. I am just more comfortable with women. Men are less sensitive than women. What is often difficult to find is a lesbian woman, and when you do, you try to keep her. I dated another lesbian and found her to care for

me as much as I cared for her. I have run against people who have shown their prejudices against lesbians and homosexuals. One guy came to our meeting and started to condemn us and that we needed prayer because we were all going to hell. My aunt would rather I be dating guys. In Texas, I dated this guy by the name of Raul, but I later left him. I found him to be insensitive because when I thought I was pregnant and dropped hints to him that I had missed my period, he didn't question it. If I would have mentioned this to a woman, she would have picked up on what I was really trying to say. My aunt tends to blame my lifestyle on my mother who was bisexual. I disagree because the relationship that my mother had with her girlfriend was not a good one. There was abuse. I know that with my family, there was a lot of pressure not to have my grandmother find out. I knew this was a huge step, but ended up telling my grandmother and was surprised that she got up and gave me a hug. My grandmother also knew about my mother's sexual identity.

One of the things I would change about college is that it is big and difficult to get one's hands around it. Also, too many options. In high school, things were more defined and manageable. Also, there are too many majors. I feel college has made me lose control. I also was frustrated and did not know that Western did not have an architectural program. Part of the reason for me not doing as well my first semester was no discipline and I needed a smaller environment. I would have wanted smaller classes. In one of my classes I have about three hundred students. I felt more comfortable in smaller classes.

I don't identify as a Hispanic. The only thing I think of when one mentions the

word Hispanic is the quinceañeras (Mexican celebration for women that are about to turn fifteen) and the traditions. I dated this one woman who was a “real” Mexican. Her parents were not supportive of her finishing up her school. Also, being a migrant and welfare was okay for them.

My long-term goal is to marry, work and publish. I also don’t want to be poor and live like my family. Being on welfare is not a goal and I do not respect that lifestyle. I see it as temporary, but not for life. I remember the time I was on welfare and was getting eighty-eight dollars a month. I even tried to convince my friend to get off of welfare. But my friend’s family was not happy with me trying to do this and threatened my life. I also do not want to go back to Texas and see my friends on heroin and continuous fights with my family. All my past is there. My aunt doesn’t really understand me.

Profile of Adolfo

Adolfo was one of those exceptional students with whom I felt disappointment because he transferred back home after being at WMU for two years. He graduated from Weslaco High School with a 3.9 GPA and a 15 composite on the ACT test. He was academically challenged in high school and ready for the challenge in college. He came to WMU with a speech impediment, which very few of his Texas friends who also came to WMU knew about. I learned about it mid-semester of his freshmen year when he one day e-mailed me asking for help to see if he could get admitted to WMU’s Speech Clinic. I made an appointment for him and he asked I could come

along, which I agreed to do. I was surprised to later find out from the diagnostician at the clinic that Adolfo's speech impediment was severe, and she was surprised that Adolfo had been as successful in high school academically, and later in college without any medical assistance and/or therapy. I believe that everyone at the clinic was surprised as to how he could do oral presentations to the class. And he responded that his professors seemed to be responsive and sensitive to his struggle, and were flexible with the assignments, especially those that included oral presentations.

In high school, Adolfo was well known and popular. He was voted Homecoming King in his senior year and was a talented athlete in track and field. He was well liked and never seemed to have a problem making friends—or even finding a date. With his severe speech impediment, one might have argued that he would have been very dependent on his Texas friends at WMU. First, he was far away from home, he also was very close to his family, and had a severe speech impediment. But this was not the case. Unlike many of the other students that were reliant on the university's offices and myself, he was the last to ask for help, or for that matter, complain. All matters related to academics, filling out financial aid papers, or taxes he took care of. Although he was always appreciative when he came to the house or visited our friends in Lansing, he asked for little help, which made me want to offer him more assistance.

While at WMU, he focused on his academics and did quite well his first semester—the highest of the Texas cohort. He limited his social and extracurricular activities and found watching a movie, TV or hanging out with friends was a great way to spend free time.

He described himself as religious, with a strong faith in God. His roommate, Horacio, had shared that before going to bed Adolfo would read the Bible every night. There were others that described him as a Texan or ranchero (rancher) from Texas. He enjoyed dressing-up in his cowboy boots, hat and belt at the Latino parties, and later discovered that he missed doing this since in Texas this was common practice. One of his hobbies was riding horses and going to rodeos.

In his home, he was raised in a very traditional environment where he viewed male and female roles separate and distinct. Like his mom, he viewed women as primary caregivers who were responsible for the cleaning, cooking and overall maintenance of the house. He certainly did not feel these were responsibilities that men necessarily needed to learn. However, he argued that doing the laundry was his responsibility because he did not trust his mom with washing his clothes which he agreed he was particular about.

Although I was sad to see him leave, I knew that going back home was a good decision since he was unable to secure funding for his third year, even though he tried to get a scholarship through WMU's ROTC office. I discovered later that the reason why he had not received any scholarship was largely due to his speech impediment. He appealed the decision with the support from another department which felt he had been the victim of discrimination. The ROTC office claimed that the reason for denial was due to his low ACT scores from high school. However, his accumulative GPA was a 3.3 at the end of his freshmen year at WMU. He did not feel comfortable having to take out school loans to complete his education, and therefore, he decided

to return to Texas and study at Pan Am University, which was near his hometown.

Although I was not able to record or conduct any formal or informal conversations due to his speech impediment, I decided and he agreed that we could communicate via e-mail. So I conducted brief, informal conversations, though only on a few occasions. I wish that we would have had more time to further dialog.

Adolfo in His Own Words

I come from a family of five brothers and sisters. Both my mother and father were born in San Luis Potosi, Mexico. My father's grandparents were farm laborers who migrated to the U.S. to continue to work in the fields. I am a first generation Mexican. I identify with being Mexican, but also I am American. Being raised as a Mexican American has its disadvantages and advantages. The food is one that is an advantage and I know two languages. Also, visiting my family in Mexico is another advantage. The only disadvantage that I can think of is not being able to learn English nor Spanish the correct way. I mess up with the English tenses. My parents both have a third and fourth grade elementary school education, and my sisters and brothers only have a high school degree, yet I'm the only one who is going after a college degree, even though one of my older sisters is attending a community college.

High school did prepare me for college in regards to discipline. I still feel that there is more work in college than in high school. In high school there wasn't enough homework to keep me at home during work. In my first semester, I maintained a 3.5 GPA. As I got into the semester, classes did get harder. So far, I'm doing okay in all

my classes. I wrote a paper in English class and my teacher liked it a lot. She said I had a really good sense of making everything flow from one step to another. I also had my first chemistry test this Wednesday and I think I got an "A". I study and do homework. Usually I go to bed at three or four and wake up at seven thirty. I'm so tired.

Class size is nice here at Western. So far the largest classes are SOC 200 and my lecture class of CS 105. I like going to class because there has to be an attractive girl that catches my attention. My daily schedule was going to classes, working, eating, sleeping, and lifting weights and studying. While I participate in some of the Hispanic Student's activities, I do this because it is part of my work study. I really don't have time other than my schooling. The only extracurricular activities that I have time for are listening to music and working out. And the only Texas students that I really hang out with is Gardenia.

I find the faculty to be friendly and helpful. When I ask for help they always do it in a nice way, and they are just never rude to me or anything. If I want to talk to them about a personal problem, they always listen.

I knew Gardenia in high school because we ran track together. Most of the friends that I have are from my hall. I don't know if I should call them friends or not because I really don't go out with them or do much with them. I just know them and say "hi" when I see them. Anyway, I always find out something new about their country. Almost every one that I've met here is pretty cool about everything. Most of those people live somewhere in Michigan.

My host family hasn't done much for me. However, like my uncle said to me one time, the major reason to go to college is to study. I mean, I do think having a host parent is important and cool, but you should always be prepared for the unexpected. At first, I thought my host family was going to call me once in a while to invite me to places and stuff like that. Well, he never did. It didn't bother me because I remember what my uncle told me. He told me that I'm here to study and to get a degree, that there will always be time to go out and to go out to places when you can get a degree and find a well secure job.

Living in the residence halls is not a problem. But living in the halls has its good and bad sides. I see living in the halls as meeting new people and having fun all the time. The good things are meeting a lot of people from different places and to get involved with the activities the RA (Residence Hall Adviser) has planned on the floor. It is also good because the halls are walking distance to all my classes. But they are noisy. I have neighbors that play their guitar real loud and sometimes when I'm asleep, they'll wake me up with the noise. Also, I don't get along with my roommate, and it can be a hassle. We are just two totally different persons and this causes a lot of conflict.

I believe racism exist everywhere—Texas and WMU too. It does not necessarily have to be a race thing, but it is also a class thing. Whether you are rich or poor, ugly or beautiful, smart or dumb, somehow, some group or someone will always think he/she is better than you. My family may have experienced racism, but I can't remember.

I love my mother's home cooking. I also miss my dog and my family. I love receiving packages from my mother and they usually include tortillas, candy cookies. I'm so happy today because I received tortillas de harina (flour tortillas) and pan duro (Mexican pastry) from my mom.

The only thing that high school did not prepare me for was being away from my family. However, college is here to prepare us and to prove that we can make it on our own.

Michigan Cohort

Although particularities exist with each student, general characteristics were found for this group. Participants included three males and seven females, and all were high graduates from various schools located in both rural communities and inner cities (i.e., Detroit, Grand Rapids, Saginaw). Yet, most were raised in rural communities (i.e., Holt, Mendon, Fennville). Their overall grade point averages varied across the group with four between a 3.5-3.8 range, and the rest slightly below this range. Their standardized ACT/SAT scores ranged from 14-27 composite scores. They were also very successful and involved in extracurricular activities (i.e., Honors Society, Athletics, Spanish Club, Government). Many enjoyed their high school experience and felt very loyal to the teachers and administrators, though one student felt he was always being compared to his older brother who had a higher GPA and was a better athlete.

Over half of the students in this cohort came from inter-racially/culturally

mixed marriages, except in four cases where both father and mother were of Mexican origin. While some did understand Spanish, many did not have the verbal Spanish skills, and therefore, feel more comfortable speaking English. One student was fluent in both languages. Only three of the students still lived with their biological parents. However, over half had parents who were divorced.

Michigan Portraits

Portraits for the following eleven students from the Michigan Cohort will be presented: (1) Josefa, (2) Catarina, (3) Maria, (4), Veronica, (5) Federica, (6) Domingo, (7) Nutra, (8) Margarita, (9) Rolando, (10) Antonia, and (11) Romero.

Profile of Josefa

Josefa continues to have a special place in my heart. As a freshmen, I remember her as quiet and introverted and somewhat disconnected, unaware of all the opportunities awaiting her at WMU. She had a few friends that she met in class and at work. However, she was hesitant to get involved until the second semester of her freshmen year, and this was largely due to my involvement in her life.

I invited her to a few student Latino(a) gatherings at the house. She knew some students, but overall, was removed from the Latino(a) student campus community, partly due to her limited Spanish speaking ability. She also claimed that she was lazy and did not get involved with HSO.

Although she did not speak Spanish and did not maintain the more traditional Mexican lifestyle as did the Texas students, she maintained a stronger connection to her Mexican identity than many in the Michigan cohort. While she claimed that her mother did not cook Mexican, her grandmother certainly did and credited her with continuing many of the traditions. Josefa also maintained involvement, like her brother, in the community Mexican Ballet Folklórico, and often talked about missing the Mexican cooking and Mexican bakeries in her neighborhood in Detroit. She still claimed that she did not practice some of the values and Hispanic traditions as much as her close friend who was both Mexican and Puerto Rican.

Josefa graduated from Southwestern High School in Detroit, where the largest percentage of the Mexican population in Michigan is located. While growing up she did not understand why many of her relatives married outside of the Mexican culture to predominantly Whites. She did not offer any explanation as to why that would be, other than that there was little encouragement to marry within one's culture. She recognized that her cousin who was half Mexican and half white would be confused as to what ethnic group to circle on an application. Josefa stated that she would rather identify as a Mexican than as Hispanic on applications or other forms.

Josefa's college search process was very typical of many minority students from inner city schools. She graduated with a 2.93 GPA and a 15 ACT composite and seemed to be academically competitive when applying to other universities, even though her ACT composite was low. Although she did receive encouragement from her family to continue her education, for the most part she claimed she was not too

interested in college, and did not think much about it until her senior year of high school. She believed that it was due to a lot of support from her guidance counselor and science teacher that she managed to get to college. However, she was rudely awakened once she arrived as she was immediately challenged with roommate problems.

Josefa claimed that her experiences were not great the first semester. The unfortunate part of all of this, she said, was that she and her roommate were best friends in high school. Their struggle later impacted her academic performance and resulted in her being placed on probation at the end of the first semester. While challenged academically, she claimed she managed to make the best of it, and believed that she would one day graduate.

After two taped conversations, and the opportunity to visit her neighborhood, I find that her voice is one that, while serene, is critical and full of introspection. Here is her story.

Josefa in Her Own Words

I was born and raised in Detroit and come from a diverse neighborhood. My family came to Michigan from Texas because of jobs, but I am not sure. I have one brother who is fifteen and one brother who is ten. While my mom and dad are divorced now, my grandma and grandpa lived next door.

I am Mexican, but I know people are in shock when I tell them. But my mom, she's half Mexican and German, and my father is all Mexican. Although both of them

are Mexican, there are other relatives that married white spouses. So, my family is a lot of halves--half white and half Mexican. I sort of don't acknowledge the German part. At home my family all speaks English and grandparents speak both English and Spanish, but they never encourage me or the other kids to speak Spanish. My dad was also born in Detroit, but both of my grandparents were born in Texas. Most of the family currently lives in Detroit, River Rouge.

I was brought up in the Hispanic neighborhood with a very diverse community--Puerto Ricans, Arabs and Mexicans. Being Mexican means celebrating certain traditions like Day of the Dead, but I never knew about that until I had that class and my teacher talked about it, but we don't practice it at home. There are other celebrations like the Cinco de Mayo (May 5) and Quinceaneras (Celebration of a girl's fifteen birthday), but there is not much more that goes on in the community. People try to involve themselves, but not really. Cause when I went to Arizona, I went there for a competition with one of my teachers and we went during that time and they had a festival that was much nicer than the one at home. And I was really jealous cause they really take pride.

I graduated from Southwestern High School, a very diverse high school with lots of Puerto Ricans, Mexicans, Blacks and Arabs. Because of this experience, it wasn't difficult to make the adjustment cause I was used to a lot of ethnicity. Cause I've heard from others that they've never been with any other than Whites. I guess I didn't feel anything different at Western except that I found more Asians here, whereas in high school, we didn't have any Asians. I have to say that being around

more Blacks and Hispanics, I was not used to being in a classroom with all majority white students. I do feel uncomfortable because it's just different. They like, involve themselves more, and they are always asking questions. And I'm just there sitting around. They always are making themselves known. You know, they want to be involved more. And they do. I don't feel less than they do, it's just that I'm so shy. I just go to class, take notes, listen and all that, but I don't know. I haven't got the courage yet to ask questions. Maybe in other classes. I don't know. I'll have to work on that. That's one thing I have to work on. I don't know. I just can't. And other people, I just watch them, and they'll just raise their hand.

Not my mother and father, but my grandmother always talked about me going to college, but I never thought about it until I was in the senior year. I thought about going to college, because there was nothing better to do. Because I knew if I stayed at home, I would have to get some kind of job I didn't like and have to stay with my mother. And I just didn't want to do that. I am really the first to go to college from my mother's side. My aunt and uncle on my mother's side went to college, but never finished. My aunt got pregnant, but I think right now she's going back. My uncle went a few years and then got into trouble. From my Dad's side I am the oldest grandkid over there, and so I am the first to go to college. Many of them got into trouble and never finished.

My first impression of college was on TV and they made it seem like fun. Everybody knew everybody. In college, it's nice to be away and keep some distance from family. And also I had to get out of Detroit. I really needed to get out of the

neighborhood. It's getting worse. There's killing and everything. The barrio is a different crowd. However, there is always something to do. I got away because I needed the quietness. Over there you have the fire engine, the cops, people yelling and screaming. I just needed, I don't know, the quietness. It's quiet here. For me, it's quiet here.

The first time I saw this campus was during Orientation. We did a lot of walking. At the time I was assigned to stay in the Valley Residence Hall, but realized that it was too much walking. The first semester I missed my high school counselor and teacher. I really had some struggles. I regret not getting more involved and meeting more friends. I also had a difficult time with my roommates and suite mates because they weren't motivated to study and I had some conflicts with them. I moved a couple of times the first year. At first my close friend and I decided to room together, and decided to room with these two girls in a quad in Bigelow Residence Hall. Then this girl started out with me and I started out with her, and so we didn't like each other. So I thought I should move out and I finally did the second semester. See, and it was because of these girls accusing me that "I don't like black people no more." Clara and I were good friends in high school, but I noticed that when she would call on her way back from work she would ask them if they wanted anything, but she would never ask me. So okay, she's sort of like, I don't know, she was like trying to be friends with them, and I just knew that I would be okay with it or whatever. It's just hard being with three different people, different attitudes, personalities. I don't think the cultural differences got in the way.

I don't feel uncomfortable with not speaking Spanish, but when people come to me and speak in Spanish, I just wish I knew it. And I don't. I've signed up to take some Spanish and thinking about taking Spanish as a third minor. I also wish I had participated and knew what was going with events and all that. But I had to go to work, go to class. For next year, I would like to be more involved and active in an organization, like I was in high school. I was involved in everything—SADD (Students Against Drinking and Driving), BPA (Business Professionals of America), volunteer work where we would go with the science teacher to elementary schools and help the kids with their homework and year book. And I did like the ballet folklorico dancing. But right now, I feel very disconnected.

At Western, classes were different the first semester and getting up in the morning, and, you know, doing everything on my own. But the one class, anthropology, didn't agree with me. I had a lecture class the previous semester and didn't like it. Also had a night class and didn't like that either. And I wasn't too thrilled about taking gen ed courses that I call a diet technique. Last semester, I was on probation, but this semester things are much better. Now I know what it takes to get the grades you want. Apply yourself, and keep yourself motivated. I got more of a feeling, you know, on how to manage my time and be hopeful. I knew that I had to move out of the room. I mean, those girls last semester skipped class, slept all day and would be up all night. I mean they would keep me up like from two to three in the morning. And they would sit there and laugh, just having a good old time.

My long term goal is to graduate, just to graduate. I don't care. I am not

concerned with how long it takes me. I just want to, I just want to finish.

Profile of Catarina

I met Catarina through one of the recruiters in the Admissions Office. He referred me to her because of her involvement with the Incentive Scholarship Program. I called her to see if she had an interest in working with the project. Before she agreed, she thanked me again for my flexibility in allowing her to live off campus. I had not remembered at the time that she was the same student that had requested to live off campus months before. It was her understanding that in order to be an Incentive Scholar one had to live on campus. I explained that this was not the case and the problem was easily resolved. She again was very grateful, and at the same time, enthused to be part of the study.

Catarina was different from other students in the cohort. Although she was eighteen, she acted quite mature and old for her age. She graduated from Muskegon High School with a 4.0 GPA and a 24 composite on the ACT. She was involved in many extracurricular activities that included cheerleading, National Honor Society, the Muskegon Pageant, and she worked part time. Her reasons for going to college were to seek a degree and be certified to teach in elementary education. Hard-working and determined, she found that the only “free” time she had at WMU was to spend time with her boyfriend. Due to time constraints, she had no other time to get involved in extracurricular activities and/or leadership opportunities. Catarina was focused and kept her eyes on the prize—her education.

When she described her childhood, it was one of bittersweet memories. Her father was of Mexican descent and her mother was Angla from Michigan. The marriage did not last and ended in divorce when she was six. She had one sister, and although she loved both her parents very much, she understood the challenges that both of them brought to the family as a couple when she was young. Another personal challenge that Catarina faced with her family was that her sister had dropped out of school, and was taking drugs. She remembered her environment as being highly unorganized. Her mother never took charge of the household, and her father was always seen as the strong and strict disciplinarian. After the divorce, there seemed to be more chaos in the household. Although Catarina acknowledged these struggles, they just made her stronger, and more motivated and determined to move on. She admits that when her mother and father divorced, and she and her sister decided to live with their mother, that Catarina became the head of the household in many ways. She ran the home that her mom was incapable of doing. Being the oldest, this would also explain her strong work ethic and desire to do well in all that she set out to do—especially in high school.

There was strong adoration and love for her family and her childhood memories of them. This was clearly reflected in the many photographs she had of her family in her apartment. Also, anytime I spoke with her, there was always a desire to have me learn about her past and that of her Mexican ancestry, even though she recognized that she was raised with no traditions in comparison to her cousins that were born and raised in Mexico. Yet, she did not want to lose her heritage and desperately sought to

stay in contact with her dad's relatives, and maintained the Spanish language by trying to pronounce all Spanish words with a Spanish accent. Although some would consider her to be of mixed heritage, she clearly identified as a Mexican American.

Not having much contact with her before the interviews, I was surprised that she was so comfortable with me and not hesitant to share her feelings, insecurities and vulnerabilities. Although we became very close and she was very comfortable with seeking me out as a confidante, we lost contact. I continue to hope that we will meet again before she graduates from WMU.

After four conversations on campus, her apartment (two of which were taped), I share her story of determination, passion and honesty.

Catarina in Her Own Words

I identify both as a Hispanic and Mexican American. I feel it sets me apart from just being American, Caucasian. I like that. I don't know but I do. I do claim my heritage very much. However, people who see me don't know who I am. They don't think I'm Mexican. Some think I'm mixed or black. I guess in the summer I get real black. Yeah, I guess people see me as different, but it never sets me apart from them. Being Mexican or Hispanic has been a good thing. It got me into college for free. And I don't take being different as bad; I take it as just being special. In high school I hung out with Mexicans, but also with other groups. So they were very multiracial. People don't see it as bad that I'm Mexican but as cool. If there have been any racial issues in high school it has been more on Blacks and Whites. In high

school, I was considered more white than black. At Western, especially in the Incentive Program, many Blacks didn't see me as a minority and therefore didn't understand why I was in the program. They once asked me, "what minority was I?" I actually heard that I am not considered a minority because I'm considered white. People don't realize that Mexicans are also a minority.

My mom is German and 1/8 Native American, and my dad is Mexican. My dad is a very traditional Mexican male in the way he treated my mom. He was very forceful and always had the attitude of "my way is the only way." My dad has always worked hard. In Mexico, he was studying to be a dentist when he met my mom in Mexico, who at the time had decided to study abroad at Central Michigan University. They met in Mexico and he then went to visit her in the U.S., and later married her in Michigan and they stayed here. Mom is very nice and sweet, but I recognize she has a mental problem. I remember times when she would never clean the house and seemed to always be depressed. She really was never motivated to care for us. Practically raised by our mother, I became the responsible person who cared for the house. They divorced when I was six. They still don't get along, but they tolerated each other because of us.

My dad's family mostly lives in Monterey, Mexico, though he does have one of his sisters living in Muskegon. The other two sisters live in Mexico. He is still a Mexican citizen and is deciding to become a U.S. citizen. And my Grandma Beatriz from Spain and Grandpa Rogelio from Mexico live in Mexico. I'm very close to my sister and love her very much, but I am very troubled with the life that she leads.

She's out of school, in drugs and with no job. This last summer I lived with my father and sister and it was very difficult. I love my family and we stay in touch. My dad's family is very united. My aunt in Michigan calls grandma and grandpa practically every day. They are five in the family, Aunt Vicky, Aunt Patty, Aunt Rosana, and Aunt Claudia, and then my father Rogelio who goes by Roy. They all married Mexican men except my aunt who lives here. She married an Anglo. My dad remarried and then divorced. No one liked her in the family. Even my grandma cut her out of one of the family pictures.

My mom's family lives in Michigan--Grandma Carol and Grandma Eddy. Mom completed her Associate's degree at Baker's College; however, my Dad never completed his schooling and is still working. My mom never was there for us. When I was in high school, she was never home and I was angry, mad and hateful towards her for a very long time. Now that I'm out of the house, we can be friends now, you know, I can let go. But my sister is just now realizing that she was not there for us. And she let us do all these stupid things when she was not there. She never put any rules down. I realized that I relied on my ex-boyfriend's family a great deal. His mom was one of the best mothers I've ever seen here or known of. You know, she set down the rules, you know as much as you can do for teenagers. She worked and then she'd come home and make dinner pretty much every night. And then she would stay up and play board games with us. I miss her. We really had a real close relationship. I think a lot of times one of the biggest reasons why I stayed with my boyfriend as long was that I was afraid of losing the family. My mom, however, was there

emotionally. Anytime we had anything to talk about any feeling, she was always there that way. And I can give her credit for that. Because I could always tell her absolutely everything. I consider my mom to be a good friend, but she is so helpless.

