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## **“A balancing act”: The role of gender and cultural identities on Latina counselors-in-training**

Amanda Sivoney Rodriguez

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“A BALANCING ACT”: THE ROLE OF GENDER AND CULTURAL IDENTITIES ON  
LATINA COUNSELORS-IN-TRAINING

A Thesis

by

AMANDA SIVONEY RODRIGUEZ

Submitted to Texas A&M International University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2020

Major Subject: Counseling Psychology

“A balancing act”: The role of gender and cultural identities on Latina counselors-in-training

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Major Subject: Counseling Psychology

## ABSTRACT

“A balancing act”: The role of gender and cultural identities on Latina counselors-in-training  
(May 2020)

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Chair of Committee: Dr. Elizabeth Terrazas-Carrillo

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Latina counselors-in-training (CIT). Research indicates that the number of women enrolled in graduate school programs and obtaining masters and doctoral degrees has been steadily increasing. Although more women are enrolling in graduate school, the training experiences of Latinas in graduate counseling programs are unexplored. Previous literature notes how Latinas may be affected by their cultural values which can ultimately influence their identity development as CIT. Using an intersectional framework, the following study examined the process of counselor identity development and how culture and gender may impact Latina CIT. In the study, a total of 8 interviews were conducted with Latina CIT attending in a university located in the U.S.-Mexico border. Conventional qualitative analysis based on a constructivist epistemology was used to analyze the data. Participants' responses were first coded by finding the meaning units within the transcribed text (Creswell, 2007). Thematic analysis also included the categorization of codes to create categories and themes which emerged from the data. Results of the analysis revealed the following three themes: (1) overcoming multiple demands as a Latina CIT, (2) the influence of Latina/o cultural values, and (3) forming a unique identity as a Latina CIT. The findings highlight the experiences of Latina CIT, the influence of gender and cultural identities on Latina CIT, and the counselor identity development of CIT.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to my late sister, Arli Dinora Rodriguez, who left this world too soon. I hope you are proud of the career path that I've embarked on to become a therapist that is passionate about healing minds and hearts.

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I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Elizabeth Terrazas-Carrillo, for providing me with invaluable support throughout the past three years. Dr. T., I could have never done this without you. Thank you for taking me under your wing and mentoring me in various ways. Throughout my graduate school journey, you were a significant source of wisdom and encouragement. You helped me recognize my own strengths and pushed me to build on my talents. Thank you for being my role-model and helping me recognize that I had the potential and the skills to complete a graduate degree as a young mother. I don't have the words to express my sincere and deep level of appreciation. All I can say is that I can never repay all that you've done for me.

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## INTRODUCTION

Latina/os are considered the largest ethnic minority group in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Currently, there are 58 million Latina/os in the country, which comprises 18.1% of the total population. It is estimated that the Latina/o population will continue to increase in number, especially in southern states like Texas. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). When compared to previous decades, Latina/os are now deciding to pursue higher education degrees in greater numbers. As a result, the Latina/o student population has seen a five percent increase of conferred college degrees and account for over 15% of all college students in the U.S. (Gandara, 2015; Fry, 2011). Although Latina/os have made significant gains in education in the past few years, they still fall behind when compared to other ethnic groups (Gandara, 2015). Specifically, the Latina/o population is underrepresented in various graduate school programs (Gandara, 2015; Ramirez, 2013).

Furthermore, Latina/os receive a minimal number of graduate degrees in comparison to other ethnic groups (National Science Foundation, 2009). Out of the thirty-six percent of Latina/os enrolled in college, only twelve percent will make it to graduation (Llamas & Consoli, 2012). In regard to educational attainment, the Latina/o population is disadvantaged when compared to their non-Latina/o counterparts (Llamas & Consoli, 2012). Minority graduate students may also face a high attrition rate across all academic disciplines, which furthers the dearth of graduate students of color (Brunsma et al., 2017; Zeligman, Prescod & Greene, 2015). Despite the barriers that Latina/o graduate students encounter, Latinas have made significant advances in higher education enrollment in the past few years (Gandara, 2015).

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This thesis follows the style of *Psychology of Women Quarterly*.