My grandmother talks about my mother and says that she was always that way when she was younger. My grandmother tells me that she never cleaned her room. Sometimes my mother when she was young would get her girlfriend to come over and clean her bedroom.

My sister, on the other hand, does not identify with her Mexican heritage. While we get along very well, she dropped out in ninth grade and is on drugs, possibly cocaine. My sister wants to go back to her high school, but they won't let her, and she doesn't want to go to adult education. She said that the main reason that she probably wants to go back to school is that she is bored and all of her friends are back in school. She's not doing terrible things, but, you know, she doesn't come home half the time; she'll stay at her friends' house and what not.

My boyfriend is very different than I, but we've been going out a year and we have both decided to have him move down to Kalamazoo from Muskegon where he worked in the UP Postal Service. I don't like when he is not organized. I am after him with picking up his things because my mom was a slob, and I had to live with that and clean up after her and clean after my sister. And I hated that with all my heart. I always was embarrassed to bring friends to my house because it was so messy. And finally, when I was old enough to get control over it, I felt like I was a maid. I was the one who cleaned everything after everybody. So, now that I have my own space, I

want it nice.

In high school, I got a lot of support from my teachers, especially Mr. Marshall, the Tim Allen on TV's brother. He is a wonderful person and he's a wonderful teacher. He made a huge impact in my life. He really helped me find a lot out about myself artistically and what I could do. I mean we would have so much fun in class that we wouldn't even realize that we were working. On the other hand, the counselors didn't have much of an influence on me.

While going to school, work has always been a priority. But I also got involved in some things like cheerleading. I started cheering in my tenth grade in all sports which included basketball and football. I was also in drama where we did one-act plays for the schools which then got me involved in the Festival of Arts. I was in the National Honor Society and Muskegon Pageant. I got involved in the pageant because of my mother. I didn't want to. They are fakes. In the back stage you had women putting band aids over things and, they sprayed sticky stuff on their butts to hold their bathing suits down and we, we wore high heels with bathing suits. Who wears high heels with bathing suits? And just smile, smile, smile. And everything is aimed at the judges. It's a production and I found it rigged.

I made a lot of good friends during high school. The best friends are the old friends. I don't hear from them very often, but they will always be in my heart. Right now, I don't have many friends. I don't hang out at the bars or parties because this would be unfair to Joel because he is moving to Kalamazoo for me. He does not go to college. He knows no one. I am just happy hanging out with him and possibly a

couple of other friends.

Classes are going fine. All of them were large last semester. However, this semester they are pretty small. Three of them are very good. Math Concepts of Elementary Education was very good. The physical science class was also nice and the teacher was very understanding. However, the class was too long. I did well my first semester and was happy that I was able to get both the FAME (scholarship offered in the College of Education for minority students) and Incentive scholarship. The only things I didn't like were the residence halls. As a matter of fact, I hated them. They were too loud with people pounding on the walls. I was written up for burning incense. I would never live in a dorm again. I also wanted to be close to my boyfriend who was working and living at the time in Muskegon. So the first semester, I commuted.

There is not much of my family that is traditional. I'm probably the whitest Mexican you're going to ever find. I don't speak Spanish and we never spoke in the household other than learning a few words at an early age. I decided later in both junior high and high school that I would take Spanish. At home now, dad every once in awhile will cook something Mexican and we visit his sister--she cooks a lot. I've never had the traditional quinceañera, like my cousins, but was amazed on how huge this celebration is with selecting the dress, the band, and all the padrinos and madrinas (godparents).

Other differences with how one lives in Mexico is that the woman's role is to serve and the men are the breadwinners. Also, the family is always together. I love

that because here the only time I see my family is during the holidays. Over there I'll be sleeping and the next thing is I hear the women in the kitchen cooking the breakfast for the whole family. The whole family gets together a lot. The women are very domineering. My grandma is the boss in the family and the aunts too. They get what they want. The men work and the women control the money. My dad always remembers my grandfather coming home and handing his check to my grandmother. Sometimes my father says that the next woman he is going to marry is going to be a Mexican. Well, this sounds contradicting of what I was just talking about because I think traditionally the majority of women do serve their men. You know, they bring them the food, they bring them their drinks, they clean the house and what not. Even though they are in control. My dad kind of wants someone that is submissive, he wants a servant that will do those womanly things around the house. I think in his case, he never received that from his other two wives. I believe I take after my grandma. I am very stubborn and very opinionated. I like to be in control, but I do like to baby my man. I mean, I want to cook for him and do his laundry.

One difference that I experienced with my dad's side of the family, including my dad, was the time I decided to invite them to a picnic at the apartment where both I and my boyfriend live together. My grandfather refused to come because my boyfriend and I aren't married. My dad decided to also not come and I told him he was a hypocrite because he had lived with a woman that he was not married to. He called me the next day and decided to come after all.

Overall, my parents have always treated me as an adult. I am very independent

and get things done. There are times that I feel that I'm going to drop out, but I don't want to lose the scholarship.

Profile of Maria

Maria was one of few students in the Michigan group who was not connected to any Latino/Hispanic organization, or associated with other Latinos(a). She did not share much about her Hispanic culture. I came to know her through one of our admissions recruiters who had met her at her high school in her senior year and had invited her to compete for the HEIS scholarship competition because of her 3.78 GPA and 27 ACT composite.

I was impressed with her commitment to be an elementary school teacher. She came from a family of teachers committed to education. Her mother, who was also her role model, taught Maria to be persistent and dedicated. Her mother had received her undergraduate degree at a much later age in life, and was still teaching. Therefore, Maria felt that she was always destined to be a teacher because of her family's influence.

She did not have much to say about her father who was by then divorced from her mother. Although her two younger sisters still visited their dad, Maria wanted nothing to do with him. Even though he was of Mexican descent, she did not identify as a Hispanic, other than when she checked the Hispanic racial/ethnic box when she applied to WMU.

It seemed that our conversations were more structured than with most other

students. Perhaps because we did not know each other, there was more formality. However, her willingness to assist me was apparent, and she seemed interested in having me follow up with her in the spring and summer semesters after final exams. Most of our conversations dealt with high school and college experiences and very little with cultural/personal identity. Other than having a Mexican father, she did not identify with any other Hispanic values and/or lifestyle. She was an Anglicized freshmen and had no interest in pursuing or regaining any of her father's past, learning Spanish, involving herself in Latino(a) social activities, or surrounding herself with Latino(a) students and friends.

After two taped conversations in early and late April of her freshmen year, here is her story.

Maria in Her Own Words

I can't think of a place that I would rather be. I even can't think of anything I would like to change at the university. I really like the environment. I like the people, and I like the classes and things like that. I am also impressed by the things that I've seen on campus. They got so many different programs and everywhere you look there's like a new, like I can't even imagine not having a group for the kind of activity that you're looking for, or for the kind of support that you need and things like that.

When my friend and I arrived here, we did set out going to cheerleading clinics and were going to be a part of the cheerleading squad. And the more we looked into it, the more we decided that it's not something that we want to do right now. Maybe

later on in time. See, when we were in high school, it was very important to us and we had a lot of close friends and it was a great experience. We really prided ourselves on our cheerleading squad. We took the squad and made it, you know, a respectable group. It just doesn't seem like the same experience that we had. We are also checking the possibility of joining a sorority because you make new friends, going out and helping. You know, they do a lot of volunteer and things like that and so. It's a matter of finding the group that has the most people with the same interest and the same basic beliefs that you have. You should be choosing for yourself and not letting them choose where you fit. We don't want it to be necessarily a popularity kind of thing. Sigma Kappa is one that my mom's friend told me to look at. I really want to meet new friends and broaden my experiences. I haven't gotten involved yet because of my studying.

I have made a lot of friends in the residence halls. First semester, I stayed at Eldridge Hall because of it being an honors dorm. I loved it. I made lots of friend--at the same time, I was able to study. Also, my best friend became my roommate. Like I've said, I've lucked out and made a lot of great friends here. Some people just don't have the opportunity. Like, I have a few friends that live off campus, and I've noticed that those who don't live on campus, they don't have the same kinds of, you know, connections that I've got. But also, you know, there's one, one of my friends who doesn't, he didn't get along with his roommate at all this year, and he didn't make as close as friends as I did. So, you know I thought that it would be horrible because like I said, I had such a great experience, so it's kind of hard to imagine for other

people who didn't have that good of an experience.

I have one friend who is going through a lot of personal problems lately. She actually attempted suicide a few weeks ago. It seemed like a movie where, you know, all of these college students and everything is going along well, and then all of the sudden you have a person who tries something like this, and how does everybody cope with it, you know? She is one of our closer friends here. Although she is not from Manistee, she came from a small town too. And she was having a hard time adjusting to the size and not being able to know everybody, among a lot of other things. And then classes on top of that.

For me classes have taken a little bit of time. In high school, I wasn't sure what to expect because, I mean, I guess I always pictured college as you go and you have like three hundred kids sitting in a room talking, listening to the teacher lecture. My first semester, every one of my classes was a big lecture class. None of them were going towards my major and went towards general education. I took Anthropology 120, History 211, Geology 100 and "Direct Encounters with the Arts". I really enjoyed Direct Encounters. I ended up with a 2.3. I recognize I could have done better, but I believe that there were adjustments from high school to college and having three hundred students in a class took some focusing. For my second semester, class size changed considerably. ED 250, math, children's lit ranged between 20 and 50 students. I ended up with a 2.93. I didn't get involved with my professors the first semester because the classes were too large. But I found the second semester that the faculty were especially very personal and helpful. They gave me their home

number and email addresses and things like that. My English teacher has been very supportive and understanding. I don't know how many times I've called her at home to tell her that I don't know what I'm doing on this paper. My printer is not working and I can't get the paper done on time. And she's been very good about that. However, each had their flaws too. My children's lit course, which was part of the Honors cluster, incorporated a lot of multicultural theory which made it less relevant. I still like the class because part of the course was a practicum class where I volunteered my time at Edison Elementary school. I also liked the teamwork. I love working in the classroom and have a lot of experience. As a freshmen, it's good to go into the classroom, but personally I've been working in the classroom since probably my freshmen/sophomore years in high school. My mother is a teacher and I work in her classroom. I use to volunteer every day with her after school. My family are teachers: my aunt, my grandma, my mom. And in my senior year I was a teacher's aid, and I am very affiliated with the teachers in the area.

I'm in the Honors College and find that there is a difference between those classes and regular classes. I've seen this with courses that my roommate has taken. She doesn't see the need to go to the teachers for like a one-on-one kind of help. I know she doesn't spend as much time talking to teachers and things like that as I do. So, it's hard to say if they would be different.

When I was a senior in high school I was very leery going to a bigger, bigger setting like college. My overall graduating class was 156 students. I came from a small town and had very close friends. After all these friends that I connected to, I

was concerned that I would hurt them by leaving and splitting them up. You think you'll never have the same friends that you had in high school. I did apply to Alma College and the only reason why I chose WMU was what one of the recruiters had to say about this college. I also found him very helpful in getting the application filled out and making sure that I was eligible for the HEIS Competition. I found that the school was very personal and individualized. Also, my best friend decided to go to WMU and so that helped making the decision. You know, when you think about college, you think you'll never have the same friends that you had in high school. I also had negative perceptions about them, like having only community baths. But I have a suite. Initially I thought that classes would be large. Some of the biggest changes from high school to college was having a class schedule and the schedule was different because they varied, day to day. When I talk to high school students, I tell them that they need to be flexible and take time to work things out. Also, in college it is what you make of it. You need to balance your lives. You have to plan it on your own. Sometimes I lost focus because you want to have fun and then you forget.

While I can't speak for men, as a woman you have to be concerned with safety issues. But the university has done a great job with the escort services.

In high school, I was involved in like SAAD, PRIDE, Winter Carnival, varsity cheerleading, and homecoming activities. I was very connected to the administrators and teachers. I loved it in high school, especially my last two years because I became very involved in activities. Yes, we had cliques, but they were different. You could flow between groups of people. We were all pretty good friends and had been going

to school basically together since first grade or so. And so everybody knew each other, and everybody could get along pretty well without any real problems and so. When going to college, that was kind of different because when you got to college, you could pick the people that fit best with you.

About my family, I don't spend a lot of time with my dad. However, he still is connected to my sisters who are 17, 12 and 11. My mom is my biggest role model. I've gotten a lot of ideas and beliefs from her because she's done a lot on her own. She also had to struggle a lot to maintain the family when they divorced when I was fourteen. I come from a low socio-economic income. But I never remember going without. That is why I can't use the socio-economic factor as an excuse why a student doesn't do well. Cause looking at me as an example, if everybody worked a bit, it could be done. My dad comes from a very large family from Texas. But we lost contact with the family. They fight a lot. My next sister who is 17 and I don't speak to him, although he tries to stay in contact by sending checks to WMU.

Mom married right after high school. While she always wanted to be a teacher, she started later in a community college and finished with her bachelor's degree at Central. That is the time when my parents were going through a divorce. When my mom and sisters moved to Spring Lake, I couldn't handle it and decided to go back to Manistee and live with my aunt and her husband.

My Hispanic side comes from my dad. I don't identify as a minority. I don't like to be considered a minority. I really don't identify as Hispanic. If people ask me I don't say Hispanic. I definitely acknowledge the fact that there is a Hispanic bloodline

in me, but a lot of times, if people ask me, I'll say Irish or, you know, things like that. I think mostly due to the fact that the side of the family that is Hispanic, the Hispanic bloodline that it comes from, it's just the side of the family I don't associate myself with them very much. The only reason why people ask about whether I'm Hispanic is due to my surname. I try not to classify myself as being Hispanic because I don't, you know, I don't feel that it has any bearing on the type of person that I am.

I don't speak Spanish and I am really not interested in learning. People assume that I speak Spanish because of my last name. But I admit that based on my appearance, no one would identify me as Hispanic. I don't care to connect with anybody of Hispanic descent. I never have run into faculty that identify me as a token Hispanic. I do get identified as Hispanic, Mexican and Spanish. I deny being Mexican. I don't believe Mexican is part of my bloodline. I am particular with those who I share my Hispanic background with. Being European, you can be anything. But if you're African American, Hispanic and Asian, it has prominence, and they immediately put you into some category and they assume certain things. When people ask most of the time what heritage I have, I say Irish because my mom is Irish, even though she kept her married name because it was just easier and not confusing to the family.

I don't believe that I have gotten jobs because of my last name. I know there have been people that have reacted when they heard that I had received the Heis Scholarship. And they think that just because I'm Hispanic I got it. My roommate questions the fact that while I don't claim my Hispanic heritage, I did get money.

Nobody said that I had to be a practicing Hispanic to get the scholarship. I accepted the scholarship due to economic reasons. Without it, I would have not been able to go to WMU. I am not sure what to think about whether students should be awarded scholarships based on certain races. But because there are so many scholarships, it shouldn't be a problem. For example, there should be scholarships like FAME (a scholarship for minority students pursuing teaching as a career at WMU) if there are not enough minorities teaching. It is a good incentive. When it comes to being admitted to the university based on race, some think it weakens the admitted pool of students. Based on my grades and ACT, I do not fit that profile. No one lowered their standards for me. I worked as hard as everybody else. I don't believe in using race as the sole factor to give people a chance. I don't think because a person is a minority they need to receive special treatment.

The reason why I am pursuing a college degree is because I want to be a teacher. For the longest time this is the only thing I remember I wanted to do. Having my family as teachers did influence me, but I do love working with people and helping. I always remember my favorite teachers and it was those that kept me interested and focused. They were into what they were doing. One thing I would do differently is provide more "hands on" activities for students. Also, when assessing students, one should classify and separate students according to their ability, and need to emphasize their interest level. Teachers classify according to their reading ability--they need, however, to get them interested. I am really angry with the current educational system, especially with people who refuse to change their teaching style. Some

teachers, like in the case of my sister, don't take the time to look into a child's needs and things like that. They just pass it off as someone else's problems. I believe all students have the potential. Teachers have to try to work with their students that didn't have the same opportunities as others.

While I feel bilingual education and the ebonics movements are important, teachers and people should not focus on it as a primary. If they need the other language to help teach, then do it. But they also need to be given the opportunity to learn English. Diversity is fine, but I don't want to emphasize it. Regardless of whether they are from the same socio-economic backgrounds or they are white, they still come with different experiences. I want to downplay the physical appearances, and what should be emphasized are the levels of education and experiences that the students bring from home. The issue is learning and not race in your classroom. Just because you are from a different race or because you know they have the different religious beliefs, it doesn't mean that they're going to have, you know, they could be on the same exact level as everybody else in the classroom. It doesn't matter what group of students you are going to have, you always are going to have a lot of variations. The fact that the variations may be noticeable when you look at a person should be played down. While you can't overlook it, try not to make it the main focus point. You know, obviously you can't overlook it. You know, I mean you don't want people overlooking and saying, oh, pretending like it's nothing because obviously it is, it's something to deal with because people are, you know, very set in the ways they grew up and things like that. But in the classroom, you need to make it not an issue of race

and gender, but an issue of learning. I don't like to see students attached to a particular category. I believe that we should move away from categories. I believe that moving away from the category makes me more tolerant. I have a hard time generalizing.

Profile of Federica

I knew Federica first-hand through a college colleague of mine who knew Federica and her mother quite well. Because of our busy schedules, it was not until the very end of her second semester and throughout that summer that we became acquainted.

Of the Michigan cohort, Federica was one of two students that was fluent in both English and Spanish. Although born in Mexico, she came to the United States when she was eight and was raised for the latter part of her adolescent years in a small rural town called Mendon, Michigan.

Both she and her mother retained their Mexican citizenship, even though they had contemplated becoming American citizens. Because she lived in Mexico for several years, Federica had fond memories of her country, especially her grandparents. She spent an hour with me, showing me a video of her quinceañera, and at the same time, sharing how much she missed her grandparents. Although she recognized the enormous economic and political gains she and her mother had received by living in the United States, she missed Mexico and was very proud of her heritage. One significant difference between she and the rest of the cohort was that she came from a

higher socio-economic class. On her mother's side, her family was well known in Mexico and quite prosperous. When her grandmother died, she and her mother received a lofty inheritance. Both of her parents were well educated. Her mother went to Houston, Texas and completed her bachelor's degree, and later completed two masters, and her father completed his doctorate and was an administrator at a university in Mexico. When she talked about her family, she mentioned the many trips that her mother took with her father, the many parties that her grandparents used to plan, as well as the investments that her father inherited from her grandmother. She also re-counted a story about when she was in Mexico and robbers had come and assaulted her grandmother's house and taken several pieces of estate jewelry.

The remnants of this wealth were detectable with the many paintings and furniture that were displayed in Federica's house. Although her current home was one that many would not consider upper class, the decor certainly connoted prestige and elitism compared to other students' homes.

Federica did not seem to connect with anything in college other than her studies. I did not include her mother in the study, but had the opportunity to talk to her briefly. She shared that her daughter struggled the first semester, did not enjoy living in the residence halls, and went home every weekend. She did well academically, yet she had not made many friends. In my conversation with Federica, she agreed that living in the residence halls was not right for her and decided to move out her second semester. She did not seem to think it was necessary to involve herself with anything going on at the university, except studying, working and then going home.

While I made some attempts to continue our relationship after this study, it seemed that we never found time to connect. Either she was extremely busy, or I was involved in other activities. The potential was there for both of us to become good friends, but neither of us made a greater attempt to initiate it. After two taped conversations, both in my office and at her home, here is her story.

Federica in Her Own Words

Soy Maria Federica Gonzalez pero como en Mexico todo es Maria algo. (I am Maria Federica Gonzalez and, like in Mexico, everybody is called Maria something). El otro problema que tengo es que mi nombre lo estoy siempre cambiando. Si pones Maria Federica Gonzalez entonces no te encuentran y con los social securities. (The other problem is that I'm always changing my name. If I put Maria Federica Gonzales, then they don't find me and I have two social security numbers).

I was born in Mexico City, Mexico and was raised there during my childhood. I came to the United States when I was in elementary school at the age of eight. We came here not for economic reasons, but because of our family in Mexico City. My mom wanted to get away from the family. I was so lucky when I got here because my second grade teacher was the sweetest lady and I loved her to death. And she spoke Spanish too. So it helped me out first, but I was still in a classroom where everyone spoke English. It still was very difficult living here at first. It was more because I missed my family. The culture, I thought, was neat in Mexico. But after you go back, you realize there are so many things you miss. Here I wished that I could have both.

I just really have grown accustomed after all these years--it took me a long time. I think it was mostly my family that I missed.

My grandmother died about one and half years ago, but when she was living my mother and I would visit her once a year, and I just connected to my family. It was very difficult to be away from that. I had no one in Michigan. But then my grandmother died, and we haven't gone back. Since she passed away, I have not been there in a couple of years because it is like, what for? It was my grandmother who kept the family going. Also, I was very close to my grandparents when I was young. It was weird when both of them died within the year. It seemed like I had lost it all when they passed away--like being able to go back to your grandmother's house and staying with her. All my culture, but everything in my past, everything that I remember from my school was in that house with my grandma. And when it was gone, it broke my heart. You see, the most important thing in letting go of my Mexican culture is my family. Everybody is family over there, related or non-related. In Mexico, it's family that is everything, you know. It's like in your family you have a gazillion cousins. Your aunt and uncles. And it does not matter if they are your cousins and they are your uncles, and you have tons of family. And you know, you do have everything with them. You party together, you do everything together. And it's not like here. It's hard coming here and not having anybody that you can do this with.

When I was looking at colleges, my dad wanted me to study in Mexico. But it wouldn't have been the same without my grandmother there. I decided to go to WMU. I lived in the dorm and I did not like it. It's not like I can give you a fair

opinion cause it's the dorm I did not like, you know, but everything else I have a kind of mediocre opinion. I'm now at home, but next year I'm going to house sit and live by myself. It will be different, but I like to go out with people, so I don't know if I will be home that much since I also will be working. I don't know why I didn't like the dorms. It takes me awhile to get to know people. I just can't go out and be friendly with everybody in the hall. It was not comfortable.

Those dorms just didn't motivate me for anything. And I did not like walking around campus. I just didn't like it. School was not more than going to class, listening to the lecture, doing my assignment, and turning it in. A struggle this semester was the course scheduling. What I found is that I have not come into contact with any counselor to tell me what classes I am going to really need. I know we did this in Orientation. You know Orientation with a gazillion people there who are just going to get you out of here quick. If you try to get an appointment with anybody at the time of registration when you really need somebody, there is nobody. They kind of take for granted that everybody knows all the sheets and classes and what to take for every area.

The best class that I have taken so far is sociology. The professor there was nice. If you had a problem, you could go to her and she would be understanding. So, she was nice. Probably the worse professor I had was in anthropology, which I love. I have never, ever fallen asleep in a class except for this one. I have to admit, and don't tell my mom, but I never went to class. I wish now I would have gone. Cause the faculty took me a letter grade down because I was not in class. I would have

gotten A's. I know, I could kick myself; my roommate kicks me. I never missed school when I was in high school. I'd get up and go. I took some community college courses as a senior and I did fine. It's the fact that you don't have to be there. But if I would do good and I did not go to class, why does the professor care whether I'm there or not? I know that's awful, but it's true. If I am not there and I am getting bad grades, it's only my own fault. Give me a bad grade, but if I am not there and I'm still doing my work then I know what I am doing. Just cause I'm lazy, but I get A's is not my fault. It's kind of your's.

I moved to Mendon when I was in the ninth grade and graduated from the high school. I was the only Hispanic there, but it didn't bother me or stop me from doing the things that I had to do. It makes me unique but it doesn't because I don't let it. And I mean, I hope I don't sound stuck up or judgmental, but I think that when Hispanic Americans identify with their culture here, it's like they cling to it as their only identity, and that is what is stopping them from getting to a lot of places. It's like the Chicanos and Chicanas and they only group themselves. I have no problem. I have friends with every different anything, everybody. Half of the time, they don't know anything about their heritage. It's like the HSO. That is why I am not in that. I don't want to sound stuck up or anything. I think I can identify with it all. Sometimes they do this because in a lot of places they can't fit in and you want to cling to your own kind. But this really hasn't happened to me. I don't understand those who want to only identify without acknowledging being American. See, I am not Tejano (Texan), I am not Mexican American--I am Mexican. You know, I don't believe there

is anything wrong with them and to be proud at all. But it is a whole different thing. I am different. However, I have adopted so much of this culture. That makes it so difficult and uncomfortable to go back there. It is safer and there is a lot of opportunity. Americans have everything. If I had to give up my Mexican citizenry or stay in the United States, I would choose to stay in the United States. It means as much as you want it to mean. It doesn't change anything. It means what you want it to mean. It's nice to have it because it's more convenient. My mom says that it does not mean anything. You know, if it is more convenient for our passports when we come in, well, then you know. Well, and what my mom said about everybody, like how we don't want to give up our Mexican citizenship and everything. But she said the best way to get back at this is to become a citizen and vote. I mean still there is culture in Mexico. Because America is unique and is without a culture. So I like culture. You know what I'm saying? Spain, Portugal or anywhere you go, there is culture. And America is the only country without one. It's made of different kinds. What is it, baseball and apple pie? What is that? There is not really culture: You don't look at the history and say, you know, this is the tradition to do.

I knew this one girl and they were from Texas. They were different. The class of people were different. Uhm, I think it's because it is so racist and classist in Mexico that you always are saying los norteros (people from the north), you know, and the people from Texas are even lower than the low. It's something that you're raised with always. I don't want to sound stuck up or anything cause I don't agree with that. But always, especially the norteros, you know, it's like Chihuahua. My

aunt moved there, but Tijuana is like awful. But those opinions are influenced by class more than anything else.

I graduated from a small high school of about forty-two seniors. When I came in I felt alone because everybody knows everybody. And they have their ways of doing things, their parties and their things. And they are not that receptive to newcomers no matter how white you are. It doesn't matter. So the first year when I came here, I hated it. It is a very racist town, very racist town. But it's because of ignorance. It's also a football town. They are also sexist. In my junior year it was better. By the time of my senior year, I was with everybody. It was the funniest year of my life. I had so much fun my senior year. I loved government class because of the teacher. I had a great government and history teacher who got me interested in looking at political science as a major. Maybe if I would have not had them as teachers, I would not have selected this as a major in college. He was the biggest democrat on the planet, and the only one in the town. Also, having the experience of living on the north side of Kalamazoo, I had friends that were black and I learned many other things. I learned not to be critical. I learned to listen. I learned why it is that way.

I also became the President of the Democratic Party in high school, and there was an election, and there was this guy named Rudie that was a football player. And he won because the students, football players and even the teachers voted for him. But they all did it to make me angry. It was a joke and it became funny. I was always teased, because really I was the one that got the best grades. One thing I can say, that the whole town knows now, is that they should never say the "n" word (she meant

nigger) in front of me. You know, and they have all changed their ways. I don't think they really meant any harm by it. Now, when something escapes them, they apologize. And I'm just trying little by little to change something because it's funny. It's like sports, they didn't have any sports for girls. But they changed. I did get involved in clubs like the National Honors Society, but there, everything was sports. High school was like my house. You walk around from class to class, you're talking, you know, to all the teachers; you know where they live. You see them every weekend at the football game. It got to be real neat. I graduated with a 3.4 GPA, though I don't believe that high school prepared me for college.

Being Mexican means a way of life. I am not a patriot. You know what I am saying? Basically, I am not an American patriot. It's the culture that is different that I love and that is what my identity is. You know, it's my family. I keep saying that, but it is. My family is the different things that you do, the different ways that you live, the little thing--that is the way I'm use to. The tortillas that are really made of corn and flour. Going to the corner to get them. And seeing the aguacate (avocado) lady and talking to her, walking down the street and talking to her, getting candy with my grandma on every little corner where there is a candy store. The birthday parties, the piñatas. Every Sunday, my grandparents and I would go out to eat and then I would go over to my uncle's house and we would play poker. I was the only child allowed.

I like adapting. I want to go to college and then go to law school in either immigration or civil rights. And now, this is getting into theory, but I believe that what is keeping Hispanics in this country back is their failure to adapt. Cause once

you adapt, you can change things. Once you accept, adapt change and just put yourself and learn all you can, you know, and integrate. That is the only way to get ahead. And I know that, not because of anything, but from the fact that I have seen it. The difference in race problems is that the more you see the difference, like you wouldn't want to be treated differently. So why do you pick out the one thing that separates you the most--your own identity? You want to say that you are not different from the rest. Everybody has their same aspirations and the same opportunities to do something, but the fact that I'm Mexican doesn't mean I am different from somebody else. That is what they pick out to be. Latino power or stuff. It doesn't give you privileges and it doesn't oppress you. When you told me when we are talking about other organizations, it doesn't link me. That's not my identity. I have other things. If I see someone that discriminates against me, then I know why it is and what it isn't and what I can do about it. But I am not going to help if I am just offended and take it to that extreme. What I have learned is that I try to do my best. That is why I want to be a lawyer. In Mendon, I didn't experience racism because I got good grades. I didn't go out and I didn't work in the fields. And I'm educated. The more you click, the more you're going to separate yourself, the more you're going to be separated.

Profile of Domingo

I had met Domingo through HSO and was pleasantly surprised that later that summer in 1997, he was hired to be one of WMU's Orientation student leaders. Because I was involved in the Orientation program, we were able to see each other

more frequently during that summer than other students.

Domingo was a very bright student who graduated with high honors from Holt High School, Michigan. Born and raised in this small rural community outside of Lansing, he did not have much of an opportunity to socialize with many Latinos(a) or Mexican Americans. Although both of his parents were of Mexican descent, he recognized that they were not raised with many of the traditional customs, and therefore, he was not either.

He had assimilated to Anglo culture, yet had a sincere hope to regain some of his traditions by enthusiastically connecting with more Hispanics at WMU. He involved himself more socially and politically with Latino(a) issues on campus than any student from this cohort. While he acknowledged that he did not speak Spanish, even though his parents are bilingual, he wanted to work harder at learning. He did not want to disengage from his culture, even though he had very little knowledge of his heritage. He was proud of his Hispanic heritage and had a tremendous thirst to learn more about it. His involvement with HSO and being in contact with some of the Texas students educated him to the vast diversity that exists within Latino(a) culture and how different he was raised from the rest.

Domingo also came to WMU with scholarship support. He was a recipient of both the Medallion and Heis scholarships due to his GPA of 3.85. He took the ACT five times and finally received a composite of 25. He took it so many times because he wanted to be in a competitive situation where he could get the best scholarship. Domingo was very talented academically and had sought out other opportunities to

enhance his leadership skills such as Orientation, HSO, being an RA, and helping to create the Latino male fraternity, Sigma Lambda Beta.

After three taped conversations and several informal contacts during Orientation and HSO, here is his story.

Domingo in His Own Words

Both my mother and father were born in Corpus Christi, Texas. I don't know much about my family's background and how far back it goes, but I believe I'm either third or fourth generation Mexican American. Not many of my family live in Texas. And I don't like to visit because I get bored there with the family, since there's no one there of my age. Also, I have a summer job which kind of makes it difficult. I have three brothers. Although both my older brothers went to college, the oldest was accepted at Harvard; my parents never went to college. At one time, my dad was thinking about going to dental school, but left it. He worked in the fields and he didn't graduate from high school. But after his mother died, he made her a promise that he would graduate from high school. So he actually got his degree after I was born. My mom graduated from high school and then married my dad. That is why they moved up here. They wanted the best for us. Cause my dad got a job at GM (General Motors). Regardless of no schooling, they have been very supportive of our education. They never pushed us to, you know, study all the time and all that. They just said do your best.

My mom has six or seven brothers and sisters and got married when she was

nineteen. My father had twenty brothers and sisters. My parents are both bilingual, but really never taught us because they wanted us to be in control of the English. Mom believed that learning Spanish and my culture could come later. But we first needed to fit in. I think the reason why they feel this way is the way that they were mistreated in school when they spoke Spanish. I mean you'd get the flap with the ruler, or hit or whatever. They didn't want anyone speaking Spanish. They had, they had to become fluent in English and all that.

I graduated from Holt High School. There were approximately three Hispanics and one from Pakistan. Cause being one of three Hispanics, I was the only one that actually did well grade-wise. The other two were in Alternative Education or remedial classes. You know, when the bad, or the people, or some people screw up, you screw it up for sometimes the whole minority race or whatever. My parents helped us a lot. I was within the smarter group of people. Me and this guy from Pakistan. We were two of the top twenty that didn't play in a band or played an instrument, or things like that. We were given respect from our peers cause I think socially we were so--we hung out with everybody and we were really friends with everybody, and we had really great social skills. And what helped me without having the stereotypes of the teachers about Hispanics is that my brothers had already gone through the ranks. And whenever they had problems, my mom, you know, if it was racial or school problems or anything, she was there. She always went there and talked to the teachers. She was never afraid of fighting the school system. You know, she wanted her kids in the smartest classes so that they could do well. She was

assured that we were going to get the classes we wanted. She pushed my younger brother to get involved in the Odyssey of the Mind and the Science Olympiad and things like that.

In my senior year, my main goal was to go to college. And I was, it was because of the scholarship money. So I checked out like I don't know how many scholarship applications. I applied everywhere in the state of Michigan and also out of state. I applied to Grand Valley State, Central, MSU, U of M, Wayne State. I really didn't want to go to MSU because it's just too close to home. I had to go where the money was. I ended up getting \$8,000 from the Medallion competition and \$4,250 from the Heis competition. But financial aid was very important. I did get a tuition scholarship from both WMU and WSU and I was very impressed with WMU's Business College. Also, everything was so nice and so new. And that was, that was probably the top priority of going here. Everything within a few years like will be, you know, be brand new facilities or all that. And it's like, wow! I also needed to get away from MSU because I would have stayed with the same friends. See, my oldest brother was a Valedictorian in his class and he didn't have to worry about financing.

In high school I was very good in math. I didn't like the sciences. Nobody is good in sciences in the family, but I was very good in math. I got a four on my AP exam. But I still didn't apply for the Lee Honors College at WMU because of the essay, thesis and all this other stuff. Thinking back on it now, if I would have applied, maybe I would have got a \$12,000 scholarship. However, I have heard from some of my friends who are in the Honors College that they don't like taking cluster classes. I

also didn't like the competition. Therefore, I got four credits that were accepted at WMU. When I got to college it was difficult the first semester.

In high school, I was very involved in the Honor Society and was President of that. I was also involved in the Student Council, Multicultural Club and Spanish Club. I may not have had big parts in them, but did participate.

Overall, my classes were fine the first semester because of my study habits; that helped me a lot here. Unlike my friends who studied their brains out. The first semester, I took Sociology, Geology, Business and Computer Science, Art and University 101. Ended up my first semester with a 3.4 GPA and I am shooting for a 4.0 this semester. What was tough was getting to meet people.

The transition from high school to college was trying to get used to everything. I was able to meet new friends in HSO and other organizations. I got my confidence and abilities to talk to my teachers more openly, and develop my social skills with a lot of teachers. Right now, I'm not worried about being the big number. But I want to make a difference in a small community around me. And if I can make a name for myself with the people that really matter in my life, then that's all that I need.

At first when I was here, I had my crying stage. Like my days where, you know, it was during the fall and all this stuff was coming down on me. It wasn't like high school. I had six classes a day and homework every night. I couldn't slack a bit because when I did I was way behind. Then I was worried about not getting money. Where am I going to get the money to pay for college? I wanted to go home, and when I was there, I wanted to be at Western. I was just crying. And my parents

couldn't come cause they're like 1½ hours away, and then my brother came and he just talked with me and we worked things out. I was losing sight of what was important. Like religion was important to me. Like I lost sight of that. But I'm was going to try my best. And if I have to pay for the rest of my life, I'm going to get my college education. So, I have really matured and I am right where I should be. So, I think with my brother and religion, I credit a lot to him, you know, to God and everything. A lot of praying. It gets me through.

I identify as Hispanic. Cause I've never liked Mexican or the classification. I mean, we are classified as Mexican Americans or whatever, like that. I am Hispanic because that is probably the best politically correct word. That's what I am going to be. And people always assume that if you're Hispanic, then you have to be Catholic, and we're not Catholic. We're Church of Christ Christians. The strong Hispanic traditions that I identity with are strong family, church and hard working. But at home, we don't do the traditional. We have the food, you know. Beans, rice, and tacos and whatever. My mom is really a good cook. Just, you know, traditional things like that. But we never did any major festivals like Hispanic, Day of the Dead, or stuff like that. My parents and I didn't do anything elaborate. I see myself as an Americanized Hispanic. Cause I might as well be, you know, just like my Anglo Saxon friends and all that because I'm just, you know, I grew up around them all my life. So when I think of where I'm from, I say, you know, Holt, Michigan--that's immediately what I think of. You know, so I'm just like one of the guys. I'm not one up from Hispanics. It's like I heard this from my anthropology teacher, and he said

that it's like having the one individual who acts like a Native American, who does all the things of a Native American, but he is not Native American, and so he doesn't get a scholarship. On the other hand, you take this Native American who hasn't done anything for Native Americans; he has Native American blood, but he's Americanized and doesn't do anything. So it made me think, why do we hyphenate ourselves, Mexican-American, Native-American, Chinese-American and all that? Why can't we just be, you know, an American? And all throughout my life, my parents have stressed to me to not see the racial things or the differences.

When I came here I didn't know what Chicano or Latino meant. I never heard those phrases used until I got to college. You know, by saying Hispanic, it just eliminates, you know, Chicano, Latinos and whatever else. And the reason why I do it, it's just, you know, it helps us become closer to being all one. It kind of takes away from the separate things that each classification does. But, you know, we are all humans. Just be humans. Let's not worry about the distinction. Let's worry about the more general. We should be in common. And just people in this world concerned about classifying themselves.

I know that there are differences between the Hispanics from Texas and myself. We're all Hispanic, but we're all different. Dressing style, the types of Spanish, dialects or the speed or tone. Like I thought all Hispanics were just the same, just the same, just like me, but it's not the case. Well, I thought that Hispanics were just like me, you know, studying, working hard and all that. And they just spoke a little bit more of Spanish than I did. You know, they come from different places.

Therefore, they say different things like classifications, or just words or slang. Until you know about their background and where they've grown up, it could be different, like being raised in California instead of New York. And a lot of Hispanics, you know, believe in things that maybe I don't. I never thought of it before. I never thought I was celebrating the Day of the Dead that much or anything like that. Or things that are near and dear to them. I mean, it's really important that they celebrate the holidays. Just like Halloween or something like that. There are other holidays that I don't believe the university should support like Good Friday. State and church should remain separate. With Martin Luther King Day, a lot of white students were complaining about having that day off and that is just a black holiday, and why can't we get our holiday off? You know, they don't realize what they are saying. They don't realize that that this is a racial comment. Cause, well, I'm not racist. It's just those little comments that just add up and you don't think about. And I don't say that I don't do it myself sometimes. It might slip my mind and I think about it, and oops, I realize what I was saying.

Racism does exist. I used my personal experience of being stopped by the police when I was in high school. Just because "I" was in a nice neighborhood at the wrong time, as part of my testimonial to other freshmen, because I wanted them to be aware that it does exist.

At the university, I don't believe there is sensitivity to Latino/Hispanic issues. Like in planning the party, that was not very respectful to the Latino culture by not allowing the community to bring beverages in the recreation center. Or, they were not

being sensitive by scheduling a sports event on the same day as the Pow Wow that later made it very difficult for the Native Americans to access parking near their event. The university in a lot of things is not sensitive to minority issues. And they should really be more concerned with the church and state.

I do feel uncomfortable when someone comes up to me and starts speaking Spanish. I actually say, you know, I don't understand that much. And it's kind of uncomfortable sometimes. I feel uncomfortable a little bit in those settings. And that's a little bit of the regret sometimes. But you know, right now it's not a major concern to take Spanish classes here at college. So why really do it, though I need to know it. And I probably eventually will take some classes, but it's not really a main priority for me right now. Of all in my family, my oldest brother understands it the best.

With Affirmative Action, at first, I thought it was really great cause it's helping African Americans and Asians and all that from the past screw-ups, and helping them get ahead. But the more I think about it, it's like if I was getting a job cause I'm Hispanic and there was a person that was way more qualified, you know, he may be white and deserves it more than I did, and that makes me feel awkward. You know, cause he deserves it. He deserves the position more than I did. But he should have got the job, and not I. Cause I believe that, you know, whomever does the hardest work should get the job. But there are some instances where people won't provide those opportunities and I understand that. And there are some people that need the assistance. So, it's like a gray area for me, I think.

I've changed from high school to college in that I've learned the social aspect to college instead of just studying. It used to be that I would only go out on weekends. And now I'll go out, you know, if there's a basketball game on a Tuesday and I have nothing else to do. If I have to read, I'll read after the game. You have to become smarter in a different way. I tried to see how people are and seeing that there was other stuff to that smartness in a different way. Everybody can have what they know in college. It needs, however, to be who you know. You have to wait for bigger businesses or the bigger check, you know. I've had to personally develop special actions to change socially. I'm working on my social skills more than I'm studying. That always comes natural. My study habits will always be the same. I have also become closer to my family and see them as my friends. I've also learned so much about my culture through HSO. I definitely want to be more involved next year.

Profile of Nutra

It was disappointing to be unable to spend more time with Nutra. We had one conversation and we agreed to find time to meet that summer. I mentioned that I would follow-up and meet her in Grand Rapids, if necessary. Somehow, we never met. However, I discovered later when classes started the following year that she had transferred to Kalamazoo Valley Community College and was living off campus. Since I did not know where she resided in Kalamazoo, I called her mother's house in Grand Rapids and spoke with her. Her mother recognized who I was and mentioned that she would leave a message with Nutra to call me back. However, she never did.

I will never know the reason for her not calling me back—maybe she was embarrassed for not doing well her second semester and her academic dismissal from the university. Regardless of the reasons, I was quite impressed with her. And while we had only one conversation, I felt her story was significant enough to be included in this study. She had more insight into the many struggles of Mexican American people, particularly in college, than the rest of the Michigan cohort.

I had met her prior to her enrollment at WMU in 1996. She had visited the school several times and was impressed with campus. She also knew some students at WMU who had graduated from Union High School, an inner city school, predominantly minority with a large Latino(a) constituency. She, as well as the counselors at that school, recognized the high number of Latinos(a) that did not graduate or continue to college. Nutra graduating and attending WMU was the exception. Her counselor and I worked closely together in getting her to apply, be admitted and enroll at WMU. I had promised her counselor that I would follow-up with Nutra to make sure that she was doing well.

Later, I had some personal disappointment that I was unable to proactively be more engaged with Nutra's life while she was at WMU, and felt that I could have been more involved in her life. Many invitations were extended to her to visit with me, yet I realized I could have done more outreach. It was my hope that Nutra was still in pursuit of her undergraduate degree

Again, she was different from the rest of the students. She was raised in a strong traditional Mexican-American environment. She was also different in that her

parents' cultural heritages were Mexican and Puerto Rican. She was bilingual and clearly identified with both cultures.

Nutra was very gracious and interested in meeting with me. I was so glad to have had the opportunity to capture her voice.

Nutra in Her Own Words

My mom is Puerto Rican and my dad is Mexican. I claim both my Puerto Rican and Mexican backgrounds. But there are times when I identify more with being Mexican because my mom doesn't have a Puerto Rican accent. She also looks more Mexican and was brought up in Chicago. People don't believe her when she says that she is really Puerto Rican and they test her. I was born in Michigan, yet my family came here to the fields to work. However, I did live in Weslaco for a short while when I was six. At Christmas we would go to Texas and then to Mexico when I was growing up.

There is a lot of tension between the Latino groups at Union High School. The Puerto Ricans don't get along with the Mexicans. Mexicans think that the Puerto Ricans are arrogant, talk fast, they think that they are better than others, and they have kinky hair. I have a friend named Julia who didn't like Puerto Ricans and would say bad things about Puerto Rico. I asked her how could she say those things and hang out with me, and she answered that I was different.

One of the reasons for coming to WMU was that I wanted to get away from the family. I am always the one in the family who is trying new adventures and

activities. I also have an aunt in Kalamazoo. I decided to live in the residence halls when I moved here but didn't like residence hall life. My dad didn't either. My roommate was one that no one liked. I started to get tired of her because she would ask me to take her everywhere in my van. I would take her to class, take her to pick up the newspaper. I finally had to tell her off and did it over the phone. The roommate finally moved out.

My second semester was much better, but I have decided to move off campus next fall to Knollwood Apartments. At first, I was afraid to tell my father that I had moved, but my father reacted much better and thought that there were less people in the apartment than in the residence hall. I also didn't like how the RAs did not enforce the rules. My current roommate also moved out of the residence halls because her friend had her boyfriend sleeping in her room. My friend complained to the RAs but not much was done. You know, my roommates next fall are all Anglos. I am surprised of that.

I really haven't hung out with a lot of Hispanics in college. Things are different here because I did hang out with Hispanics in high school. I hung out with more Blacks and Hispanics, but here I hang out with more Anglos. I don't feel comfortable with the HSO people. I have hung out with some of the Texas students, but at one point I felt uncomfortable with the Texas students. Some feel that you're not as Hispanic as they are. When I attended the Hispanic picnic in September, people were cold with me. I sometimes have told the Texas students that I lived in Weslaco, Texas for a number of years in order to feel connected to them. I somehow feel that the

Texas students get treated more special. I have this other friend who is Tex Mex (Mexican from Texas) who doesn't feel comfortable with other Hispanics. I mean, I remember this one student from Texas that I responded to in English and from that point on, he referred to me as a Bolia (a white person). I was offended by that, and since then, I don't feel any different towards them. I thought I was the only one that had this problem, but I found that there are other students that feel the same way. I have talked to another student from Texas, and he keeps inviting me to go to things with them and not to let my feelings about some get in the way.

At first, going to classes was hard because it seemed that my family matters always took over my classes. I would go home every weekend to take care of the kids. There were times when I would not go to class Thursday or Friday because I had home responsibilities. Eventually, my adviser called my parents and explained that they were demanding a lot of my time at the cost of my grades. I did struggle with some of the faculty, but went to my adviser for help. My father struggled initially with me going to college. He wanted me stay close to home and go to Grand Rapids Community College. I am not sure if he was protective over me because I was the oldest or that I was a woman. I do have six other brothers and sisters. My parents never really liked me going here, but I liked it, especially since I had visited the college so many times before coming here.

The only class that I really felt comfortable in was Dr. Febles' Latin American class. There was this other class that was difficult but I can't remember the name of the class or the instructor's name. The faculty didn't think I was trying hard enough.

I think classes went better the second semester, but were hard. I took three classes this semester, psychology, Direct Encounters with the Arts, and math.

Profile of Margarita

Margarita was one of the students with whom I had the least amount of contact. She lived at home and was not involved in any activities, scholarship programs, or jobs on campus. On the phone, she was hesitant to get involved, but as I spoke with her more about learning about the diversity of students that claim to be Hispanic/Latino(a) or of Mexican descent, her interest was peaked, and she agreed to meet.

At the time she was working, had family obligations, and was planning a trip to Mexico to visit family, and I knew then that it would be difficult to meet again. However, she proposed that we meet, after she got back from Mexico. Margarita thought that she would be able to share another perspective after being to Mexico and seeing her family again.

When she returned later in the summer, I contacted her again, and she mentioned that her grandmother whom she was very close to had passed away, and therefore, she needed some time to get back into the swing of things before meeting with me again. Time passed, classes started and I followed up with one more phone call and left a message. The call was never returned, and I never saw or heard from her again.

At our first, and only meeting before her trip to Mexico, we met in a restaurant

nearby her house. While rather shy and quiet, she was helpful and very open about her family and experiences at WMU. It was very apparent that she had selected WMU due to financial reasons because she decided to commute and live at home. She was not very involved with anything on campus other than classes, and spent the rest of her time with her boyfriend or working at Target. Although she seemed to miss the traditional college freshmen experience, on the other hand, she did not miss much at all. Margarita claimed that she was not that involved in high school either.

Her Mexican heritage was from her mother's side, who was born in Texas. Her dad was born in Michigan. Although her mother spoke fluent Spanish, she and her two sisters did not speak much Spanish nor felt the need to take it in high school. We spent some time talking about traditions, values, and culture. The concept of culture and values was difficult for Margarita to grasp, and, I might add, difficult for others in the study to grasp too. Even though she could not easily identify with Mexican values and traditions, I found her to be interested and proud of her Mexican heritage, but she did not see herself following any specific traditions. For the most part, she was raised in a very Anglicized environment, though her mom had very strong ties to her family and heritage.

While Margarita spoke of being a minority student in her classes, she did not see herself as a disadvantaged minority in other settings. After several hours of conversation, here is her one taped conversation.

Margarita in Her Own Words

I graduated from Portage Central High School with a 3.0 and a 21 or 22 on the ACT. When looking for colleges, I was considering WMU and MSU, and decided on Western because of staying close and living at home. Also, staying home was because of the financing. I received a loan and some grants. The rest my parents were going to help me out with. So half of the cost they paid, and the other half I paid. They did say that if I didn't stay, they wouldn't pay for any of my college costs. Also, they told me that I had to pay if I was going to stay in the residence hall. Another reason why I didn't stay in a residence hall was because I am very strong in my beliefs (she meant Christian beliefs), my beliefs meaning no drinking and all that stuff. And I know what goes on a lot in the dorms, and I didn't want to be tempted, you know, if I moved. There would be more pressure and stuff like that. Where if I lived at home, I would have felt no pressure at all, and would have enough time to study, and it's close to work.

I really never visited the college, except when I was a junior and went with my senior friend. Even as a young girl, I always wanted to be a teacher, and was also interested in art and art education when in high school, and thought of WMU.