According to the American Psychological Association's (APA) Committee on Women in Psychology updated task report, (APA, 2017) there was a 66% increase in the number of Latina/os who enrolled in master's and doctoral psychology programs from 2004 to 2014. Among all doctoral candidates in psychology, 8.4% of Latina/os were awarded degrees in 2012. Specifically, a total of 277 women received doctoral degrees in counseling psychology in the same year (APA, 2017). The number of graduate degrees awarded to women has increased in all subfields of psychology which includes Latinas. Although there is an increased number of Latinas enrolling in graduate degrees in counseling, their training experiences are unexplored. Latina graduate students face a unique challenge as a result of balancing the expectations from the academic world and from their culture and/or family members. They encounter unique barriers related to their status as minority students and as Latinas. Additionally, Latinas are also affected by their cultural values which may greatly influence how they develop a counselor identity. Thus, it is significant to investigate the unexplored training experiences of Latina counselors-in-training (CIT) in graduate programs.

### **Characteristics of Latina/os in Higher Education**

Latina/os account for over 30 percent of all students enrolled in college (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2016). Among Latina/os college students, Latinas earn 60% of all conferred college degrees (Gandara, 2015). Specifically, more Latinas than Latino men are pursuing college degrees (Snyder, De Brey, & Dillow, 2019) and are enrolling in psychology programs (APA, 2014). In the psychology field, women comprise a vast majority and are overrepresented. However, when compared to the broader U.S. population, Latina/o doctoral psychology students are limited in number (Callahan et al., 2018). In the U.S., only 5% of all active psychologists are

considered Latina/o or Hispanic (APA, 2018). Nevertheless, there are 1.6 million Latina/os with masters and doctoral degrees, and this number is steadily increasing (U.S. Census, 2017).

Latina/o students in higher education share similar characteristics where many are first-generation college students (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). Latina/os tend to be from a low economic status background and report having a less rigorous high school education than Anglos (Gandara, 2015). Latina/o students prefer to enter community colleges, where almost half enroll in two-year institutions (Krogstad, 2016). Over 40% of Latina/os college students attend universities that identify as Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) which are concentrated in the states of California and Texas (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000; Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). Latina/os in college also tend to identify as nontraditional students in order to fulfill family and financial obligations as they work and attend college part-time (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003).

Many Latina/o students lack a rigorous educational background when compared to Anglo students. Research indicates a lack of academic preparation among Latina/o college students due to poor K-12 education (Karen, 1991). Public schools around the country face a lack of funding and have a limited number of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to support minority students (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). Additionally, the administrators and teachers in the public schools that have a significant number of Latina/o students may have a lack of experience with the Latina/o culture (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003) and may provide inferior teaching (Hurtado & Sinha, 2006). Latina/o students can also be affected by the threat of violence in their communities, which further elucidates the failure of the public-school system (Hurtado & Sinha, 2006).

In addition, because of their first-generation status, Latina/o graduate students may perceive a lack of support from their family and community members. (Maton et al., 2011). In fact, many family members struggle with understanding the experiences of graduate students. Thus, parents find they are not able to provide appropriate support or advice (Torres, 2006). Overall, the experiences of Latina students are meaningfully different from those of Anglo students. However, literature exploring the experiences of Latinas in higher education is limited. The rising number of Latinas enrolling in college highlights the importance of documenting the unique experiences and challenges of Latina CIT in graduate school.

### **Women of Color in Graduate School**

Previous research reveals that women of color face similar challenges to other minority groups enrolled in graduate programs. However, women of color experience additional barriers and obstacles in their academic journey (Zeligman, Prescod, & Greene, 2015). These barriers include isolation, having access to few mentors or role models, struggling with social expectations, sexism, and gender norms (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994). Specifically, the conflicting demands of professional and personal life place additional stressors on women (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994). For example, when deciding to enroll in a graduate program, women find themselves weighing childbearing options such that they may postpone applying or enrolling in an academic program if they are considering having children in the near future (Zeligman et al., 2015). Further, according to some research, a woman of color's decision to start a family negatively impacts her professional development (Zeligman et al., 2015).