In high school I wasn't really involved. Basically, hung out with my friends, I did a lot of that. I was involved in the Spanish Club. And well, it's like, it had exchange students and stuff like that. And it was just to help out the foreign exchange students that did come around to get adapted and take them out sightseeing. It later

became the Foreign Exchange Program. I was in band and went to football and hockey games, but really didn't like basketball.

Classes that I took in high school were Spanish, science, and math. My Spanish teacher was very good and I think he was the reason why I wanted to go into Spanish in college. I didn't do too well in the class. I got Bs, but it was because he made it so hard, but it was so much fun. At Western, I started with Spanish 200, but was not that confident, so I changed to Spanish 101, which was a repeat of what I had taken in high school.

There was a transition from college to high school when it came to teachers. After awhile you start to realize what they need from you. In high school, I got along with all teachers. You had thirty people in your class and I got to know my teachers. Whereas, here you have to go to see them in their office hours and then talk to them. It's very hard to, you know what I mean? It's very hard to get to know them. Cause once you start to know your teacher, you start to like them and you start to really be interested in their class, I believe. My largest class right now is about three hundred. Both my speech and anthropology classes were huge.

Last semester, it was work, boyfriend, and school. That was my life. Really, no time to get involved. I had even asked my boss to reduce my work hours second semester. My first semester I took English, anthropology, direct encounters, and geology, and I ended up with a 2.17. My second semester I raised it slightly to a 2.2. And now, I'm going to try for school and study real hard to get that 2.5. I don't think I'm going to get involved too much. In order for me to do well in class, I need a

teacher that will get my attention, unlike my anthropology class. My geography teacher was good. He cracked jokes and teased. I don't mind lecture classes as long as they are interesting, like Direct Encounters with the Arts, because we always have some kind of thing that would take us away from the lecture. They had a movie that we would watch. Or they'd have something, you know. Whereas, speech class was not a fun lecture.

I was a minority, and I have, I don't know. Most people look at me and they don't see, you know, like anything. And like your hair. That's all I can see, you know. But I don't know. I've never felt really like a minority cause I've grown up like. If I would have grown up like in Texas, then I probably would have felt it more.

I go to class, then I have in between times where I go to the computer lab, e-mail to my friends, come home do my homework, and then I'll like watch TV and stuff like that. But if I come home from work I have to watch TV first just to settle down. When I'm doing stock at work, I come home and watch TV because it relaxes me and stuff. And then I can do.

My mom's name is Josefina Marta Arrendondo Guevarra. She is forty-nine and my dad is forty-six years old. My mom lived for twenty-three years in Mexico and they met in El Paso, Texas. Even though I was born in Saucillo, Mexico, I was raised in Kalamazoo and Portage. Therefore, I am first generation. My parents work full time and do not have a college degree. My mother has a sixth or seventh grade education which is really high school over there. My mom makes all the rules in the house. I think that if we would have had a boy, I think my dad would have been more

lenient on him in a lot of things. I think my dad has no idea what it's like to be a girl. No idea on how to raise us. Like when I was a tomboy, he had a little bit more to say. You know, he would try a little bit. But as soon as I turned, you know, the age where I started dating, oh, he stopped real quick. With my mom, she may have been lenient with the boy because in Mexico the boys don't need to learn how to cook, they don't need to know how to make the bed. You know, the wives do take care of them. But my mom doesn't feel that is always the case. See, all three of us have grown so independent like my mom. We are very independent and don't take much. My mom cooks, my mom cleans, my mom does laundry. My dad will fix stuff, sometimes. But my mom has learned to do stuff. Yeah, and she's uhm...she has the tools, she loves new tools.

When I was younger, I didn't talk much to my mom. I barely talked to her at all. Whereas now, I got into college and I do talk to her a lot about relationships. I talk to my grandmother about everything, you know. I will tell everything and she is just great. I love her. She's eighty-seven and very spunky. We got a lot from our grandmother because every Saturday when I was young we would go over there. Now I've gotten older and I go and see her at least once a week.

The reason why I decided to go to college is for a career. Ever since I was little, I wanted to be a teacher.

Profile of Rolando

Of the Michigan cohort group, I personally was able to impact two students'

lives—one of these students was Rolando. We subsequently maintained a relationship, even though we had been separated by distance.

Meeting his parents provided a deeper understanding of his relationship with them. His mom seemed to be the equalizer and balance between Rolando and his father; his father seemed to be the taskmaster who made sure that both Rolando and his older brother understood the importance of hard work, commitment, and good grades. Anything less was defined as a failure. At one meeting, Rolando's mother shared with me that all of her life she was always in the middle between the boys and her husband, and was tired of doing it. She had mentioned that her husband was disappointed in Rolando's second semester grades at WMU, even though he had received over a 3.0 GPA. She felt that their sons getting good grades was a reflection of their own hard work, and their insistence that their sons needed to get an education, in order not to be working in a factory all their lives as their parents had done. She said that it was particularly difficult because of living in an Anglo environment.

Before meeting Rolando, I knew his older brother well and was introduced by him to Rolando. While his brother was shy and non-demonstrative, Rolando was communicative, interpersonal, and I might add, quite opinionated. While we had not spent a lot of time together, we seemed to be very comfortable with each other's company. He would regularly stop in the Admissions Office to say "hi" and chat about anything and everything—from his girlfriend to classes to family.

One day he came by and shared how bitter he was that WMU had not selected him as an incentive scholar while in high school, like his brother. While he recognized

that he was not as smart as his brother, he recalled that the Mexican female students who had been chosen to get the tuition and fees scholarship for four years, had decided to not attend WMU or any college for that matter. He also believed that because he was not as popular, and as academically strong as his brother in school, the teachers and counselors did not select him as a recipient. After the first semester at WMU, however, Rolando had achieved a 3.7 GPA. He wanted to know if he could still receive the scholarship even though he was not a recipient in high school. With some advice and counseling, I suggested he write a letter of appeal and have both my colleague and I evaluate it. We did, and months later he was awarded the scholarship. Somehow, I believe he felt indebted to me because of my support for him.

Rolando did not experience his freshmen year like most entering students. He came to WMU, roomed with his brother in an apartment, and practically went home every weekend to visit his girlfriend and family.

Rolando did not have a clear opinion on Affirmative Action. Although he considered it stupid, he recognized that inequity did exist in the workforce. He could see that being of a particular ethnic group or race did have an impact, and that Hispanics, who were equally as qualified, did not get jobs.

He was the only student who did not agree to have the conversations taped. His energy, insight, honesty, and collaboration were very much appreciated. After three untaped, informal meetings at his apartment in Kalamazoo and other university settings, here is his story.

Rolando in His Own Words

I prefer to be called Ram, but some do call me Javier or Javy. I identify as a full-blooded Mexican because I identify with my mom and dad's sides. I also recognize that I am an American because I was born here, but I do associate more with my Mexican background. Also, I pay taxes, so that makes me an American.

Being Mexican means continuing to eat the traditional foods at home like enchiladas, tortas, tortillas, and barbacoa (barbecue). My mom is a good cook and that is also why I go home a lot on the weekends. I don't like menudo (tripe soup) or mole (chocolate sauce over chicken). When we go out to eat at Mexican restaurants, I always joke around the fact that the food is not authentic. My brother and I eat American during the weekday because we have no time. We don't cook--that is a woman thing. My wife better know or learn how to cook. My girlfriend does not know how to. Another thing about being Mexican is the strictness in the family. My dad is real strict. This behavior is not one I see in white culture. My dad is the breadwinner of the house and my mom cooks and cleans (although his mother also worked out of the house). They both have worked very hard to give us the best education.

I do speak very little Spanish, although mom and dad are bilingual, but in the household English is spoken. Bernardo and I were born in Holland, Michigan. But my dad was born in Monterey, Mexico and my mom in Texas. My mother has about twelve to fourteen brothers and sisters. All of my dad's relatives live in Mexico. The reason why they came to Michigan, especially Holland and Fenville, was because of

jobs, and my father found one in Comstock Fruit. I am not sure, but I think my father was a migrant worker before he worked in the factory.

I came to WMU because I wanted to be closer to my family, didn't want to stay in a dorm, and my brother was already at WMU. I was admitted to WMU with a 3.0 GPA and a 20 on the ACT. And now after completing my first semester, I have a 3.57. Some of the courses that I took were Spanish, algebra I, anthropology, history, and university 102. I only study on the weekdays, but it hurts when I go home because I have Spanish on Mondays and it suffers because of not getting to class. I now have a C and it's primarily due to it being a grammar class. I also struggle because I didn't have a good high school Spanish teacher.

In high school, I wish I would have done better. That way I would have been able to get more scholarships. My high school prepared me for college but only with certain classes like history and English writing class. I was never too impressed with the teachers because of my personality. I have had many confrontations with them. I have also been scared psychologically for having so many teachers compare me to my brother who was always quiet and non-disruptive. I always asked questions and seemed to be seen as the troublemaker or one with the short fuse. I would always have teachers tell me that I was nothing like my brother.

What I enjoyed most about high school were my art classes, although I know that math, history and English did prepare me for college. I liked my English and art teachers. With the rest of the teachers it was very hard because they remembered my brother as the role model. My most influential role model was my brother. My

parents worked all the time when I was young, so I only had my brother to go to. While I don't have many friends in college, I was Mr. Popular. I was very involved in cross country, basketball and football, but my favorite was cross country.

Although there is a growing Hispanic population in Fennville, the high school Hispanic drop-out rate is growing too. I think it's because of lack of family support. My parents have always supported us to go to school and go to college. I don't ever see other students getting the same support from their parents like my girlfriend.

My first semester was difficult because I ended up with Chicken Pox. But, this semester, classes are tough. I have most of my classes on Monday. I study during the week and then go home every weekend. I believe that I'm not really connected to WMU. I live with my brother and another friend in the apartment. My girlfriend goes to Kalamazoo Valley Community College, and I tend to go home a lot over the weekends to visit family, friends and girlfriend in Fennville. I believe that living in the residence hall, there would have been more interruptions from friends, though I recognize that I don't have many friends. I love sports, but haven't managed to get involved in an intramural sport. Again, living off campus, it makes it more difficult. However, I do have some friends that go to KVCC and I play basketball with some of them. My brother is too busy. I also work. I am looking for a job this spring, but not in a factory.

When I look at differences between me and the Texas students, one is language. Many speak Spanish. While I understand them, I prefer to speak in English. At home, we speak both in English and Spanish. I have noticed that the Texas

students are extremely lonesome. That Tania, Horacio, Adolfo, and Noria are really homesick.

I don't recall experiencing any prejudices here. However, I do remember that the university 101 class teacher who was African American was not ethnically diverse. I was offended because the teacher was referring to minorities as only those that were African American, and that my ethnic group did not count. I also feel that people might question why I would take a Spanish class in college. Not that this has happened, but I always feel this way. In high school, I had an experience with one of my high school teachers who every time he saw me with my girlfriend, who is white, would scold me or make a negative comment. I later talked to my parents and thought that maybe he was doing this because I was dating inter-racially. Other than this, I never have experienced someone calling me negative or derogatory slurs about being Mexican. Well, my friends have called me "guero" (light skinned) or "milkweed". Because I'm light skinned, people see me as white. I once talked to my mom about this, and my mom said that I was undeniably Mexican. The term milkweed comes from a movie that came out a long time ago that was called *Blood In and Blood Out*. It was a Hispanic film about gangs and drugs. The main character was Hispanic and he was light skinned and they called him Milkweed. Racism in the Fenville community was strong and very noticeable when Bernardo was in school. There were not too many Hispanics during that time.

For next year, I want to make more friends. I have them in my classes but not out of class, and I see this as important because in another year my brother Bernardo

and his friend Santiago will not be around.

My main reason for going to college is to get a good job that pays well. Money is a constant concern. And it can't be factory. After seeing my father work and mother, especially my father work the graveyard shift, I believe there is better than that. They have worked all their lives. My father gets up at 5:00 a.m. and comes home at 5 p.m. I want a 9-5 p.m. job.

Profile of Antonia

Antonia came with energy and a desire to cooperate in this project. While some of our conversations and other informal contacts were beneficial, I found that for the most part, she was more interested in talking about her personal life, especially her difficult childhood and upbringing. Even her relationship at the time with her boyfriend was one of constant struggle.

I met Antonia through a colleague in the Admissions Office. He had forewarned me that she was very needy and had a tumultuous upbringing. Little did I know how painful our conversations would be involving many hours of hearing her recount her story. I can not say how many times tears came to my eyes as she recounted the many injustices, abuses, and later psychological scars that her stepmother and father left.

Antonia can be considered a minority in many different ways. In one way, she was a minority for beating the odds, having graduated from high school and furthering her education in college. Not only did she have the socio-economic struggle that

many of the students in this project had experienced, but she came from a very abusive family with no love and support, and continued to face many of the same challenges with the people she allowed or invited into her life.

After many conversations, writing appeal letters to the Financial Aid Office, and involvement with other community-based organizations to support her with counseling, Antonia managed to regain her scholarship a second time. But soon afterwards she was depressed and this time she dropped out of school. However, she had not lost hope, and I believed one day she would regain the confidence and financing to re-enter the university and complete her degree. From beginning to end, her story was one that she controlled. She retold it as an autobiography and there was little to no interference from me. In order to further understand her struggle, she encouraged me to read and lent me a book, *Motherless Daughters*, by Edelman that described more theoretically the struggles that she faced as a child and continued to face. Undoubtedly, it helped me better understand her constant battle with life and how she continued to be a victim of abuse.

Edelman (1974) argues that children who lose a parent need two conditions to survive: (1) a stable surviving parent or other caregiver to meet their emotional needs, and (2) the opportunity to release their feelings. But in a situation where the child continues to be in an unstable home, she/he can end up a long way from the point where she/he once began. Any love that Antonia ever had was with her deceased mother, cousin, brother, and boyfriend. She basically was in search of love. She did not feel that there was much more out there. With every contact Antonia continued to

state her sense of loneliness and lack of family support, and confessed that drugs, food, over-achievement and alcohol served as substitutes. She claimed there was a tendency to mistrust women, and she found no assurance or trust from her stepmother. Instead, the relationship was one of abuse, jealousy, and vengeance. Depression, low-self esteem, and pervasive loneliness are just some of the qualities that describe Antonia's personality. However, Edelman argues that the motherless child takes the role of mother which usually forces a daughter to assume an identity that is inconsistent with her developmental state. Several studies suggest that caring for younger siblings can help a daughter gain confidence, develop a resilience toward later stress, and work through feelings of loss.

Although she did not share much about her ethnic identity, based on her conversation she did not seem to identify with it because of her upbringing. She did not speak Spanish and did not seem to remember any Mexican traditions for they were never practiced or instilled. She was disconnected in every way from her family, or the little that was left. After two conversations, one taped, here is her story.

Antonia in Her Own Words

I was born and raised in Kalamazoo. I am nineteen and come from a mixed heritage. My mother is Anglo and my father is Mexican-American.

I went to Kalamazoo Central in both my ninth and tenth grades. I did not do well, so I transferred to Albion High School for the last two years of high school and lived with my cousin whom I admire and love very much. I graduated from high

school with a 2.96 and an 18 on the ACT test.

My experience in high school was terrible. In my freshmen and sophomore years I skipped class all the time. I was crying all the time. I was going to counselors almost every day. You know how it says in the Bible that God will not put anything on you that one can't handle. Well, I kept remembering that. Finally, when I couldn't handle it anymore, it stopped. What happened was that I had one more month left in my sophomore year, and then my junior and senior years. And, I just did so well, I finally felt like I was normal. I don't know, I lived with my cousin and she was sort of like the mom to me. And I was happy there. And, my grades just went right up. I mean it basically evened out which was pretty good because I did bad.

You know, I actually never thought about going to college. Ever since I was little, everyone thought about college. I never actually thought about details, about college. I just always knew I was going to go. So when the time came, it was just like my next school. It wasn't like a big deal to me. Well, my mom talked about it a lot. I know she wanted me to go, but I was real young. And I know I wanted to go to Western because she went to Western. And I still haven't got the nerve to look up her records. I want to do good in school when I go.

When I first started college, I was doing real good at first. I would get up an hour and a half before class every day and get ready; have all my books ready. I didn't have like a real strong relationship with any of my family except my cousin. But then my cousin and I got into this big fight and all of this crazy stuff came out. And I was so crushed because I thought of her as my mom, and my only family. I don't know,

but I started getting depressed and I started doing things that I should not have done. Suddenly one day, one day I called her and I started crying and talked to her over the phone. And we put this all behind us. And I started feeling better and started doing well in school again. And I started getting it together. I don't know, I'm kind of like psycho all the time.

It's stressful. My mom died when I was young. And my dad, my dad doesn't like, he is still like a parent. Me and him would fight real bad. And he was being real mean to my brother. He tried to get me arrested here. He and the cops found me at the gym cause I work at the gym. They tried to arrest me for kidnapping because I would not let my brother go home. Because my brother was scared and did not want to go home. And it's not like I was just taking my brother and acting all crazy. My brother didn't want to go home. He was scared. I finally had to send him back home. And I started, I started smoking weed. That is not why though, but I do it recreationally. And then once that started happening, you know, I spent all my time, just so I would not have to think about things. I just messed up so bad. I really did. Now, I kind of figured it out that I would lose my scholarship. At the time, I told myself, you've got to try harder or you're going to lose it.

Going to college is hard when you first come to college, especially if you're not prepared. You know, everyone wants to go and party and have fun with their friends. For some people when they first get to college they're like, you know, there are no rules or anything. Actually, I think you realize the first year of college that it doesn't mean anything, it's your family. I feel I have no one to go to—no family.

When you don't feel like you have anyone close to you, or you feel that you don't have family that is close to you, you feel, you really feel alone. Real alone.

My goal is to have my brother eventually move in with me. And once he is seventeen, my dad can't say no. I mean, I don't ever want to be tied down to a man or anyone for that matter. You know, I want to do things on my own. And I know that if I don't do school, I'm going to have to. There are so many things that I want to do. And I get so depressed. There are all these things, and I will never be able to do them. And then I stop and think, why can't I? It's all in the way you think about things. No, I just realize that I have to quit. I have to quite feeling bad about everything.

See, my mom died when I was young. I was eight. And my Dad remarried and she started abusing me like. Well, there was this big trial. It ended, it ended okay. I went to live with my dad and his girlfriend. They were not married at the time. To make a long story short, I was sexually and mentally abused up until I was fifteen. Finally, I tried committing suicide three times and I ran away from home a bunch of times. One time I went to a friend's house and her mom called the Children's Protective Services. And one thing led up to another and she ended up being arrested. There was a trial, a seven-day trial and she got convicted of nine felonies. And she got sentenced and she got twenty to fifty years.

She was jealous of my mother. I don't know, but after my mom died, she just started abusing me just terrible. And I never thought about my mom that much until after the situation was over eight years. And then after the eight years, I still, I didn't

like try to think about anything for a couple of years. But it just started to, I don't know, but I just started getting so sad about my mom this past year. I don't know. It was so hard. Like she would tell me things over and over. Like how stupid, all kinds of stuff. I mean, she told me that I was ugly, this and all that. My hair was cut short and she made me wear guy clothes. Things that would embarrass me. And it was funny because, my dad use to, when I was younger, use to make me say affirmations. Like you look in the mirror and you say I am this and I am that. And I know now that affirmations work because back then when she was telling me all of this that I was retarded, that I was stupid, and all of this other stuff, I never actually thought that I believed it. But then again, when people look at me, the first thing that I think is that I am stupid, and thought everyone else around me thought that.

I am Mexican American. My mother was white and had a little bit of Indian in her, and my dad Mexican American. I don't have much of a connection with my mother's relatives or my dad's family. My dad left my mom with a kid, me. She was about my age. She was seventeen when she had me and she turned eighteen a month later. When I think about that, if I were to have a baby now, I would have struggled too. My dad wanted her back after she graduated from college. They divorced when I was young. So, my mother raised me and decided to change her name, not to her maiden name but came up with a new name. I don't know why, but she did. But I think about that. I am really proud of her cause I don't think I would if I had to. She realized she had to do something and so she started school. She got a bachelor's in computer science. And she died right after. She just got a new car, a new place to

live, and a new job, and she died. But at least she died knowing that she did.

She had an embolism. It's like one in a million chances of a person getting it, and it happened to her. Between eight and fifteen I lived with my stepmother, and then she was sent to prison after her convictions. You know, the worse thing is that after my mom died my stepmother told me that I used to pray and wish my mother would die. She used to tell me stuff like that all the time. All the time. The worse she told me was that I caused my mom to die. She told me that I caused my mom so much stress from being a brat that she couldn't take it on her heart, and it stopped. And for the longest time I thought I had killed my mom. You have absolutely no idea what that can do to someone. It's terrible. I thought I killed my mom. Then my father decided to remarry to a third wife. My dad is a jerk and no one likes him. I tried to have a relationship with him, but it doesn't work. And even when I do, it's not like a father/daughter. It's like we're friends or something. It's like I see him on my level. I lost so much respect for him. And then there is my brother. He's fourteen and he does wonderful in his job and in school. He tells me everyday how much he doesn't want to stay with my dad. And there's nothing that I can do.

You know, like towards the end of the school year, and up until now it's been like having a, like I will just start crying and I can't stop, I can't sleep, I can't eat sometimes. Sometimes I just get depressed and I just want to move away. And I won't. I have had the opportunity to, but I won't move until my brother is okay, you know. And hopefully, I will be able to start, to start to feeling better so that I won't want to move. And it's funny because I think to myself, what good is it going to do?

No matter where I go, I'm going to have all these memories.

Profile of Romero

I first remember seeing Romero at one of the Hispanic Student meetings. At first, I was not sure about his ethnic background. He seemed so different from the rest. I later discovered after talking to the president of the organization at the time, that he was a freshmen of Mexican descent. I later called him, and we met in my office.

He graduated from Heritage High School in Saginaw with a 3.69 GPA and ACT composite of 24. After a few minutes of conversation, there was an immediate comfort level and connection. He seemed to have a liberal democratic position on political and social issues, which was unique to the students in this study. We seemed to have an immediate, natural affinity which allowed us to move from the researcher/student role to one simply of two individuals with common interests talking. His vast awareness and interest in current issues was surprising, especially as I had not met any students with this interest. At times he worried whether he was giving me the information that I wanted. I was not sure what he expected from the interview, but the meeting was of immediate comfort.

He and Federica were the only two students that came from a family with an educational background. All the parents of the students in this study promoted education, but the difference with Romero and Federica was that their parents had experienced college. Both he and Federica also came from a higher socio-economic

level than the other Latinos(a) in the group.

After three conversations and several opportunities to interact at my house and other social gatherings, here is his story.

Romero in His Own Words

I was born and raised in Saginaw, in a predominantly white suburb where there are few minorities. Although as minorities become better paid, they are able to move into these neighborhoods. Our family is real tight. All the family was born in Saginaw including mom and dad. However, dad's parents were born in Michoacan, Mexico. His dad's name is Hicacio Ramon Ricardo Barrera and his mom's name is Beerly Jenia. My grandparents met in Chicago and got married there and then moved to Flint and then to Saginaw. They both died when I was four. My father says that grandfather escaped the Civil War in Mexico and went to the U.S. According, to my father's stories, my grandfather remembers seeing several hangings in Mexico when he was a young boy. Any person who was fighting for Pancho Villa, if caught by the army, was hanged.

I have two sisters and one brother. My older sister graduated from U of M. She is the one most connected to her Mexican heritage. The second oldest is in her last year at WMU. She is majoring in women studies and Spanish. My mother and sisters have a great influence on me. I am very sensitive to racial, ethnic and women's issues. I largely owe my development and understanding of women issues to my sisters--I consider the second oldest to be a hard core feminist. The oldest is fluent in

Spanish and is working with Hispanic clientele placing them with jobs. She also got accepted at the University of Chicago and is pursuing her MA in Spanish. She lives in the Mexican neighborhood. The second oldest is planning on moving to Chicago. My younger brother is two years younger. And my dad, you know, we see him a lot. He calls us whenever cause he goes on business trips cause he's a senior buyer. Like he was in Florida awhile go. And he gets free calls and an expense account and all that stuff.

My father started his education at either Saginaw Valley Community College or Saginaw Valley State University initially and then finished his BA later. My mother only has a high school diploma. My father worked at GM (General Motors) and was promoted to the top, making good money, and traveling lots. My mother doesn't work, but has a day care center at home.

My sister and some friends know me as Rom, but I prefer being called Romero. Most of the time I would say I'm Hispanic. I feel comfortable using either Latino or Hispanic to self identify. Even if I said I was Mexican, it wouldn't clarify, since there are still so many distinctions. Not all Mexicans identify the same way. You can't generalize. I'm not fully anything. I point out the fact that I'm not full Hispanic and that I'm half white which is a big part like German. Cause it's fine to identify as Hispanic. But when you do that and you also have a white background, as far as like German and stuff like that, you're kind of dismissing that part of the family. And I do not want to do that. My mom has mentioned she dislikes it a little bit that most of us recognize our Hispanic side more than our German part. And so I try to

point out that I am mixed and I do have both sides to me. My aunts and uncles have also interracially married. My aunt on my mother's side married a white guy. My uncles married African Americans. On my mother's side they married some Mexican. But generally when someone asks, I'll say Hispanic, if they want a quick one, or like to fill out a form. I know that I have seen the multi-racial category on forms. The thing with that is a lot of people who see that maybe getting to think black and white parents, because you're getting into the whole minority, you know, whatever racial thing. They always assume that you're talking about African Americans and stuff like that.

In high school, there were white people that didn't believe I was Mexican. I remember when I was applying for the HEIS and had to get permission, a teacher's permission to leave school that day. So I went up in front of the class and asked, "can you sign this for me?" I was asked where I was going, and I said that I had to go for the scholarship, and he responded, "what for?" I'm like, "it's like a scholarship for minorities." And like "what minority are you?" "Oh, I'm Hispanic." And they're like, "no, your not." And I'm like, "yes, I am." And they're like, "no you're not." And I'm like, "yeah." "Your name is Romero." And I'm like, "yeah." And they proceeded to tell me that I'm too light, and that I don't really look Mexican, and that I don't really speak Spanish that well, and I don't have an accent. This was a kid. I never have had an administrator blatantly say, "no, you're not." But the students who say that are also very prejudiced. But at the same time, that hurts a little bit. Especially when you sit there and they call me a liar. And then, you know, I've had friends

that never really thought of me as Mexican, and so they'd tell jokes that are a little derogatory. And, you know, sometimes in high school you just let it fly. And other times you speak up, and I spoke up.

I wish I had more Spanish. I wish I had an easier time picking it up. I wish I had more exposure to it when I was a child, because if you're exposed to it as a child, you pick it up easier if you want it. But I was never exposed to it. I was English, you know, the entire way. My sisters have picked it up and are hard core. But my father's parents didn't speak Spanish with him that much, even though they were fluent. Because at the time everyone was trying to fit in. That's my theory, you know. Mexican family moves into neighborhood. Most of the people speak English there. You don't want your child to suffer so you teach your child English. I mean, if my dad were to go to school and, you know, break out into Spanish, every once in awhile, anything like that, he may get teased or he may get picked on. So, they wanted him speaking English. They wanted the child to have a good time, you know --everything to fit in with the country. My mother feels that my grandparents should have tried some English. Because of their grandkids. And they couldn't speak to it. And she is very much into family and stuff like that. So she could not fathom the concept of not being able to speak to a member of your family, like her grandchild.

At school, people do come up to me and start in Spanish, thinking that I know it. And so, I'm sitting there and a lot of times, I'm not that good at it yet. I don't pick it up as well. You have to speak real small and it has to be like the textbook cause slang screws me up hard core. And so a lot of times, they'll look at me and see

me confused as sin. And uhm, I swear a lot, so I tried to cut back when I find people who might be offended by it. So they'll look and they go, "I'm sorry, I forget, you don't really speak Spanish." I think more times than that, especially back in Saginaw, where most people don't think I'm Hispanic.

As far as traditions, my mom is the one that tries to maintain the Hispanic traditions like the Christmas music or Posadas, making tamales at Christmas time. If it was up to the rest of the family, including my father, they would never do anything. Every year we do that. And last year it was in danger of not being done because like my father's brother and his wife weren't really interested. And my other aunt and uncle weren't really interested in it. I mean, they hardly do the work. My mother always does, like the preparing before. And you know, the only thing that they do is they come and spread families together. And she found a Mexican Christmas song Feliz Navidad by Jose Feliciano. I also have some German traditions that we still keep because my mom doesn't want to lose her background either. We have this advent calendar every Christmas and we have this tradition of hiding the pickle in the tree.

I've grown up with no religious background and therefore, I'm not religious at all. Although my mother isn't Catholic, she converted because of my dad. She tried to be good, but she really wasn't into it. So she said to my father, for me to get up and take your children when you're the only one who really cares, is pointless. If you want your children to have this strong religious background, you're going to have to get them up, you're going to have to dress them, take them to school, to church. And my father didn't. My mother doesn't believe in religion, but believes in being a good

person. And that's the key point.

WMU was the only school I had applied to. I have visited GVSU and U of M and MSU many times because of my sisters and friends, but decided to come to WMU, which was largely due to my sister coming here first. I owe a lot to my sister. She had been here for three years. Well, this is her fourth year and so I've been coming here for that much time, so I know this campus probably best of all.

I'm clueless about my major. I am interested in the humanities, although I started out with a math or business. But I am not worried about it because my sisters didn't have a major picked out either when they started college. I mean college doesn't guarantee a job. It guarantees a different experience. It owes me the education.

In my first semester I ended up with a 3.2 G.P.A. In my second semester, I'm not so sure because of physics. I had the opportunity to take many classes different from home. I went to high school every day going, "I hate this, I hate this, I hate this." I mean, the teachers were jerks half the time. I didn't like anybody, any, you know, the teachers that much. Well, I think it has a lot to do with the city of Saginaw. I feel it is a pretty conservative town. I mean, I had favorite teachers and stuff that I liked and talked to, but none of them really steered me in any direction. I also hang out with a diverse group of friends. My roommate is African American and I have taken two of Ben Wilson's classes in the Black Americana Studies Department.

Regarding Latino or Hispanic issues, there is nothing on this campus. The little that there is, people tend to think about. Like what I was saying, and I think a

lot of us keep thinking about minority issues as a black issue. Most people think about it in those terms. Cause back in Saginaw, it was. Because I lived in the township; I didn't really live in the city. And I think the city is more like involved and wrapped, you know, in stuff like that. But in the township, it's basically white suburbanites. And for the people who move out of the city, and try to fit in with the people that are there. And so, a lot of times, the culture and stuff like that isn't really there. Like I didn't get any exposure.

There was one student who transferred from WMU, to another university. She mentioned that a frustration she had with the university and HSO was that they were not involved in political activism and that the group seemed passive. I remember her mentioning to me that the coordinator of Hispanic programming on her campus saw her as too radical. I believe that there are also many differences between me and the other Hispanics from Texas with their language and their traditions. When I look at the Texas people, I love it when they speak, when they talk about their culture or stuff like that. But at the same time, I can see where they have like the old way of thinking. Cause like I can call myself a bit of a feminist. I can't concern myself because I still have tendencies that are sexist when I was a kid. But I grew up as far as, you know, sexism and stuff like that. I was a pervert basically in my eyes. And so, I will be sitting down and talking with Adolfo as an example, and he'll be like "ah, there's a pretty chick over there." And I'm like, "watch it, buddy." And he'll use like the "B" word. And I'll be like, "Wow! Stop right there, all right?" And he'll go, "Babe," and I'm like, "no, you've got to cut that out." And the same with Horacio.

For next year, I want to change my classes, friends and HSO. I want to be more involved in my classes, do more outreach with different friends and be more involved with HSO. Last semester, I really didn't go out and meet the people that I wanted, you know. I don't know. For some reason I thought it would just happen naturally, and everything was going to be okay when it didn't happen naturally. I don't remember how, but, you know, some of my best friends now are. I just want to enjoy it more. Cause I went through this first year, and it was fun, I loved it. But it was all new. Everything was brand new. I came from Saginaw, came here, freedom, you know. When I headed back to Saginaw, my parents were pretty much confusing me. But come here, you know, it's a different freedom that I had. And so next year, I want to, I want to have these years as an experience, you know. I'm coming back with no preconceived ideas of what's going to happen, you know, cause I just went through it. And so, next year I want to just do what I screwed up this year and just enjoy everything more you know. This way, I'll enjoy classes more, I'll enjoy people more and enjoy HSO more and everything, you know. I don't know, more fun, I guess. The only way is get near it and grab it.

The Michigan/Texas Cohort

Profile of Rocio

Rocio was not one of the students recruited from Texas through the TRI Scholarship Program because she graduated from a high school in Michigan.

Although she was born and raised in Texas, her family members were migrant farm workers who seasonally worked in Michigan and returned to Texas. Rocio graduated from Hartford High School in Michigan, but she felt more culturally connected to Texas. Consequently, I invited her to outings and other events that TRI scholars were invited to. She eventually became quite connected to the Texas group and was often confused as a TRI scholar. Initially, I did not plan to include her in the study, but with her interest and those of friends, she became the Michigan/Texas cohort.

After talking with Rocio, I realized that she offered a perspective that was unique from those of the other cohorts. She had experienced living in both Texas and Michigan environments and understood and shared some of the socio-cultural differences of living both in a predominant Hispanic environment like in Texas where she was numerically in the majority, and simultaneously attending a small, predominantly white, rural high school in Michigan where she was a minority because of being a migrant, and also because there were significantly fewer Mexican Americans living in that area compared to Texas.

When I first met her, she was very shy and conservative in how she viewed the world. She had long, dark braids that went all the way down to her waist. She dressed quite conservatively with long skirts, bulky sweaters, and/or long-sleeve shirts, and no make-up. I later discovered that much of her conservative look and demeanor had much more to do with her religious upbringing rather than her ethnic culture. Nevertheless, this image changed in her second semester.

A shy, conservative student was transformed into a more up-to-date, trendy

young woman. She wore make-up, she cut her hair and wore jeans for the very first time. Someone who seldom dated began dating a man who was significantly older than her. Much of this change I attributed to her desire to break away from her traditional upbringing. Also, she was influenced by her other friends from Texas who talked her into making a change.

My relationship with Rocio was one of care, but there was still distance. Other than attending some of my home gatherings with other students and some other activities, we did not see or talk to each other much. I would ask her how things were going and she always responded fine, but we never found the opportunity to sit down and talk. I do not believe she saw me as a person that she could come to in times of need, other than when she needed help filling out the financial aid and income tax forms.

It was not until I scheduled the informal conversations the second semester that I began to learn about her. We met three times, and I found her to be a delightful storyteller. The way she spoke and some of the idioms she used were quite different from the rest of the Texas cohort. She was bilingual, but she had a way of combining her Spanish and English words in the same sentence. For example, she would start in English and then finish the sentence in Spanish. Or sometimes, she would switch off and on in the same sentence. While difficult to initially understand, I found the sounds to be melodic and rhythmic. Of all the stories shared in this study, I found her's to be the most illustrative and descriptive of her life. I seldom asked questions or intervened, and let her talk. At one point in our conversations she even described herself

as a storyteller who enjoyed telling stories to children and adults. She was involved in one group interview and two individual interviews. I always found that she had the ability to speak of herself as if she was painting a picture of her life, which I share with you below.

Rocio in Her Own Words

Mi (my) mom was born and raised in Mexico and my dad was born in Texas. My dad comes from a large family of fourteen brothers and sisters, while my mom comes from a smaller family which lost twin brothers. My parents met in high school in the tenth grade, but neither finished high school. Although my mother wanted to finish, my dad always hated school. They got married fairly early. My dad has spent most of his life working in the fields as a migrant, primarily in the spring and summer, but also has other side jobs like carpentry, fixing cars, and security guard. But not my mom, who worked in a factory. My dad always gave me and my other two sisters the option to finish school, but if we didn't, we had no choice but to work in the fields. My dad is a migrant because his father was also one. My father remembers working and giving all of his earnings to his father and wanted to do the same with us daughters, but my mother said no, that we had worked hard and deserved to keep some of the money.

I was born in South Haven, Michigan. As a migrant, the family spent half of the year in Texas and the other in Michigan. In Michigan, for years they have been going to one migrant camp, Bruce Hout, which is an orchard in Hartford. He's a big

ranchero (rancher). Mi dad tanto que tiene alli (he's been there so long), he'll go anywhere. He'll ask my father where he wants to work? He calls him Joe, instead of Joel, and my dad will choose where he wants to work. In Texas, he's a security guard, and a mechanic. And so where we live, it's like on a hill. Estan las houses for the families (There are houses for the families), and on the bottom estan las chiquitas houses (there are the little houses) like where all the guys and todos los men que no traen a las familias live (where all the single men and those without their wives live). And that is where all the guys get together, but my dad doesn't want us around there. He also makes houses.

Now, I have been part of this rancho since I was one, though I say I'm from Texas. I've lived six months in Michigan and sixth months in Texas, but where I have my home is in Texas, and my family and relatives. I also have relatives from both my mom and dad's side that live in Mexico. I identify as Hispanic. But I say that my parents, well, my parent's ancestry is from Mexico. But I consider myself Hispanic. I know there are some Mexicans that sometimes want to think that they are U.S. citizens. Because where I've been working at, los Mexicanos que yo he conocido y Mexicanas que han nacido en (the Mexicans that I know and the Mexican women that are born in) Mexico, they tend to act like they were born here. We're like se quieren creer (they want to think that they are better). Like, they're all like, they wear clothes that have name brands and stuff, and mom's like, "son de Mexico. Estaban en el rancho. Pa que se quieren hacer algo que no son?" (They are from Mexico. They lived on the ranch. Why do they want to be something that they're not?)

I think that because we're born here, we forget. Like we weren't born in Mexico. Even though some may not want to claim their Mexican heritage because they might be considered wetback--not all Mexicans came illegally to this country. The mojados (wetbacks) are those that actually cross the river. But not all go through the river--some people just go through the bridge. The Texans don't want to give them the same opportunities. Sometimes you can tell if they are a mojado by the way they act, and sometimes the clothes they wear, and how they talk, y las manners que tienen. Some of the guys that work in the migrant camp tienen que arreglar sus papers (they have to get their papers ready so that they don't get deported). My dad has taken some of them to Chicago to get fake papers. Sometimes you have to be so careful with your papers because they take them out of the houses, que se los llevan (they will steal them) or something.

I'm used to Western because when I lived in Hartford there were only three hundred students in the school. I had Anglo friends and the majority in Michigan were my friends. And then when I got to Texas and then everybody over there is majority, Mexican or Hispanic. My dad gets along with Anglos because he was raised in Michigan, and was used to going to school with Anglos. If you ask my dad who would you want to associate with, he would say, "I associate con los (with the) Anglos." In the field, they are all Hispanics, but the foremen are usually Anglo. One time we were detassling the corn and we saw a bunch of white average students in the fields. I realized that they were there as a summer job. But for the fun, they win prizes. The guys weren't even wearing shirts because they're getting sun tans. But

here todos los Mexicanos (all the Mexicans) are covered. They are doing it for fun and getting all these prizes, and I'm here doing it for work. They are not working the way we do. Because they only work for a number of hours. They wouldn't work in the rain. You know, we would have to work in the rain. Some things were not the same. They get perfect attendance, they get a Walkman.

We always have been migrants and come to Michigan and Texas. We always lived in trailas (trailers), but my Dad is working on a house in Texas. My dad in his early years worked in Wyoming and North Dakota. But my Mom got tired of going far away, so we just went to Michigan. I don't like it that you work so many hours for very little. And it's hard work. And it should be paid like a little bit higher than what is paid. On the other hand, sometimes I think being a migrant, you get more opportunities like scholarship, going to school, but maybe it's so that they won't be migrants anymore.

I like traveling. But que se me queda en my mind (one thing that I think about) when I was younger was one time my sister was crying and so was I. We were crying because we were working in the mud and through the rain. And I was thinking that if I stay like this, we're going to be always like this. But if I go to college, I can help my family. Paca que no hagan (so they don't have to do this). I'll help my sisters que no anden haciendo esto (so they are not doing this) kind of work. Se queda en la mente tambien like yo no quiero (Like it stays in your brain that you don't want to anymore), I don't want to be a migrant worker. I mean, we haven't told our parents like, we don't want to be like you, like migrant workers, but we don't want to be

migrant workers anymore. But that is good in a way because even my mom doesn't-- she knows that is not a good life for us. In my senior year, I didn't want to leave school between seasons. My middle sister Jennifer felt the same way and she convinced my parents that she wanted to finish school in Texas. My father is also tired. He is tired of the seasons and the harsh winter this last year. They don't believe the picking is going to be as good. That is why my mother is saying that they should stay in Texas and work in the bodega (the convenience store).

One of the stereotypes that people have of migrants or Mexicans is that they are lazy. Some say they are hardworking. Also, they are frijoles (beans). That they're dried up beans because they are working in the fields; when they're old and they're real dark y bien (and real) wrinkled because of the sun. Some say that they spend it on alcohol and they drink. They are borrachos (drunkards), they have too many kids, and that's not always true. That they're not smart enough. But I never went through this stereotype of not being smart. But we and other Hispanics are smart. In class, I was always known as the one that got A's in math. You know, the teachers would get the papers and she would say out loud, "who got an A?" And so everybody knew that I'd be one that got the A's.

One time our family experienced some prejudices in a grocery store in Coloma, Michigan. We were in the cashier line and the lady just started to give us bad looks. And she started banging the cans and other foods together as they were going down the line. I was shocked. We paid, left, but my dad was like, "sea la ultima vez que nos vamos en esa tienda que le hacemos comercio" (may that be the last time that we

go into that store and do business with them). He was like, we should have gone to the manager. But they didn't, they didn't go. Mi dad said que cuando ellos trabajan todavia (My dad says it still happens). I know que (that) it's not everywhere, but si hay todavia prejudice (there still is prejudice). We have experienced prejudices here more than over there in Texas because in Texas everybody es asi (is that way). Everybody is either Hispanic or Mexican.

My mom still makes her traditional Mexican dishes and doesn't want us to forget the tradition because my future husband won't be happy. I do have male cousins that cook, but if I would have had a brother, my dad would have taken him away from the kitchen and had him do other things. My mom has tried to help us to not forget our roots. She took us back to Mexico where she grew up and we went to this little house. It was real little. The floor was dirt, de esa straw (of straw). It was smaller than this room. I remember the cold shower in the morning. Either we really had to wait a long time for the water to calentarse (to warm up), porque la calientan en ovenes (because they heat it in ovens). There's no electricity. We made the tortillas in the comal (cooking dish) right on a big mound of dirt. We ate a lot of eggs and beans that summer because there were chickens everywhere in the house and they just dropped their eggs everywhere. We also ate flores blancas (white flowers) and palmas (Mexican vegetable), nopales (Mexican vegetable), goat and its blood.

I graduated from Hartford High School. I believe that the school systems in high school are better in Michigan. I have more opportunities as a migrant by getting the scholarship and other services. My mom always told me that being around your

own people doesn't necessarily mean that they are going to take care of you better. I feel that I got a lot more help from Anglo teachers and counselors than Hispanics in Texas.

Going to college was not in my parent's plans, but they saw college as another alternative to migrant life. My parents recognized that the struggle has been hard and that employment as a farm laborer was not easy. My parents also remember the time when the secretary of the farm que da los cheques (who hands out the checks) said "oh, look at the little girls; one day they're going to be working here too." They realized that they didn't want to be doing this. So eso tambien se les quedó a mi (So that too stayed on the minds of my) mom and dad. All of my friends went to college except my best friend who got married. They all stayed in Texas and ended up going to Pan Am University. I left Texas because I wanted to get away from the family. Not within my family, but family outside. Like there are a lot of chismes (gossip) that goes on. I didn't really look at a lot of colleges except Pan Am. There were some thoughts about going to San Marcos, Texas but WMU offered me a better scholarship.

At college the first semester, I felt so isolated. I missed my parents a lot, although I like being myself over here. It's nice not having to see the same faces or hear the same problems. Because in Texas there's always like problems, family problems. Chismes (gossip) and it's not like here--there's nothing like that. Just my homework, my friends, and that's it. I helped my family by sending my work study checks to help pay the phone bills and pay off the truck.

First semester, I didn't hang out with many people. I was primarily involved in my studying. I never saw my roommate. So, most of the time I spent it alone in my room. I don't like the food in the dorms. Regarding classes, my first semester I struggled with some of my classes like anthropology and pre-calculus. During my second semester, I struggled with chemistry. Faculty weren't too helpful, and I found that the classes were larger than in high school and the faculty go very fast. They don't try to explain too much sometimes. There is a lot more work expected from you in college than in high school. In high school you get homework and you finish it very quickly. Overall, I received a 2.8 GPA and still think I could have done better. My first semester I felt so isolated and was real serious. No me reia tanto (I didn't laugh that much) last semester, as I do this semester. I am more open to people cause I now have a lot of friends that I did not have before, and of different races. That is not the way it was when I came here first. I also missed my family and wanted to go home. The first semester I cried every week and missed mostly my mom, cause she and I are real close. We talk about the same things. This semester, I do cry, but I haven't cried like maybe one time every three weeks. Also, it helped going to Texas during spring break with the Admissions which helped me hang out with the Texas students. I hang out mostly now with Elsa, Pamela and Sonora.

Sometimes I do feel like a minority in my classes. Cause sometimes I'm the only one. Like I'm Hispanic, but there are not too many here on campus because I see other students. I see a lot of Whites, but I also see Japanese, like other countries. So, I'm not the only one. I might be the minority, but there are more minorities too. So

we're like all together. I don't ever remember feeling uncomfortable on campus because of my race. But I do remember one time at the Red Arrow School where the students would be watching us like, "look at them," but we would also be watching them too and felt kind of uncomfortable because they were looking at us too. But I know they felt uncomfortable because we were looking at them too. But I hang out with different friends. In high school yo me juntaba con (I would hang out with) Anglos. And my Hispanic friends would ask me "por que té juntas con ellos" (why do you hang out with them)? And I'm like, porque no se juntan todos (why can't we all hang out)? I'm like, pues, son (well, they) are just friends. And they're like "ay, see that gringo, ay, mira como se ha portado" (see that Gringo look like how he behaves). To me they are just my friends. But at Western, sometimes because of first impressions, you won't talk to them. Like I didn't have a problem getting along, but it was something new for me with African Americans. Like you hear stories about people, African Americans, and you're like, "it is true?" Like with Japanese, they are all white. But I've been more with African Americans, and I wasn't used to that. I would tell my mom that I needed some friends, but I wasn't sure about hanging out with African Americans because it's different the way they act. With my family, comments are made about Anglos more than other groups. But they will refer to the African Americans de los de color (those that are black)

There are similarities between Mexicans from Michigan and those from Texas, but there are also some differences. Like in Mexico, there are some different traditions. For example, during Christmas in Mexico there is a tradition of kissing baby

Jesus. They give candy to the children and they return the gift with a kiss to baby Jesus. When I went down there the first time, my sisters and I did not know this and ran off with the candy. I believe that there are also differences with being raised in a Mexican family versus an Anglo family. My dad was more strict with me and the rest. My father doesn't want to know about any guys that I meet or date. He's only interested in the guy that I will marry one day. My mom behaves in a different way and wants to know everything. Overall, I also see some similarities too with Mexicans and Anglos. It is just different in how they celebrate, for example, Christmas.

My goal is to be a teacher and tell stories to the children.

The demographics for the students in all three cohorts are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Table 1
Demographics for the Texas Cohort

	Ethnic Identity	Migrant	Income	Language	High School	GPA/ACT	WMU Award	WMU GPA
1. Horacio	Mexican	No	Low	Bilingual	Weslaco	3.49/18	Yes	3.18/2.0
2. Adolfo	Mexican American	No	Low	Bilingual	Weslaco	4.0/15	Yes	3.44/3.20
3. Gardenia	Mexican	Yes	Low	Bilingual	Weslaco	3.39/15	Yes	2.00/2.00
4. Tania	Mexican	Yes	Low-Middle	Bilingual	Weslaco	3.36/15	Yes	2.56/1.86
5. Carolina	Angla	No	Low	English	Weslaco	3.3.0/18	Yes	0.00/0.00
6. Elsa	Mexican American	No	Low	Bilingual	Weslaco	3.5/NA	Yes	2.88/2.63
7. Pamela	Mexican American	No	Low	Bilingual	Weslaco	3.56/19	Yes	3.25/2.00
8. Sonora	Hispanic	No	Low	English	Weslaco	3.07/16	Yes	1.96/1.38
9. Noria	Mexican	Yes	Low-Middle	Bilingual	Weslaco	3.50/15	Yes	1.69.2.13
10. Melissa	Hispanic	No	Low	Bilingual	Rio Grande	3.76/20	Yes	2.65/2.63

Table 2
Demographics for the Michigan Cohort

	Ethnic Identity	Migrant	Income	Language	High School	GPA/ACT	WMU Award	WMU GPA
1. Romero	Mexican/German	No	Low-Middle	English	Arthur Hill	3.69/24	Yes	3.20/2.97
2. Domingo	Hispanic	No	Middle	English	Holt	4.16/22	Yes	3.32/4.0
3. Maria	Angla	No	Middle	English	Grenville	3.78/27	Yes	2.93/3.21
4. Margarita	Hispanic/German	No	Middle	English	Portage C.	2.86/21	No	2.17/2.25
5. Antonia	Angla	No	Low	English	Adrian	3.0/23	Yes	2.75/2.00
6. Josefa	Mexican American	No	Low	English	Southwestern	2.93/15	No	2.33/2.00
7. Rolando	Mexican American	No	High Middle	Bilingual	Fenville	2.94/20	No	3.57/3.20
8. Federica	Mexican	No	High Middle	Bilingual	Mendon	3.46/23	Yes	2.63/3.38
9. Veronica	Hispanic/Angla	No	Low-Middle	English	Everett	3.5/25	Yes	3.75/3.66
10. Nutra	Mexican/Puerto Rican	No	Low-Middle	Bilingual	Union	2.33/20	No	0.00/1.40
11. Catarina	Hispanic/Angla	No	Low-Middle	English	Muskegon	4.17/24	Yes	3.60/3.73

Table 3

Demographics for the Michigan/Texas Cohort

	Ethnic Identity	Migrant	Income	Language	High School	GPA/ACT	WMU Award	WMU GPA
1. Rocio	Mexican American	Yes	Low	Bilingual	Hartford, MI	3.84/21	Yes	2.86,2/09

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, THEMES AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the lives and experiences of a select group of freshmen of Mexican descent attending a predominantly white campus in the Midwest. It was designed to contribute to the existing literature on the socio-cultural complexity of college freshmen of Mexican descent; and also, to further understand how their experiences and cultural backgrounds effect their transition from high school and acculturation to a college environment. As a result of the researcher's theoretical and methodological interests, topics presented in Chapter III served as a guide to examine the following: (a) cultural identity and the role it plays in the lives of these students, (b) the importance of parents' background and upbringing, (c) the role of students' high school in preparing them for their transition, (d) the function of racism, (e) the role of the institution and whether students felt silenced and deligitimized politically and socio-culturally due to their identities, and (f) the intra and inter socio-cultural differences that exist with these cohorts and how it impacts students' adaptation to college.