Women of color are considered a double minority because they belong to both their gender and racial/ethnic group (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994). These women may face several pressures stemming from the larger society and their own racial or ethnic community (Comas-

Diaz & Greene, 1994). For example, women are often viewed as serving the role of nurturer and caretaker (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994). Therefore, these societal expectations conflict when the traditional gender role of a woman does not align with that of a highly educated woman (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994). Additional difficulties for women of color in graduate school may include conflicts with close friends and family members (Zeligman et al, 2015).

Women of color may encounter difficulties when they are unable to explain the rationale and reasoning for their pursuit of higher education (Zeligman et al., 2015). Specifically, women of color often struggle providing family members or loved ones an explanation for their unavailability (Zeligman et al., 2015). Furthermore, many women of color state not feeling prepared for the transition when they entered their respective graduate programs (Zeligman et al., 2015) and often report experiencing difficulty due to others not understanding the demands or time commitment requirements of graduate school (Zeligman et al., 2015). Similarly, highly educated women of color may experience feelings of isolation such as tokenism (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994; Green, 1992). Tokenism is described as the overvisibility of students of color as a result of the limited number of minorities in academic settings (Niemann, 1999). Women of color may also be considered double tokens due to their gender and/or race or ethnicity (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994). As a result, women who are viewed as a double token may feel that they stand out in their academic programs. (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994). These women may often be asked to serve as a minority mentor to their peers (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994). Tokenism places additional pressures on women of color when they are seen as a symbol or a role model (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994).

Epstein (1987) indicates that women experience a paradox whereby they are placed in prominent positions but are not fully respected by others. For example, some women see the

achievement of success as a result of the loss of feminine characteristics (Person, 1982). In addition, because women are socialized to place others before themselves, they often find the pursuit of ambition and success are contradictory and dissonant (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994). In fact, women who have the most success tend to feel the most isolated from others and from their communities (Comas-Diaz & Greene, 1994). However, Williams (1990) found that women of color equate career advancement and receiving an education with achieving success in life. The traits of determination, endurance, and resilience in professional advancement are found in many women of color, including Latinas. However, the review of the literature regarding women of color in higher education settings reveals they encounter many challenges, and no research to date has explored whether Latinas in counseling graduate programs experience these challenges.

### **Latinas in Graduate School**

Research notes that Latinas may receive contradicting messages regarding higher education from their parents and family members (Sanchez, 2013). For example, Latina/o parents may emphasize the importance of receiving an education and may often suspend the familial responsibilities of their daughters for the sake of schoolwork (Hurtado & Sinha, 2006), but, at the same time, express a fear that children in college may change and forget their values because they are far away from their protection (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). Due to differences between their parents and the educational world, Latinas often feel stuck in between their familial obligations and their academic dreams (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). As a result, Latina students have to make individual choices regarding school and family and may often find themselves between these two cultures. Latinas have a desire to pursue a higher education but also feel tugged towards the duty of familial obligation and loyalty (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). In addition, Latina graduate students may feel conflicted because they are unable to rely on one

of their largest support systems – their families – during one of the most challenging times in their lives (Gonzalez et al., 2001). However, research suggests that regardless of Latina/o parents' lack of knowledge about graduate school, they provide unconditional support of their children's educational achievement through affirmation and moral support (Hurtado & Sinha, 2006).

In the same manner, Latinas find challenges and tensions related to aspects of their ethnic identity when adapting to the world of higher education (Torres, 2006). Latinas must integrate their roles as students and as family-oriented Latinas. Literature exploring the challenges that Latinas encounter in graduate education and the impact of graduate education on their counselor identity development is limited (Torres, 2006). The available literature indicates that similar to other minorities, Latina students have the task of socializing into the academic world, which may result in feelings of isolation (Gonzalez, 2006). When Latina graduate students enter school, the academic world may trigger a change in their identity, as the student may feel compelled to embrace their academic identity (Torres, 2006). Latinas have choices to make in graduate school in order to balance the demands of school and family, which generates the perception of feeling “stuck” between two cultures (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Torres, 2006).