Moreover, I also sought to understand and further contribute to the current literature on feminist materialism and critical ethnographic research. One way was examining more naturalistically the methodological and ethical dilemmas that field researchers experience while doing qualitative research and how it impacts their

findings. Because I was an involved observer, being a Latina, an administrator, and an advocate for these students, I was interested in how balancing these multiple roles as both an insider and outsider influenced the observation, collection and interpretation of these students' voices.

This chapter presents themes that emerged from both the theoretical and empirical data, and conclusions of the issues informing this study.

Struggle for Identity

Identity is an interrelated problem of self-recognition and recognition by others (Calhoun, 1994). Calhoun further claims that identities are often personal and political projects in which "we participate, empowered to greater or lesser extents by resources of experience and ability, culture and social organization" (p. 28). In this study, students debunked the essentialist notion that individuals can have "singular, integral, altogether harmonious and unproblematic identities" (Calhoun, 1994, p. 28). As a social constructionist, in this study I challenged social scientists who define collective identities, as founded on some common socio-cultural characteristics shared by all members of the collectivity.

In this study, certainly the students' responses did confirm that common characteristics exist, which identified them as being of Mexican descent. For example, respect for elders and family, being hard-working, language, belief and practice of particular traditions (i.e., quinceañeras), and the importance of family were mentioned. All students understood as well the importance of family unity and

respect. Even the student who had undergone a very trying and abusive childhood, recognized how a strong traditional family had been absent in her childhood and was still absent. Some commented that one of the big differences that they saw in their Anglo friends was the lack of respect that Anglos had for their families. The Michigan cohort in particular shared that their Anglos friends expressed little to no interest in visiting their parents and being aware of what their parents were doing. Some also commented that “familia” meant more than just the immediate family. It included the aunts, uncles, and cousins as they were all very involved in their lives.

Nonetheless, the findings in this study demonstrated as well that enough significant inter and intra cultural group disparity did exist to make it difficult to categorize any one student under any one cultural label or collective. In fact, while the majority of these students acknowledged their Mexican ancestry and pride, nevertheless, because of their complex socio-cultural make-up, they sustained a struggle with how they chose and wanted others to culturally define them. This volatile state of identity was highly influenced by their cultural upbringing and other environmental factors which included: generational level, acculturation, community, language, and parents’ cultural background and practice. Therefore, general cultural traits could be associated with the Texas and Michigan/Texas cohorts versus the Michigan cohort. As they entered college, they became further exposed to other socio-cultural and environmental factors that challenged them in both negative and positive ways, and were reflected in their stories.

These students did not perceive themselves as one collective identity that

shared similar characteristics. Instead, they represent complex, multiple identities with problems of recognition that postmodernist researchers interested in racially-mixed people and the politics of identity are trying to further examine to contribute to social theories of cultural identities. Because they are often misunderstood this creates for many an internal frustration that is often manifested in poor academic performance, isolation and the inability to acculturate to a predominantly white institution.

Cultural Identification

To assess the cultural identity of each cohort and individual, I included the following socio-cultural factors: cultural loyalty and awareness, language, generational level, ethnic social orientation, and parents' heritage. I also included acculturation that I argue influences highly how these students culturally identified, and which is a social force that is often not chosen but imposed by the larger society.

Cultural loyalty, acknowledgement of one's ethnicity, is a salient issue regardless of their acculturation and/or cultural adaptation (Arbona et al., 1995). However, cultural awareness is a deeper understanding, ownership and practice of one's customs, values and traditions which includes: language preference, ethnic social orientation, cultural identification, and parents' cultural heritage and practice. Therefore, one can chose to identify as Hispanic without necessarily feeling tightly connected and immersed in traditional Mexican ways and beliefs.

The findings in this study support Lamare's (1982) argument that

generational distance does influence cultural loyalty and awareness. I found that the students of second and third generations least preferred the "Mexican" label in this study. Buriel and Cardoza (1993) also found in their study that generic labels, such as Hispanic and Latino/a, were not often used by students and parents, especially in areas where there was a concentration of historically Mexican people which included a large percent of recent migrants from Mexico.

It was evident that geographic location and generational level did effect their loyalty to and awareness of their heritage. For example, the Texas cohort primarily identified as Mexican or Mexican American. Those that chose to identify as Mexican were born and raised in Mexico. All of them had residences in both Mexico and the United States. Those that identified as Mexican American were first and second generation U.S. citizens.

Only three students identified themselves as Hispanic. Though one recognized her Mexican heritage, she also understood the multicultural make-up of her ethnic roots which were Indian, Spanish and German. They also lived in towns where close to 100 percent of the population were of Mexican descent. The findings in this study did not exclusively support Buriel and Cardoza's conclusions. Therefore, I concluded that geographic location and cultural density may be influential in determining ones' cultural awareness, but other determining factors exist that may be more influential, such as acculturation and parents' cultural background and upbringing.

Overwhelmingly, these students had a clearer understanding of their parents'

birthplace and generational level. Most of the students' parents were born and raised in Mexico. In other cases, one parent was from Mexico and the other was first generation Mexican-American. One of the students was insistent that she would not identify as Mexican because neither she nor her parents were born and raised in Mexico. She was second generation and understood better than the rest of the group the interracial mixing that existed with her grandparents and great grandparents.

The Texas and Michigan/Texas cohorts did have a stronger cultural awareness and affiliation to their heritage compared to the Michigan cohort. I also found that significant intra variability existed with levels of commitment. Over half of these students claimed their Mexican identity and Mexico as their birthplace, and therefore, they felt no cultural attachment to Anglo culture. Traditional holidays, music, meals, language, family lineage, and Mexican community contacts were all important to their identity.

Less than half claimed Texas as their native state and birthplace, and identified as Hispanics. The students in this group were either first or second generation. One of the students did not want to claim her Mexican or Hispanic identity, but did understand what it meant to be Mexican because she dated a girl who was Mexican. She defined the culture in the context of the quinceañera and the strictness in the way her girlfriend was raised.

Although cultural awareness was different for these students, overall the Texas cohort stressed the importance of traditions (e.g., La Posada, Dia de los Muertos [Day of the Dead], and quinceañeras), family, and respect for their elders.

Many commented about the strictness of their parents and that chaperons were not a thing of the past if women wanted to date. It was also mentioned that their families had a strong work ethic and that they too were raised with this attitude—this value was particularly stressed with those students that had a migrant background. Over half claimed to be religious (i.e., Catholic), mentioned that God was a major support for them, and went to church regularly. Yet, less than half participated in a religious student organization. The same student who identified herself as a lesbian was also an atheist. I speculated that her rejection of a religious or spiritual deity may have partially been in response to her culture rejecting her.

On the other hand, the students from the Michigan cohort had a different cultural understanding and practice of their heritage(s). The majority did indicate that they preferred the “Mexican American” label. Again, based on Buriel and Vasquez findings, how they chose to culturally label themselves could be attributed to living in towns and cities (i.e., Detroit, Fennville) with a significant population of Mexican Americans. They felt more connected to their Mexican roots and explained their culture in the context of the foods they ate at home, the religious traditions that they practiced during the holidays, and the interest in Mexican music and dance. These same students saw their mothers’ and/or grandmothers’ Mexican cooking as a symbol of “holding on” to the tradition. However, Federica, who was born and raised in Mexico yet lived in Mendon, a predominantly white community, identified as Mexican and kept her Mexican citizenry. She defined America as having no culture other than apple pie and baseball in contrast to Mexico that did have

“culture”. She defined Mexican culture as “a way of life” and some of the examples she used were how the family would always get together, whether it was Sunday playing cards or other social events. She also stressed the importance of the quinceañeras in her culture, and showed me on video how she celebrated her’s.

However, the majority of the students did not live in a predominantly Mexican environment. Close to half of the cohort lived in cities with a concentration of people of Mexican descent, such as Saginaw, Grand Rapids and Lansing. Over half of these students claimed multicultural heritage (e.g., German and Mexican, Puerto Rican and Mexican, or Anglo and Mexican) and they were not satisfied with being identified as Hispanic or Latino/a. They also found it important to recognize both their mother and father’s cultural heritages, and not just their Mexican heritage. For example, Romero talked about the importance of celebrating both his German and Mexican heritages during the Christmas holidays. One common German tradition they practiced was trying to find the pickel in the Christmas tree. For others, specific examples were not shared regarding practice of customs, but they acknowledged the diversity of their cultural make-up. Their comments support the current literature (Root, 1992) on biracial and/or bicultural identities that acknowledges that children of these families are taking a more active role in dismantling accepted social definitions and categories. While there is limited documentation on how biracial or bicultural college adults cope with their heritages, and in this case how they transition to a college campus, I found that the majority of these students were very comfortable with acknowledging both heritages.

Most of these students' fathers were of Mexican descent and were second generation; their mothers were of Anglo Saxon descent. In three cases, the students claimed their mother's German heritage and in one case the freshman's mother was both white and Indian. One student responded that her father was of Mexican descent and her mother Puerto Rican, but she claimed her Mexican heritage because people saw her as looking Mexican and because her husband was Mexican.

The presence of racially mixed students and acknowledgment of such a reality in this study further supports Root (1992) and others' work on racially mixed people in America. These researchers claim that the increasing presence of multiracial people necessitates an increasing understanding of new meaning and new racial and cultural categories that portrays their reality and does not continue to silence them under traditional political categories created by social structures such as school systems, including higher education.

Overall, it was difficult for the Michigan students to express their interpretation of culture, and more difficult to define what it meant to be of Mexican descent and/or Hispanic. Responses regarding cultural understanding and identification ranged from having little to no understanding of what it means to be a traditional person of Mexican descent to those that felt attached to their culture. Again, this supports Lamare's argument that with successive generations there is a greater disconnection with the core values and norms that form traditional Mexican American culture. Also, Arbona et al. (1995) demonstrate that as the generational level increases, an individual's language preference, ethnic social orientation and

social pride decrease, but ethnic loyalty remain relatively stable from the second to fourth generations. The responses of the majority of these students support Arbona et al.'s findings.

Overall, those who had a limited understanding or did not speak Spanish still had a sincere appreciation and they found ways to immerse themselves by either learning Spanish or taking classes in high school. Some pursued a Spanish minor or major while in college. Concurrently, some of the students became involved in the Hispanic Student Organization (HSO) and in the Latina sorority as a way to connect with their heritage or learn more about it. One student recognized that his older sisters had become fluent while taking Spanish classes in college and had even decided to concentrate their careers on working with Hispanics. Three students did not feel the need or did not have the time to connect with any Latino(a) organizations or become involved with the community in any way. Their lack of involvement though could be attributed to their busy schedules.

In one case, however, the student's mother was of Mexican-American descent and her father was Anglo. The student claimed that her mother was very connected to her heritage and made frequent visits to Mexico and Texas to visit her family. However, she argued that there were no traditions, Mexican meals or other customs that the family practiced at home. Only in two instances did the students share more specifically their mothers' ethnic heritage. Three of the students in the cohort had Mexican parents who insisted that their children understand the customs and traditions. However, in all cases none of the students spoke Spanish.

I found that in their discussions of cultural identity, several of the Michigan students wanted to be viewed as Americans. This was partly attributed to the lack of cultural understanding and reinforcement, and the belief that being an American meant being Anglo. There were others who did not feel comfortable with the label minority because they interpreted it as subordinate or inferior to other people. For example, in one of her conversations Maria stated: "I don't want to be considered a minority. Physically, I don't look [like a] minority. The only thing that makes me a minority is my surname." Another student commented: "I don't want to be treated as the token Hispanic." Yet another student shared, "I don't feel like a minority. If I would have grown up in Texas, maybe I would have felt more like a minority." There were others that felt more American than Hispanic, even though their parents were both of Mexican descent. Domingo mentioned in one conversation that he felt like an Americanized Hispanic because he hung out more with Anglos than Hispanics.

According to many of these students' comments, it felt more comfortable to be American than Hispanic because they hung out more with Anglo friends than Hispanic. Also, they recognized that they did not know the "traditional" Mexican customs. Initially in the study, this did not seem problematic, particularly with their Anglo acquaintances. Maria, who wanted nothing to do with being Mexican, did endure her Anglo friends questioning why she was not more verbal about her Hispanic background, particularly when she had checked the ethnic box on her application. Nevertheless, in most cases, I found that their struggle for identity at

times was influenced by how Hispanics or Latinos/as perceived them—in many cases as not pure or traditional.

While some were not at all interested in seeking a clearer cultural understanding of what it meant to be Hispanic or of Mexican descent, the majority of the students demonstrated a keen interest in regaining some of their cultural history and traditions that had been lost while they were growing up. As I indicated earlier, many students were interested in keeping their heritage from further disappearing. I argue that these feelings of cultural re-vitalization could be accredited to a raising of consciousness and affirmation as they became more exposed to cultural diversity awareness and recognition by the high school and university, in contrast to the animosity experienced by their parents and grandparents.

None of the students identified themselves as Chicano and the majority did not even understand the word when it was mentioned in the conversation. One student from the Texas cohort, prior to being involved in the study, was offended that I had used the word Chicano in the title of my dissertation and she mentioned that she could not participate in the study because she did not know what it meant. Gutierrez and Hirsh (1973) found that adolescents who self identified as Chicano were more aware and critical of overt forms of institutional racism than adolescents that called themselves Mexican American. Although none of the students in this study identified themselves as Chicano, these students had different levels of understanding institutional racism. I will elaborate on these observations in a subsequent section.

Throughout this study there was an emphasis on understanding how these

students self identified. I found it interesting that, while they claimed their Mexican identity, many had a strong cultural allegiance to their sexual and feminist individuality too. Calhoun, Collins and others' writing on the politics of identity argue that people are composed of multiple collectives and that there exists dynamic tension within individuals. This was evident with the students from Texas, particularly Adolfo, Carolina, and Melissa. For example, I found Carolina who claimed her lesbian identity, had a disapproving attitude toward Mexican traditional culture, which could have been a reflection of the pain and marginalization she experienced as a lesbian. Although she identified as a Hispanic, she also recognized how those of Mexican descent responded and reacted to people like her. Her family, the church, and many friends rejected her sexual preference.

Melissa, who did not label herself a feminist, shared in many of their beliefs and found herself struggling to emancipate herself by leaving her environment and moving far away. She was highly critical of the traditional, cultural beliefs that she was indoctrinated with by her family and community.

Adolfo seemed to be determined to not let his speech impediment detract from him and his successes, which were many. However, he understood the social and cultural challenges of being physically challenged based on his struggles back home and in college. It was real, but he had learned at an early age to not allow it to create barriers for him.

Acculturation

Understanding these students' struggle for identity must also be contextualized within the socio-historical, political and economic in order to understand each group's assimilation process once they entered the U.S. Rex and Guibernau (1997) claim that for the most part migrants leave their home country due to diminished opportunities for economic prosperity and migrate to seek work. As each ethnic group or individual enters this country, they determine how much of their ethnicity they are going to sacrifice for the good of the nation state and themselves. I argue that more often than not migrants sacrifice their cultural and political identity for economic gain.

Based on the findings in this study, it was evident that all 22 students and their parents shared similar acculturation experiences once their families migrated north to the United States, or from Texas to Michigan as in the case of the Michigan students. Many of them left their families, their neighborhoods, their every-day customs to adjust to an overall lifestyle and environment that often was not receptive to people that looked or behaved differently from majority Anglos.

The students acknowledged that their families had undergone similar experiences and economic hardships which support Rex and Guibernau's (1997) argument. These students claimed that their families had migrated north to increase their financial opportunities, whether as farm laborers or factory workers--even if this meant sacrificing one's cultural heritage. These students also claimed their parents were hardworking and were trying to make a living in order to provide a better life

for them. Six of the students from Michigan discussed how their parents migrated from Texas to Michigan in search of factory jobs—all seeking improved economic opportunities. For the Texas students and the Michigan/Texas student, they also confirmed that they and their parents had left Mexico to the U.S. for economic opportunities and close to half of both of these cohorts found migrant life to be economically gratifying. However, they also shared that they and their families did encounter struggle and experienced acts of prejudice and racism from the majority, Anglo culture. Their comments supported McKee's (1989) findings where many of her respondents commented that they preferred not to move up north because of the examples of racial discrimination reported by friends and family members who had migrated--even if this meant remaining poor.

The Michigan cohort often recounted stories about their families undergoing prejudices and racism. For example, their parents and grandparents, in order to integrate quickly to the majority culture, encouraged their sons and daughters to learn English in order to not be seen as different or inferior. Some of the students mentioned that their parents and/or grandparents had been reprimanded in the schools for speaking Spanish. Therefore, the families saw speaking Spanish as negative or an impediment to their acceptance and economic progress in the U.S. One student commented, "My mom believed that learning Spanish and my culture could come later, but first we needed to fit in." Unfortunately, many of these families did not sustain Spanish in the household for their children to learn.

Students' responses repeatedly acknowledged that it was important to

graduate from college. Unquestionably, the fact that all of these students were going to college demonstrates another form of acculturation or cultural adaptation contrasted to others that chose not to leave their barrios or the Texas Valley. Based on their responses, the students felt strongly supported by their families to get a college education, particularly in so much as many of the parents had not completed a high school and/or college degree. Many saw this as a ticket to increased economic opportunities and status. However, a couple of students from both the Michigan and Texas cohorts felt that a bachelor's degree was more like a high school degree, and that they would need to pursue a post graduate degree.

Conversely, I also found differences in their levels of acculturation which were largely influenced by their association and proximity to the Mexican community, generational level, parents' cultural backgrounds, and language.

For the Michigan cohort, many of these students and their parents lived in a predominantly white, Anglo environment. They were not exposed to a lifestyle that promoted certain foods, cultural experiences and/or traditions that accentuated their Mexican ancestry. Even speaking Spanish was not promoted by their parents either in the household, with their friends, or by the community. Instead, it was more critical to their families and environment that they learn and communicate well in English. For those students that did live near the Mexican barrio, and socialized with Hispanic friends in both the community and in high school, they did have a stronger cultural connection with some aspects of their Mexican culture, and therefore, I found them less acculturated. However, in comparison to other communities, Josefa from

Detroit commented, “We are losing our culture since no one celebrates any traditions and I want to regain this.”

Although I did not further investigate how being born and raised in a racially mixed environment influences one’s acculturation process and cultural identity, I speculate that this phenomenon of being multiracial or multicultural, particularly if either parent is white Anglo/a, increases one’s acculturation process to the dominant culture. I found that in cases where one parent was Anglo, the students conformed to a more Anglicized lifestyle based on the comments they made about who they socialized with, the traditions that they practiced at home, and their cultural loyalty compared to those students that had parents who were either both of Mexican descent or were either of Hispanic descent—as with Nutra who had a Puerto Rican mother and Mexican father. However, in those same cases where only one parent was of Mexican descent, I found that those who lived in close proximity to relatives of Mexican descent continued to maintain a relatively strong cultural unity and awareness.

Overall, because the Michigan students were raised in Michigan and were more predisposed to living as minorities within a white, Anglicized environment similar to Western Michigan University, I found that their transition was less conflictive than that of the Texas students. This will be elaborated in more detail under the section entitled “Silencing of Voices.”

Although the student from the Michigan/Texas cohort had lived a number of years in Michigan and had been exposed to a high school environment, her

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acculturation process was more similar to that of the Texas cohort based on her responses about cultural loyalty and awareness; nevertheless her exposure to Michigan and the school system provided her with an added advantage over the Texas students. However, her concerns were more analogous to those of the Texas group.

For the Texas students the acculturation process was different. Many of these students did not feel as acculturated to the Anglo culture as those from Michigan. As I mentioned earlier, the majority had maintained many of the Mexican practices and beliefs. However, there was several discussions and critiques about those Mexicans who had left Mexico for the U.S. who wanted to become Americanized quickly. These students were highly critical of others who wanted to let go of their Mexican culture. One student commented: "They're all Mexican, but they want to be American. A lot of people, once they cross the border, immediately want to be American." Many of the students struggled with the fact that people who crossed the border were sometimes referred to as wetbacks or less than Mexican, and felt they were being discriminated against by other Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

Because the Texas students lived in a predominantly Mexican environment where they represented the majority, they did not feel part of a cultural or political minority group. Because their families were either Mexican and/or first generation Mexican, the language, the customs and traditions continued to be practiced in the home, the school and community. Regardless of where you visited, Spanish was spoken. I found that in the high schools there was a concentrated effort to practice the Mexican traditions and celebrations in addition to the Anglo traditions. In the

curriculum, there was emphasis placed on the historical contributions of those of Mexican descent. Often, when programs were planned at the school, the meal included fajitas, tamales, and tacos. Also, the majority of these students' parents were both of Mexican descent and were bilingual. Therefore, the majority of these students felt very committed to their Mexican heritage.

Nevertheless, I found within the same cohort that students who were second or third generation were more Anglicized, even though both parents were of Mexican descent and the students had been raised in a similar environment to the rest of the Texas students. They were unable to speak Spanish and felt less committed to the Mexican traditions. When referring to her cultural commitment, Sonora stated "I see Mexican American like you're all from Mexico. I am not like that. Because I don't follow the real, true, down deep Mexican thing. I'm raised with the beans and all, but I'm not raised like Elsa." As I aforementioned, both Melissa and Carolina also felt a strong push to break away from Mexican traditions, and found that the Anglo culture and mentality offered more openness and receptivity to their attitudes about sexual orientation and feminism. Melissa found some of the Mexican beliefs and the Catholic religion to be sexist. For Carolina, her sexual orientation created enormous cultural conflict, often perpetuated by her family and community. Therefore, I found both of them wanting to break away and be in a more liberating and tolerant environment than what they had experienced in their hometowns.

As I mentioned earlier, the Michigan cohort felt very committed to their families. Nevertheless, I found that the majority of the Texas students felt more

responsible for the family's affairs, even if it meant leaving college. They commented more often than students from Michigan about financial concerns, and they did not want to burden their families with their college expenses. In particular, the students who were migrants would often send their work-study pay checks to their parents to help out. Also, I found that some had to leave college and help their parents because they needed the "extra hands" to pick in the fields. This irritated many of them because they did not want to do this anymore. All commented that they were tired of this work and that one of the motivators for attending college was to acquire better jobs which paid more and involved less work.

Silencing of Voices

Students, particularly the Texas and Michigan/Texas cohorts, expressed positive experiences with the university. Generally faculty was helpful and friendly and people were approachable. For example, Tania commented that she felt special and received more attention than she would have if she had enrolled at a university in Texas.

However, throughout their conversations, examples were cited that pointed to feelings of discomfort, isolation and inferiority, that for some students of the Texas and Michigan/Texas cohorts led either to their returning home to Texas or their placement on academic probation by the university. Although they did not refer to their frustration and alienation as a form of silencing, I found that their statements described struggle and conflict. Based on the literature and supported in this study,

their experiences and feelings are largely attributed to the attitudes and practices by society at large and the university that continue to support theoretical models that explain a student's maladjustment to the institution as a student problem. Again, I argue these are just further examples and practices that continue to sustain silencing. Moreover, these stories demonstrate evidence that silencing continues to exist and is a privileged, racial act performed by those that maintain economic and political power—primarily Anglo, white males. I also found that it is not merely a belief held by the white majority, but enacted by ethnic minority groups who are also seeking to gain or preserve a position of privilege and power. Therefore, there is sustained prejudice, discrimination and stereotypes which they benefit from at the exclusion of the voiceless.

The University Ivory Tower

I found as a researcher that the university continues to sustain a discourse that identifies these students as a single collective--labeled Hispanic. As I pointed out in Chapter II, this form of institutional, ivory hegemony treats all students the same regardless of their socio-cultural experiences. Yet this study clearly demonstrates that significant intra diversity exists with students of Mexican descent. When this diversity is not legitimized by the university, it creates further tension and challenges for many of these students. When this diversity is not legitimized by the university, it creates further tension and challenges for many of these students.

Padilla (1992) claims that as students of Mexican descent adopt roles that are

mainly reserved for Anglos, it creates stressful situations for them. They have to reassess their preferred ways of relating to and identifying with both the ethnic culture and majority culture. This dialectic tension exerts strong influences on their behavior and has social and academic implications for these students' success.

I found that the results in this research support Padilla's claim. These students' level of cultural loyalty and awareness, acculturation, and academic ability had some effect on their level of relating to others and adjusting to the majority culture. Moreover, their feelings of cultural loss, isolation, and academic failure were expressed often, and triggered racist, ethnocentric, sexist, and prejudicial attitudes on the part of their peers, the residence hall staff, faculty, and other members in students services.

Loss of Cultural Identity

As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, many of the Michigan students spent more time hanging out with Anglos than Mexican American or Hispanics in their high school and communities. Because many grew up in a bicultural environment where one of the parents was Anglo and were exposed to a more anglicized lifestyle, they experienced less social and academic conflict than the students in the Texas and Michigan/Texas cohorts. Also, being born and raised in Michigan, with the exception of Federica, acclimated them to the university more quickly than students from the other cohorts. They were still relatively close to home and had lived with the snow and harsh winters.

A greater percentage of the students from Michigan went home every weekend with the exception of two students that already lived off campus. Although these students did not verbalize about missing their families as often, it was evident that many seemed to feel more comfortable being home on the weekend than staying at the university. One of the students who went home every weekend said she felt pressured by her family to come home and take care of her brother and sister, which she felt impacted her course performance and her grades. Some said that the reason they went home was to get away from the residence halls and the food.

Over half of the group had concerns with roommates and the residence halls. Noise level and strict hall policies were common criticisms. For example, Federica and Catarina often complained about the noise level and lack of cleanliness. Their solution to the problem was going home on the weekdays. Two students who lived in the halls the first year decided to move off campus the following year because of strict policies. Three of the students chose not to live on campus due to financial reasons, and two had conflicts with their roommates and decided to move or find another roommate. Only three students enjoyed the halls and had no complaints about their roommates.

I also found that for those students who did not stay in the residence halls, their level of involvement was more limited at the university than those who lived on campus. While I would not associate their feelings of disassociation or disconnection to a lack of ethnic cultural adaptation to the university, I did find, however, that they did not feel a part of the university culture. Some of the students did not see the

residence hall as the vehicle to make friends as is often promoted by university officials and housing administrators. I found this problematic since Tinto (1987) and other scholars writing on college student retention or social integration argue that there is a higher likelihood for freshmen to leave if they are unable to find ways to connect with the university in their first year. Therefore, one way of increasing the odds of their staying is by providing them with a positive experience in the residence halls which would give them a greater opportunity to meet friends and feel involved socially and culturally.

Very few students blamed the university for not being more responsible in making it better for them. However, based on the number of students who voiced this as a critical issue, I argue that when there are a number of students that share similar concerns that they are not being addressed. Without a question, the university's lack of involvement or interest in understanding and addressing this problem was quite apparent. The students indicated that at no point did the university address their concerns. Therefore, I found that the university's failure to legitimize this particular issue was another act of silencing.

Regarding these students' ethnic adaptation, the majority of the students from the Michigan cohort saw the Hispanic cultural opportunities as a way to gain more knowledge about what they had culturally lost while growing up. Although they did not regard this as a problem in helping them adapt their first year as freshmen, many saw this as an opportunity to gain cultural awareness. For example, some were fascinated with the Texas students because of their more traditionally Mexican

experiences and thought it brought a nice dimension to the university and Hispanic functions. However, others from Michigan were insulted because they felt that the Texas group did not see them as traditional or Mexican.

The cultural adjustment or loss for the Texas and Michigan/Texas cohorts was different and more problematic. Even Rocio, who had lived and attended a high school in Michigan, felt disconnected because of the distance from her family and friends in Texas. In the literature on Latino/a retention, it is asserted that these students often need to have Hispanic centers or areas where they can express themselves and feel culturally accepted. This was evident in all cohorts, but the Texas cohort demonstrated a greater need for having such opportunities available to them.

Although there were some students from the Texas cohort that were interested in meeting different people and participating in events that were non-Latino/a related, I found that the majority of these students felt the need to get involved with cultural events and organizations that would keep them in contact with their Mexican and/or Hispanic culture. Therefore, a greater involvement with HSO and Alma Latina (Hispanic Radio Station) was apparent for both the Texas and Michigan/Texas cohorts. Also, some of them found a home away from home in working in the Division of Minority Affairs, particularly as two administrators of Mexican descent worked there—one from McAllen, a U.S city located near the Mexican/U.S. border. Although a few students were interested in meeting other students and being involved in non-Hispanic activities, they still enjoyed and sought out opportunities to be involved with Texas or other Hispanic activities and friends. At times, these same students

commented that there were not enough Hispanics on campus. Some felt that one way to change this was to become more actively involved with the Admissions Office and to support their recruitment. One student commented: "We need a place where Hispanics can go and make them feel more at home by having like more Mexican stuff or having get-togethers. Also, a place where they can get support and comfort."

These comments also confirmed my conviction about the need for the Texas students to room with someone also from Texas. Prior to the arrival of these students on campus, the coordinator of the program decided to have them room with each other. She strongly felt that because these students came from similar cultural backgrounds and geographical areas, they would be more comfortable and adjust more quickly to the university. Out of the ten students, only Gardenia chose to room with a non-Texas student. Nevertheless, at the end of the first semester, four of the students could not tolerate their situations and decided to find other roommates. Some of their reasons for changing room or roommates were that their value systems and lifestyles were different from their roommates. Several complained that their roommates were too wild. This was also true for the student who belonged to the Mexican/Texas cohort. Although she roomed with someone who was non-Texan, non-Latina during her first semester, she moved out after completing her first semester and in with Elsa and Pamela with whom she felt more comfortable.

Loneliness

All of the cohorts felt a strong connection to their families and indicated that

this was an example of what it meant to be Hispanic, Mexican or Mexican American. Nevertheless, the feeling of loneliness was more often expressed by the majority of the Texas students and not as often by the Michigan group because of their closer physical proximity to their families. For the Texas cohort, this was the single most common reason why some of the students claimed they were not doing well academically. And while the literature does not document this as a factor in students' success, I found that this was critical in these students' college transition.

There were only two students from the cohort that never complained about missing home, their mother's cooking and company, and their extended families. Much of the discussion was around their high school and teachers and the overall town environment. Many attributed their depressed emotional state, especially during the winter semester, and their low academic performance to not being able to be with their families. They appreciated that host families had been assigned to them to curb the loneliness they were feeling. Also, a large commitment from the university and myself helped them to connect with people and be involved with as many activities on and off campus as possible.

While there were complaints, all of the students acknowledged that living in the halls was a great opportunity to meet people. However, they spent little to no time involved in doing so, except for three who wanted to become acquainted with more than just with Texas students. Seldom did any get involved in activities sponsored by the residence halls. By the end of the second year, most of them wanted to live off campus either in a house or an apartment. Yet many realized that this would

be difficult because of not owning a car. Their reasons for wanting to move off campus were similar to those expressed by some in the Michigan cohort. They also saw the halls as not feeling family oriented, and I argue this was related to their cultural loss. Some complained about the food and others about the noise levels. During the second semester, the cold and the snow became another reason for disliking the halls. Initially, sledding, building snowmen, and other winter outdoor activities were seen as fun. But the novelty wore out, complaints grew, and some felt depressed because of the cold weather, no sun, and being shut in from the outdoors. They could not walk outdoors like they had done in Texas. They also preferred lighter clothes, and some got tired of sliding and falling on the ice. The majority felt imprisoned.

The Michigan/Texas student also shared similar feelings and concerns about her roommates. She did not like the way her roommate lived a more liberal lifestyle.

Academic Failure

According to Vasquez and Vasquez (1995) some of the factors that affect a Mexican American student's college academic ability are the college preparatory curriculum in high school, parents' education, and family income. My findings do not support Vasquez and Vasquez's study. I found that parents' education and family income were not significant factors influencing these students' college performance. Again, the majority of these students' parents had lower levels of educational preparation and income, and yet many of the students performed academically at average

and above average levels. Instead, my findings support Gandara's theory that low socioeconomic and educational factors have a direct influence on student educational achievement, but not in a negative way. Low socioeconomic status, cultural traditions, limited English skills, lack of motivation, racism, sexism, segregation, and occupational status have all been used as attributable factors for Mexican American students not achieving. However, there were students that regardless of these factors performed well academically.

The Michigan students felt less academically challenged and shared less concerning the difficulty of their classes. Instead, their issues were with classes being too large. While some mentioned that their classes were more demanding than in high school, others felt that some courses were boring, and that they could easily skip class and still get a good grade. The course entitled, Direct Encounter with the Arts, was quite popular for those who enrolled in it. However, an Anthropology course received low marks because the professor's teaching style was allegedly boring. Two students were quite challenged with the curriculum and struggled academically the first semester. Yet overall, the majority of the students felt comfortable with their classes and nearly all of the students achieved at least a 2.0 GPA or higher. The majority of the students passed the first semester except one who received a 0.0 GPA. Five students had above a 3.0, and three had above a 3.5 GPA. By the end of the second semester, the majority of the students received above a 2.0 GPA except one who continued to report difficulty due to unrealistic expectations placed on her by her family. Another student was still struggling with personal problems at home

and required counseling which she avoided the first semester. See Table 2 for data on individual student's college GPAs.

While many maintained good grades, generally the sentiment was that this was all they could manage, and they did not have time to be involved in extra-curricular activities. Only two of the students were involved in activities such as HSO, the House Council, or Residence Hall Adviser. Over half worked outside of the university and saw this as a priority.

Regarding their high school experience, the majority did not feel a great loss. Less than half felt that high school was a great experience and missed their teachers and counselors. Instead, I found that the majority of these students felt excited about leaving their communities and beginning a new life. Over half believed their high school prepared them for college. Two disagreed, and did not feel they were well prepared, even though they were academically talented in school. Three had no comment. Some were tired of high school because they felt that high school was limiting due to the conservative and racist attitudes that many of the teachers and students held. Others recognized that there was some fear of not knowing what to expect when they got to college. Even though most of the students were not involved in extracurricular activities in college, many were involved in activities in high school which included: sports, school newspapers, the National Honor Society, Band, Spanish Club, Multicultural Club, cheerleading, SADD, Drama Club, Los Red Hawks, and Student Council.

I would argue that the reason that these students did not miss their high school

experience was that they did not feel socio-culturally connected to their high schools. Students claimed that the schools were not sensitive to their ethnicity. Some felt that racism permeated their school. For the few that did miss their high schools, they found ways to immerse themselves at the university by finding an organization, a strong network in the residence halls, an adviser or a faculty member who would make them feel special and a part of the university.

With the Texas cohort, comments included concerns with the rigor of the courses, particularly the English reading and writing classes. Some had difficulty adjusting to the demands of the faculty, but class size was not as much of a concern. They attributed their not doing well to the difficulty of their classes and to laziness. Others recognized that the classes were more demanding, but acknowledged that they had other preoccupations which distracted them, such as missing home, the cold weather which depressed them, having no boyfriends and financial problems. There were a few who mentioned the poor high school preparation as a source of their average academic performance. But overall, they did not attribute their academic difficulty to inadequate high school preparation. Instead they felt enormous loyalty and pride having graduated from high schools such as Weslaco and Rio Grande. This was demonstrated by the number of students who wanted to go back to their school and speak to their counselors, teachers and friends about their experiences at WMU.

I am not surprised because these students were considered by the high school and the administration to be the “best of the best” cadre of students graduating that year. These students were leaders and quite popular and were involved in

extracurricular activities which included: Band, Student Council, Spanish Club, Heath Occupation Students of America, sports, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, Debate, Literary Criticism, Criminal Justice Club, Drafting Club, and others. They had achieved a fine academic reputation which they and the community found clearly reinforced by the scholarships that they received from WMU. Therefore, these students had no reason to feel that their experiences were not positive. These students had a relatively high GPA and the fact that they had graduated was a major accomplishment for the families that lived in this community. For many women, graduating without becoming pregnant was also a major triumph.

Nevertheless, I argue that the lack of high school academic training played a greater role in these students' performance than what these students acknowledged. For example Rocio, who had lived both in Texas and Michigan, commented that she had often heard that the schools in Michigan were better than those in Texas. Nevertheless the Texas students claimed that they took a rigorous college preparatory curriculum and a handful took Advanced Placement Courses (AP). I found that many of them were less proficient in English and had difficulty in their college writing and reading courses. This was evident in some of the writing assignments that I had an opportunity to review. In my conversations with them, I found that some of the Texas students, particularly those that were born in Mexico and were migrants, had a difficult time expressing themselves and found their English grammar and vocabulary to be more limiting than other students. I also found that the Texas students with lower ACT composite scores who had taken fewer college preparatory

courses had relatively lower college GPAs in both their first and second semesters than those students from Michigan.

One of the students chose not to attend all semester and therefore received a 0.0. The average academic GPA for the cohort was a 2.36, the highest being a 3.44 and the lowest, a 0.0 GPA. At the end of the first semester, three students fell below 2.0 GPA. By the end of the second semester, the average GPA was a 1.98—the highest being a 3.20 and the lowest a 0.00. Of the three students who had fallen below academic satisfactory of 2.0 GPA, all but one managed to raise the overall GPA to a 2.0. The student from the Michigan/Texas cohort had completed her first semester with a 2.86, but by the end of her second semester her GPA had fallen to a 2.09.

As these students began to perform poorly in college, they began to internalize feelings of mediocrity and devalue their potential and capability to succeed, not recognizing that it was not necessarily their fault, but had been created by an educational system that did not provide them with the necessary skills to succeed in college. The institutional structure continues to discredit them if they continue to create more opportunities for failure than success. Because these students were popular, had done well in their course work based on their relatively high GPAs, and had been involved in high school, they felt that that the school had prepared them well. Therefore, they would not necessarily be critical of an institution that they perceived as caring and preparing them well. They ultimately blamed themselves for not having the academic skills to do well.

These feelings of inability, lack of confidence, and anxiety in college were also reinforced by comments that faculty made about their limited skills. I found in this study that students from the Texas group felt that some of the faculty treated them differently. Elsa commented:

Professors underestimate Hispanics. I think they are testing me to see if I can do it. Sometimes they think that we can't do the work as good as others or that you deserve more time. I believe it's because of our numbers. In Texas, Hispanics are in a high position. Here we don't count.

This student believed that her academic ability was not appreciated or that she was not as capable, due to the condescending attitudes of some professors and invisibility from others. These are the types of silencing that non-white students suffer. At times, the Texas students felt that the professors and the university perceived them as less qualified because they took remedial classes in their freshmen year and/or because they felt that the professors did not take into consideration the fact that they had learned English as their secondary language.

The Ebony University Tower

I also discussed in Chapter II another type of silencing that exists at predominantly white college campuses called "ebony hegemony," or "ebony tower mentality." Here, Latinos/as often feel deligitimized or voiceless because they are not included in the curriculum, programming, and recruitment of minority students. When minority issues are raised they are often contextualized within an African American perspective at the expense of other minority groups.

Students from all three cohorts commented that this was an issue on campus.

Comments included: “Hispanics come second to Blacks and sometimes they are not even mentioned at all,” “Regarding Hispanic or Latino issues, there is nothing on this campus. I think a lot of us keep thinking of minority issues as black.” “I am in the Incentive Program which is primarily for Blacks and they have asked me why am I in the program since I am not minority.” One student from the Michigan cohort related that his African American professor had commented that there were no minorities in the class, excluding him from that grouping. The student was later offended when he realized that his professor understood minority to mean black.

On the other hand, there were three students, one from Texas and the other two from Michigan who did not like being referred to as a minority. “I don’t identify as a minority. And for that matter I deny being Hispanic. Being European you can be anything.”

I find this comment to be the another form of silencing perpetuated by institutions and society which contextualizes Mexican Americans as less than another minority. Hispanics are completely invisible. The only minority is African American and everyone else is white. Mexican Americans are not deserving of a minority or human status. Thus, those of Mexican descent and other non-whites have their humanity taken away.

Other Forms of Cultural Silencing. The Isms: Physical Challenges, Lesbianism, Sexism, Racism, Feminism

Silencing can also pertain, though not often mentioned in the ethnic and race literature, to physical disabilities.

Adolfo, who was speech impaired, recognized that one of the departments at the university did not award him a scholarship after he had done well academically his first year at the university. The university official had explained it away, saying that his ACT composite score was rather low. But according to Adolfo, the issue had more to do with him being speech impaired.

Carolina stated that many of her problems revolved around her sexuality. Being a lesbian was very difficult for many to accept. The difference between high school and college was that in college there were more people who thought like her, and she felt comfortable in having an organization or place where she could go. However, she often felt stigmatized by university officials, as well as other students from the Texas and Texas/Michigan cohorts. In essence, she was a victim of traditional cultural values and beliefs regarding homosexuality and I argue that this is a form of silencing imposed by a traditional, belief system that is as inhuman and cruel as that perpetuated by the white, dominant culture.

Racism

The three cohorts did share experiences of either friends or relatives who were the victims of racism, or their own personal accounts while attending high school and WMU. Some of the Texas students responded that neither their parents or friends warned them that they would be exposed to greater diversity, particularly more Blacks. Although no one claimed to be racist, a couple of students from the Texas cohort acknowledged that some of their relatives discriminated against Blacks. This

is an example of racism or ethnocentrism between people of color that is not often discussed in the literature, particularly as the racial issue is generally seen in this country as a black and white phenomena. This racist attitude among people of Mexican descent also reflects a cultural ignorance or silencing that fails to acknowledge the multiracial blending of Native Americans, European and African mixtures.

Students from the Michigan group shared several stories about how their relatives had often been stopped by the police for no apparent reason. In fact, Domingo had acknowledged that he and his friend had been stopped by the police when they were in high school while they were driving through a white neighborhood for no apparent reason. All he could deduce was that he was in the wrong neighborhood at the wrong time.

Other comments related to their high school experiences. Romero commented that his friends in high school often asked why he was participating in a scholarship event for minorities when he was not a minority. He felt offended but even more uncomfortable when after further explanation, they still did not believe he was of Mexican descent because he did not appear to behave or look Mexican. Nutra, who claimed both her Mexican and Puerto Rican identities, confirmed that there was tension and prejudice between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Veronica was self-critical and honest about her personal prejudices. She admitted that she did not know that Asians were a minority and remembered asking her friend, who was Asian, why she was participating in the Heis (Higher Education Scholarship) competition. Rolando from Fenville recalled the racist attitude of a high school teacher who scolded him

every time he saw him with his white girlfriend. He concluded that the teacher did not like him because he was dating white girls. Rolando did not feel this was unusual because there was a lot of racism going on in the town of Fenville.

Students from Texas expressed fewer opinions on the subject and did not think as much racism exists in Texas as other places because of the larger Hispanic population there. On one occasion Horacio mentioned that he was concerned about the attitude of his girlfriend's family toward him because they did not like the black boyfriend of his girlfriend's sister. Other students shared stories about incidents where white students on different occasions accused them of receiving scholarships for merely being Mexican. Also Elsa, Pamela, and Sonora felt that their residence hall advisers often singled them out as loud and noisy, but did not do that to others. They thought it might be because they were Hispanic.

The Texas students who were also migrants recounted several stories about experiences they and their families had with white people. They often felt that white people saw them as uneducated or "not smart." Rocio, who had been raised in both Texas and Michigan and had migrated to and from Texas every year, remembered as a child the economic inequality between the Whites and Mexicans. She claimed that the Whites were always the bosses and the Mexicans were the employees. She also remembered her Hispanic friends questioning why she hung out with white friends and not her own kind. She confessed that her family always made comments about the negative relationships between Whites and Mexicans, but she recognized that her family was more prejudiced against Blacks than Whites. She further added that there

were also prejudices not only between Whites and Mexicans, but also between Mexicans. She believes that the reason for this is that Mexicans who have recently migrated to the U.S. are trying to become white overnight and forget their Mexican roots. Mexican Americans who have lived longer in the U.S. perceive them as “sell outs” to their culture.

There were other students that felt this way too—especially those that were born and raised in Mexico and later crossed the border to settle in the U.S. One student commented rather passionately about the prejudices that exist within the Mexican community. The migrants were often perceived by Mexican Americans as wetbacks and people who were taking advantage of the economic and educational resources in the U.S., and that they needed to go back. Another student talked about how she experienced the prejudices of other Mexicans in high school because she was not fluent in Spanish, and was criticized and judged for having sold out. She was often referred to as a coconut—brown on the outside but white on the inside.

Some of the students believed that the Hispanic group’s struggle to stay separate and inability to adapt perpetuated racism. For example, Federica claimed that she had not experienced racism because she did not work in the fields and did not fail classes. Domingo shared similar observations. Although he recognized that he had been a victim of racism, he was a straight “A” student who had done well in high school.

Sexism

Women from all three cohorts commented about the attitudes that many men had towards women. Tania , Melissa and Catarina talked about how their fathers treated their mothers and saw them as overpowering and macho. Catarina commented: “I didn’t like the way my dad treated my mother. He was very forceful. He would often say, ‘my way is the only way.’” Females from Texas often commented about the many women who became pregnant at an early age and then married in order to save their honor and that of their families. Melissa, who had a feminist orientation, was offended that the majority of the women chose to not go to college and to marry early. She said that this was perpetuated by the culture and mindset of the town which was very Catholic, traditional and closed-minded. Women were raised to think that their major role was to take care of the men. She wanted to get away from this and it was one of the reasons why she preferred out-of-state colleges. She refused to stay home, marry and get pregnant.

It was interesting to see the women respond in such a way because I observed the behaviors of two male students from Texas who perpetuated the machismo and male dominant attitude to which the women referred. I also had an opportunity to observe this attitude and behavior while I was in Texas recruiting, and that confirmed the women’s comments.

Affirmative Action

Overall, regardless of generational level, cultural awareness, and acculturation

level, students from all cohorts had similar reactions to Affirmative Action. The majority felt that they did not want to be hired based on the color of the skin or cultural identification. I found this attitude to be a common belief of migrants that enter this country and want to assimilate or acculturate to the majority culture. Because they do not want to be seen as different or less than, they assimilate and adopt a value and belief system, indoctrinated by the majority culture, that teaches one to think opportunities are gained by merit and hard work. Therefore, there is no need for affirmative action based on these aforementioned principles since society had rid itself of racism, sexism and all other “isms. Most of the students from the cohorts felt strongly that skin color and ethnicity should not be determining factors in getting jobs and/or scholarships. However, members of all groups acknowledged that because discrimination was still practiced in this country, and the playing field was not level, there needs to be an Affirmative Action plan to create opportunities for minorities. Again, they did not feel that they were victims. One student from the Texas cohort argued that Affirmative Action was not as strongly required if one were living in the South because of the number of Hispanics living there.

Intra/Inter Ethnic Conflicts

In this study, one of the fascinating findings was the significant inter and intra cultural conflict that existed with the cohorts. Based on their statements, and my personal observations, I found that each cohort exhibited behaviors that were very similar to the ivory tower or Eurocentric beliefs practiced by many. However, the

difference in this case was that these behaviors were being practiced by members of the same ethnic collective. This conflict manifested in the position of power and cultural elitism assumed by the Texas group over the Michigan group. Moreover, there was an assumption of racial purity and inherent superiority over those who had assimilated or let go of their cultural values or norms and become “white.” Their concerns about the Michigan group not being real Mexicans were similar to the experiences of Puerto Ricans and other ethnic groups either born or raised in the U.S. when they come into contact with people who shared similar cultural backgrounds, but who were from the mother country. At a secondary level, it was an act of silencing that occurs within ethnic groups. The Michigan cohort felt culturally attacked and, in essence, silenced because their ethnicity, as they knew it, was denied or questioned.

Some of the students from the Michigan group who had an opportunity to hang out with some of the Texas students reported that the Texas group often made them feel uncomfortable. One student acknowledged that the Texas males were more traditionalist and quite conservative in their approach to women. He did not like the way they viewed women. Other comments alluded to how the Texas students made them feel uncomfortable because the Michigan students did not speak Spanish as well, or had a detectable accent. Sometimes the Michigan students felt less Hispanic or Mexican because they did not have a better understanding of Mexican celebrations and traditions.

The Texas students undeniably held certain stereotypes about Mexicans from

the north. Many commented that Mexicans from Michigan did not dance, speak, or cook the right way. Two of the students felt that the Mexicans from the north were more nationalistic than those from the south, or that they acted more Mexican. Yet, they did not practice the traditions as they did in Texas. Some of the students who had an opportunity to work in the university's outreach program in middle and high schools noticed that Mexican parents in Michigan were less involved in the educational issues that impacted their children and were not assertive in presenting their opinions for changing and improving the school system to help their children achieve.

All of these differences reflect the intra ethnic tensions which led to the silencing of certain segments of the group. In this study, traditional cultural practices had the effect of silencing women as women were expected to: (a) assume the domestic responsibilities in the home and honor their husbands, or (b) get married if pregnant and terminate their educational or career aspirations. Recent immigrants were pejoratively labeled as wetbacks, and mixed race Mexican-Americans were ridiculed for their lack of racial purity. If raised in the north, students were ridiculed for their loss of language and cultural traditions.

This study reveals that intergroup racism can silence non-white minorities in a variety of ways: invisibility, benign tolerance, curriculum, and cultural omission. Silencing can also occur by acts of kindness: scholarships, special hospitality, and others.

Researcher's Struggle of Voice

I found that being Latina and an administrator established a comfort zone with all cohorts which became an added advantage when conducting field research. For one, I had become an involved observer long before I had initiated the project. All of the Texas students and a third of the Michigan students knew me as someone who was involved in their lives prior to my assuming the role of researcher.

This was particularly true with the Texas students. Knowing the Spanish language and the fact that I shared similar socio-cultural values because of my ethnic background were advantages in establishing the context for the research. I did not have to work as hard at going native as many ethnographers do in the field because the relationships had been established early on. In many ways I had been a participant observer in the field for a lot longer. The only difference was that at that time I had not officially started the project, and therefore, technically I was not a researcher.

Being Latina and knowing the importance of reaching out to Latino/a parents, I knew I had to make them feel less overwhelmed and fearful. However, I found that not having previous experience working with students from Texas and not being of Mexican descent were barriers for some students, parents and administrators.

Visiting Texas for the first time, I found that my being a Puerto Rican made me different from the rest of the recruiters who were of Mexican descent. They found my speech, accent, and mannerisms to be different and some, including students, commented that they recognized that I was Puerto Rican. However, I knew

that I needed to impress upon parents and the high school administrators that I was going to assume the role of advocate for their children and students. I had to convince parents that my motive for recruiting their children was not to increase Latino(a) enrollments at WMU, but that I was interested in their children, and would support them. As I had done with many Latino/a families in Michigan, I had to simplify the process and help them understand WMU. More importantly, I had to answer the questions: (a) why college, and (b) why up north? All of these parents were socio-economically disadvantaged, had no college background and/or experience, and, in some cases, did not speak English well. The process was intimidating. I knew that distance, not being able to easily contact their children, and have them come home were major barriers for these parents—more so than the Michigan parents. However, I knew that if I gained the parents' trust, I had a higher likelihood of recruiting their sons and daughters to WMU.

Much energy and time was spent organizing outreach programs with the schools in Texas in order to involve the parents. Over time, I gained more credibility with high school counselors, principles, and teachers. Once the students enrolled at WMU, I knew that their relationships with me largely depended on their following their parents' advice to "stay in contact with Diane at all times." In many ways, I had become a member of their extended families.

Undoubtedly, some of the students from the Texas and the Michigan/Texas cohort felt more culturally attached to some of the administrators at the university who were of Mexican descent. Some decided to work as student employees in those

offices instead of others at the university. However, I found that the more involvement I had with these students, the more comfortable they felt with me. Visiting my house over the Easter and Thanksgiving holidays was something that they all enjoyed doing, and the more I showed I cared for them, the more they responded to me.

As an administrator, I also had credibility with the students because I had information that they needed. If they needed to drop a class, fill out financial aid papers, finalize their scholarship award, find jobs, or meet their host families, they had to depend on me. I had created a safety net for the Texas students. In case of trouble, they came to me. However, I do not know if I had not played the role of surrogate mother whether their responses about the university would have been different. If I had less involved, would they have just viewed me as a university administrator who was less concerned? And therefore, would they have been less engaged, responsive and candid with their observations about the university?

With the Michigan cohort, my involvement with them developed over a longer period because, as mentioned in Chapter III, my role was not to recruit these students as I had done with the Texas students. Nevertheless, a third of the students knew me prior to the study since I was involved in HSO, participated in several university-sponsored activities, and recruited in Grand Rapids. So I was not a stranger to some of them. I believe my role as an administrator had a greater influence on these students than my role as a Latina. Many sought me out to assist them with regaining their scholarships, finding new scholarships to help pay their bills, and counseling, among other services. Students received the results they wanted, and this

made it easier for me to approach them later when I needed their help with this project. Nevertheless, I recognized that my role was situated in a position of privilege and power.

For those that did not know me, I believe that my title as Associate Director of Admissions did establish some credibility, and therefore, a more immediate willingness from them to participate than if my role had been simply a graduate student conducting doctoral research.

On the other hand, I believe there were ethical and methodological challenges with playing these multiple roles. When initiating the project, confidentiality was critical. However, there were times when a student would come to me about an issue they had with someone else who was also involved in the study. This made it difficult because I was aware that I might be providing information that would breach the confidentiality and privacy of these students. Also, the Texas parents often called and wanted to know their children's whereabouts or how they were doing academically. I knew that many of their sons and daughters were of legal age and by FERPA standards (Federal act established to protect college students' privacy), I had no legal right to divulge this information. However, I knew that I could not tell them this and tried to proactively help the parents to contact their children directly. When parents asked about their sons and daughters progress, I had to carefully direct them to speak to their children.

As an involved observer, I felt challenged with my multiple roles. During the project, students would come and I found oftentimes it was very difficult to remain

focused on the questions or the research because there were other issues that we needed to talk about. However, when we did get to the questions, I found that the topics interested them because it was about their stories and their families. I believe that for many this was an enjoyable experience and reduced their stress levels because they could talk about their wonderful families and memories. On the other hand, I also believe that this might have triggered some sadness or, in some cases, depression, depending on how much they were missing their families at the time of the interview. Again, many of them did not understand my role as researcher. They just thought that many of the questions I was asking were related to the job I was doing as an administrator. In some ways they were correct because I would often tell them that a lot of their information would be provided at a later date to assist the administration with understanding the transition and challenges confronting Latino/a students from Michigan and Texas as they matriculated at the university. So, oftentimes interviews were rescheduled because we had talked about other issues. At other times they did not want to talk about the study, but wanted to work on resolving their personal challenges.

With half of the Michigan cohort, my role was more clearly defined. Therefore, the time spent was more formal and focused. In contrast, the dictates of the study required that I make up for lost time, and so it was necessary to meet many of the students in restaurants or settings more comfortable than my office or a classroom in order to break the ice.

There was a manipulative dimension in that I had control over these students'

lives and it would have been interesting to know the true reasons why they chose to get involved. Was it because they had no other recourse given who I was? Was it a reciprocated gratitude on their part for helping them? The question was never asked, and consequently, I do not know, but I presume that the answers would vary.

Moreover, based on the responses of all cohorts, the Michigan students were more critical of the university's policy and they acknowledged more readily that overt racism did exist and manifested itself in different ways. I believe that these different responses could be attributed to my different roles with these students. Because I was less involved in the personal lives of the Michigan cohort, they saw me more as a researcher than an administrator or provider/surrogate parent, and thus felt more comfortable to discuss and critique the university. Also, I found that even though they understood that I was of Latina descent, they felt very comfortable in addressing their concerns about not necessarily wanting to identify as an Hispanic. This was particularly true for Maria and Federica, who felt adamantly that the more Hispanics dwelt on their individual, cultural differences, the more separation this created between them and Anglos. They felt that this consequently kept Latinos/as suppressed and from advancing furthering, whereas what they need is to adapt and become more American.

On the other hand, the Texas students were significantly less critical of the university and felt that many of their experiences were generally positive. I speculate that because of my active engagement as their advocate, surrogate mother, and counselor in their lives, I placated some of their concerns. It is possible that my

immersion in their lives had silenced their expression of realities they were actually experiencing on campus. Fuertes and Sedlacek (1993) argue that support units, the hiring of Hispanic professionals and faculty, and aggressive involvement with the students' parents are all critical in creating successful retention of Hispanics in higher education. I found that I had become this and more to these students. I therefore speculate that, due to my effectiveness and kindness, I possibly silenced some of their negative and critical attitudes and concerns regarding the university. Though, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, feelings of loneliness, cultural loss, depression, failure and inadequacy existed.

Research Design

I was convinced that my research design was one that was theoretically sound. Institutional racism and silencing were real because there were enough social scientists documenting it. I had personally witnessed and experienced racism and prejudice, and had observed similar inequalities with other Latino/a students who had similar difficulties at WMU and other predominantly white institutions. I was convinced that the results of my study would support my assumptions that the students' voices would reveal these injustices. With some disbelief, I found quite the contrary. Questions were asked, topics were raised and I discovered that my socio-political beliefs were not represented. I, who knew all about the Latino/a challenge and lack of political voice, knew little about these three groups.

Initially then, a major theoretical flaw in the research design existed. Before

the project began, I was highly critical of the many researchers who continually generalized about the research population in simplistic terms. In retrospect and not intentionally, I had created three very structured categories in which to place these students: the Texas cohort, the Michigan cohort, and the Michigan/Texas cohort. However, when I became more familiar with the individuals in each cohort, I was surprised to find significant intra and inter group differences which I had assumed did not exist. Personally, the experience was somewhat humbling because I had to repress my a priori assumptions about a reality that was mine and not their's. Throughout this study, therefore, I had to constantly remind myself that I needed to take on more of the role of a passionate learner and listener, which initially was more difficult to do than I had foreseen. At the same time, it was uncomfortable because there were times when I did not want to play a passive role, and I found myself interjecting and providing opinions that may have biased the students' responses. Therefore, I found myself always working very hard not to impose my voice or dominate the conversation, especially in situations where the students were not responsive to my observations of behaviors that I interpreted as racist, prejudiced or ignorant. Yet my role was to learn and not teach--a very uncomfortable, compromising position that researchers/teachers often do not want to acknowledge.

Methods

Halfway through the project, I realized that I had to reassess my research design and methods, and asked myself whether my questions or interview techniques

were leading the respondents to answer in a way which would support my political views. For example, I noticed that I would share information about some of the struggles other students had faced prior to these students and see how they responded. I found that I had to be careful not to critique or place judgment on their responses, especially if I did not agree with them. When I realized that the majority of these students were not as politically conscious as I had hoped, I tried to not let my feelings about them interfere with their responses. However, this was difficult to do. I found that I did not like many of them because of their conservative, political beliefs. I was tormented and stunned that many, especially some of the students from the Texas cohort, had conservative political beliefs, were racist and prejudiced toward other non-white ethnic groups and harbored hostile attitudes toward some in the Texas/ Michigan intra group. I recognized that out of the twenty-two students, there were only two students that I felt most comfortable with, and understood that it would be a challenge to work with the rest of the students. I had to become very sensitive about not allowing my beliefs to interfere with their voices. Consequently, I went to the other extreme and, as Roman (1987) mentioned in her studies--I tried to be "a fly on the wall." I removed myself completely in order to not taint the data.

This became evident when I began to document what I had observed, and experienced the inner conflict between what I saw the world to be and what the students saw. I consciously decided I was far better off removing myself mentally and emotionally from the project. I hid from my revealing my biases and subjectivities. Pershkin (1992) submits that "if researchers are aware of their

subjectivity, then they can inform readers where self and subject have been joined” (p. 710). While I found it theoretically easy to do, it was more difficult to practice and be aware of one’s biases.

Conclusions

The findings in this study regarding cultural identity, acculturation, and silencing confirm and support the recent literature and empirical studies that document the socio-cultural variability which exists among people of Mexican descent. Moreover, the findings also confirm that students’ experiences influence their institutional adaptation and success in their freshmen year.

However, it is not merely the experiences that students bring to campus, but how receptive the institution is to providing the opportunities for these students to succeed. Although many of the students did not state that racism on campus created barriers to their success, they did, however, acknowledge that they had experienced discomfort with students and faculty questioning their abilities. In their stories, it was evident that institutional silencing and racism are structural barriers that continue to be perpetuated and manifested in different ways.

Based on the findings, the lives of college students of Mexican descent are far more complex than what is currently cited in the literature and understood by faculty and administrators in higher education. The Mexican American identity is one that is extremely complex and difficult to grasp and define. As social researchers, we must continue to explore and not be chained to theoretical and empirical categories that

only serve to exacerbate our lack of understanding of students of Mexican descent. Falling into this vacuum only dilutes the complexity of cultural identity. Moreover, as higher education administrators and faculty who are responsible for policy making and teaching, it is of primary importance that we note and keep reminding ourselves that the already complex world we live in, is even more complex. As our college populations continue to diversify and change, we must always maintain an enormous sensitivity to those students we serve instead of continuing to silence their legitimate voices which further creates barriers to their success.

It is apparent that the majority of the students in this study share similar struggles and experiences as the white majority college students. Through examining the attrition rates for both cohorts students—27 percent of Texas students and 9 percent of Michigan students—one can see that most of the students were successful in returning to WMU for their second year. Although parents' minimal education and low income backgrounds are cited in the literature as factors which highly influence whether a student of Mexican descent persists in high school and college, these factors appeared to have little impact on these students' success or lack thereof. Instead, the parents were extremely supportive of their sons and daughters' educational careers.

However, it is evident that several socio-cultural factors did play a determining role in how well they acculturated to a predominantly white campus such as Western Michigan University. Generational level, language, cultural loyalty and awareness, social and family relationships, parents' background, bicultural parents,

and acculturation level were all factors in these students' ability to adapt to the university. Undoubtedly, some in all three cohorts saw themselves as no different than the majority students as freshmen adapting and transitioning to college life. Others carry distinct views of their history and socio-cultural background that shape their perceptions of college life.

The findings in this study indicated that institutional silencing, racism, assimilation, and ignorance of Latino/a values continue by faculty, the residence halls, and Minority Affairs. Hegemony contextualized within both ivory and ebony tower perspectives continues to silence the voices and experiences of Latino/a students. But there is limited documentation that addresses the intra conflict that exist within an ethnic collective. Power, elitism, and racism also exist and cannot be trivialized as a white versus black struggle or a black versus Latino/a struggle.

A critical part of this study was documenting whether their Mexican American/Mexican identity alienated students and made them feel silenced as is often cited in the literature. In this study, many students representing all cohorts felt silenced as both a minority and Latino(a). Students from all three cohorts repeatedly discussed how Hispanics continued to be less noticed and taken into consideration. Whether in the classroom, the residence halls, student services, or academic affairs, they felt that their issues and concerns were often contextualized within the African American experience. As Fuertes and Sedlacek (1993) state, institutions frequently offer programming for all their ethnic groups through one minority student office assuming that all groups will benefit equally from its services. However, such

programming often meets the needs of the largest or dominant minority group on campus and does not address the specific needs of other cultural groups.

When I looked more closely at their individual stories, experiences were recounted that made it difficult for them to acculturate and adapt, and consequently, made their freshmen year quite challenging.

Being raised in Texas, where 99 percent of the students in their high schools and the community at large were of Mexican background, was significant. Moreover, being raised in an environment where both parents are bilingual and are of Mexican descent does create a stronger cultural awareness, even though all cohorts struggled with defining culture, tradition, and values. However, due to the bad weather, roommate conflict, difficulty with classes, and missing their families, the Texas students had a more difficult time transitioning to the university. Because of these environmental and cultural factors, the majority of this cohort found themselves isolated, and therefore silenced, because of the lack of Hispanic presence at the university and in the community. The acculturation process was more difficult for them as Mexicans, Mexican Americans and migrants.

For students from the Michigan cohort, the struggle to adapt and acculturate was less evident because they learned how at a very early age in their home and pre-college school environments. Because the Michigan students were brought up as minorities in a majority environment, Spanish was not spoken in their homes, and their parents were primarily of mixed race, these students were less challenged with their ethnic identity and how to fit into the larger university environment. Moreover,

over half of these students' parents were divorced. It seems that this instability and the fact that they were no longer living with the parent of Mexican descent created less cultural unity within the family. Even for the three students raised by parents of Mexican descent, the acculturation process was significantly more noticeable in the way these students chose to communicate in English versus Spanish, and how they chose not to engage in many of the traditional Mexican festivals/events.

However, some students felt disconnected from the university. This was not only evident with the students that lived off campus, but also for those who had ambivalent feelings towards the residence halls and went home on weekends. For example, Federica felt disconnected from the university and chose to go home every weekend and not engage in the university's social functions. I speculated that she might have been better off to enroll in another university that could have provided her with a greater social and cultural connection than did WMU. Or does the university have a moral, ethical obligation to explore with students who were not engaged for reasons other than those that were determined in this study?

The majority of Michigan students did not want to accentuate the differences as much as the students from Texas, who were well aware of the differences. Texas students often commented that the Michigan students did not know how to dance or practice the customs according to Mexican tradition, and noted that they were much more nationalistic. One could theorize that the more visible nationalistic attitudes among the Michigan group represented their struggle for cultural survival and visibility, even though many had lost much of their Mexican heritage. The few

traditions and cultural values that they did hold as a collective were staunchly maintained and protected. In some cases, there was a strong desire in some Michigan students to acquire and achieve a greater understanding of their cultural past and heritage, and they often glorified many of the Texas students for their command of the Spanish language and their understanding of what it meant to be Mexican. Nevertheless, some Michigan students criticized some of the Texas students for their male chauvinism and others for thinking they were racially/culturally purer than those from Michigan.

As a participant observer, I found that my role as researcher, Latina and administrator did provide challenges and advantages for the study. Throughout the project, my biases and subjectivities began to influence my understanding and relationship with the students. As an activist, I wanted to determine if these students had the critical consciousness to express how racism manifested itself on campus, and how educational systems continued to ignore students of color. However, I found that the majority of students, particularly those from the Texas cohort, did not report institutional racism and ignorance of Latino/a values as problems that affected their success at WMU. I realized that their perceptions were a classical example of a false consciousness and lack of awareness of their peoples' historical and current struggles, and that this was an act of silencing perpetuated in society and in the school system. Initially, I had to accustom myself to the fact that this was their reality. Subsequently, I found myself constantly exploring and critiquing my biases and subjectivities, and eventually I began to feel more comfortable with who I was and where they

were.

However, after further reflection I realized that because of my involved roles as surrogate parent, counselor and advocate, particularly with the students from both the Texas and Michigan/Texas cohorts, I had created a protected environment for them. With some assistance from other departments at the university, I had created a very aggressive, out-reach, retention program that assisted the students every step of the way. Therefore, in my role I had assisted them in feeling more comfortable and secure with the university and facilitated their adjustment and acculturation experiences.

In closing: when (a) developing administrative policies; (b) developing teaching and curriculum reforms in the classroom; and (c) creating diverse programming for Latinos(a), in this case students of Mexican American descent, critical factors must be taken into account such as migratory patterns, parents' education, income level, demographics, cultural identity, assimilation, acculturation, language, and high school. These factors serve as valuable indicators to further expand our knowledge of the complexity of Mexican American freshmen identities and these students' ability to succeed on a predominantly white campus such as Western Michigan University.

Implications for Future Research

While this study was designed to examine the life experiences of three select groups of freshmen of Mexican descent, the findings dealt only with their first year

experiences and transition from high school to college. Nevertheless, the data and findings can serve as a foundation for future work to be done with other Latino(a) students as well as other ethnic groups that may or may not be silenced on campus (e.g., Asians, Native Americans), and where limited research exists.

I was very fortunate to have had the opportunity to do research on students of Mexican descent with diverse backgrounds. I found that most of the studies done on college students of Mexican descent took place with populations from the southwest U.S. region. There was very limited research on students of Mexican descent in the Midwest in general, and Michigan in particular. Because of their different acculturation levels and the socio-cultural complexity when compared to students from Texas, California, and New Mexico, we need to further explore their experiences to further understand their transition to a college environment, as evident in this study.

Moreover, because I played multiple roles as administrator, recruiter, adviser and researcher to these students, my relationship with them was unique and different compared to other empirical researchers who did not use the insider approach. Therefore, we must further investigate how our role as participant observers impacts on the relationships we build with the people we choose to study, and moreover, how this effects our findings. We must also be willing to look critically at our role as one that embodies both power and privilege, and be honest about this.

There is also a dire need to conduct more longitudinal studies with minority college students on how their class level and persistence changes their attitudes and behavior on issues such as on race, cultural identity, and acculturation while

attending a predominantly white campus. From these findings, if problems exist with many of the students, universities need to seek solutions to the barriers and obstacles that many Latino/a students face in college. Therefore, I argue that we need more aggressive outreach programs and student affairs professionals who can accommodate the academic and diverse socio-cultural values and needs of these students to help them to acculturate to the university culture. If the university administration is unwilling or unable to do this, then we have a moral responsibility to be honest with these students and their parents informing them of the lack of these services. If the services are not offered, students need to look at other college options. If they choose to stay, they need to understand the realities and challenges that lie ahead for them.

Although much was discussed about their histories and family backgrounds from the students' perspectives, more can be learned through the parents' lens on how they define themselves in this country. Also, more research needs to be done on migratory patterns of Latino families, where they settle, and how this influences their acculturation process.

And lastly, as a result of this project, I find that we as naturalistic researchers inquirers must be willing to describe more in detail the dialectical interaction between our fieldwork practice and emergent theory, especially if we are going to label ourselves critical postmodern practitioners. As graduate students, researchers, and teachers, we are so conditioned to think positivistically that we continue to be imprisoned in methodological strategies and modes of thinking which bias our studies. We need to find ways, mentors, friends, and colleagues who are willing to

challenges the prevailing ways of conducting research and interpreting the results.

As the old saying goes, “action speaks louder than words.” This is not easy and at times highly conflictive, but as Roman (1992) states: “ways of narrating otherness and difference, as well as the relations between cultural selves and others in ethnographic work, become practices for political deconstruction, struggle, and transformation.” (p. 587).

Appendix A
Participant Consent Form

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
Department of Sociology

Principal Investigator: Dr. Douglas Davidson, Faculty, Department of Sociology
Research Associate: Diane M. Ariza

I understand that I have been asked to participate in a research project entitled "Comparative Cultural Study of Chicano/a Students at Western Michigan University." The purpose of the study is to examine the experiences of Mexican American or Chicano/a students at Western Michigan University, and assess whether there are significant socio-cultural differences between Chicano/s that live in Texas compared to those that live in Michigan.

I understand that if I agree, I will be asked to participate in group and/or individual interviews with Diane Ariza. I will provide information about my family and personal background and my experiences before coming to campus. If I choose to participate, I understand that it is strictly voluntary, and therefore, I will not get any extra credit, and if I don't wish to participate, there will be no effect on my school grades or standing at WMU. Even if I agree today to participate by signing this form, I can change my mind any time when we begin the interviews.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to me. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken; however no compensation or treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise specified in this contract. I understand, however, that Diane Ariza, is prepared to provide crisis counseling should I become significantly upset and that she is prepared to make a referral if I need further counseling about this topic. I will be responsible for the cost of therapy if I choose to pursue it.

One way in which I benefit from this activity is having the chance to talk about my experiences while being a freshmen at Western Michigan University in order that the university may become more sensitive to my needs as a college student.

I understand that my responses will be compared to other responses from students living in Michigan/Texas.

I understand that all the information collected from me is confidential. That means that my name will not be mentioned on any forms, and instead, a pseudo name will be used. Diane Ariza will keep a separate master list with original names of participants and corresponding pseudo names. This master list will be destroyed once Diane Ariza has shared any important information with principal investigator. All other forms will be retained for three years in a locked file in the principal investigator's office.

I understand that interviews will be audio taped; however, at any time during the individual interview I have the right to have my conversations not be taped.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Dr. Douglas Davidson at 387-5285 or Diane Ariza at 668-4869. I may also contact the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at 387-8293 or the Vice President for Research at 387-8298 with any concerns that I have. My signature indicates that I understand the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

Print name _____

Sign name here _____

Today's date _____

Appendix B

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval Letter

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board



Kalamazoo Michigan 49008-3039

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: 18 February 1997

To: Douglas Davidson, Principal Investigator
Diane Ariza, Student Investigator

From: Richard Wright, Chair

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Richard A. Wright".

Re: HSIRB Project Number 96-12-19

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Comparative Cultural Study of Chicano/a Students at Western Michigan University" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the **HSIRB** for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 14 February 1998

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