A source of stress involves the amount of time that Latinas spend on completing their tasks and assignments (Torres, 2006). Latinas may work on school assignments in the middle of a family event such as a get-together, birthday, and celebration (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). In addition, finding time to come home to visit family members also becomes a difficult task for many Latinas (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). Even if students live in the same location as their parents, it may be a struggle to devote sufficient family time (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). Thus, due to the rigorous requirements of graduate school, students may have difficulties fulfilling their

familial obligations, which are founded upon fundamental cultural values (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). As a result, many Latinas are not able to *compartir tiempo* (share time) with family members, which is central to building meaningful and intimate relationships in the Latina/o culture (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). Latina students may experience a struggle when attempting to balance the time that is spent with their families and the time that should be spent on their studies (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). However, when situations or emergencies arise, it is expected for Latina students to place family first and fulfill their obligations (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009).

Latina students often feel dissonance when they enter and adjust to the conflicting demands of academia (Gonzalez et al., 2001). Like previously mentioned, the process of negotiating and adapting to a new culture becomes increasingly difficult. Students feel that their identities are shattered or divided when adopting the dominant academic identity (Gonzalez et al., 2001). Academic values may include characteristics such as ambition, individuality, and self-sufficiency, which is opposite to the Latina/o collectivistic culture (Torres, 2006). However, Latina/o cultural values may provide a foundation to graduate students in their educational journey (Hurtado & Sinha, 2006). For this reason, it is essential to understand the cultural backgrounds of Latinas and the influence of Latina/o cultural values on the counselor identity development of Latina CIT.

### **Latina Cultural Values**

Latina students share common cultural values and beliefs, yet they have unique and diverse experiences as they navigate school and family life (Santiago-Rivera, Arrendondo, & Gallardo-Cooper, 2002). Nonetheless, their experiences are tied together by cultural practices and collective realities. An essential part of the Latina identity is developing a sense of

community and interconnection with others (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016). Latinas come from a culture that emphasizes the importance of collectiveness, loyalty, and obligation. Furthermore, Latina experiences are governed by shared Latina/o cultural core values, which include *familismo*, *comunidad*, *personalismo*, *simpatía*, and *respeto* (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016).

### ***Familismo***

*Familismo* is a Latina/o cultural value where individuals have a secure attachment towards members of their nuclear and extended families (Marin, 1993). It is a fundamental aspect of the Latina/o culture where family members experience feelings of loyalty and solidarity (Marin, 1993; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Many Latinas consider their *familia* (family) as their primary source of emotional, physical, and social support (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). The values of *familismo* include having a strong family orientation, which includes cooperation, unity, and interconnection (Falicov, 2013). The literature reveals that *familismo* stems from a collectivistic worldview where sacrifices must be made for the welfare of the group (Marin & Triandis, 1985). As a result, Latina girls are socialized from a very young age to place their family above everything and to involve family members when making decisions. Latinas often become responsible by assuming the role of caretaker for their family and loved ones (Marin & Triandis, 1985; Gloria & Castellanos, 2016). Latinas are brought up to endure sacrifices for the greater good, be a strong force for the family, and be nurturing towards others.

Although Latinas may differ in the adherence and expression of *familismo*, Gloria and Castellanos (2016) suggest that this cultural value still greatly influences the lives of many Latinas pursuing graduate studies. The closeness of family obligation remains strong even after families become acculturated to the U.S. mainstream culture (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). The Latina/o family orientation also views extended relatives as an integral part of the family. Latinas

have ties with grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, as well as close family friends (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002).

Due to the strong presence of *familismo* in Latina/o families, Latina graduate students may be directly influenced by the cultural value of *familismo*. Torres (2004) conducted a qualitative study which investigated the influences of *familismo* on Latina college students and found that parents often contradicted themselves by acknowledging the importance of education but at the same time emphasizing the traditional roles that are to be followed by Latinas. Therefore, students had to negotiate and accept the conflict in values with their parents as a result of their new role as college students (Torres, 2004). In addition, Latinas' college choice and living arrangements were directly influenced by their family. Specifically, students decided to live at home and often chose colleges and universities that were approved by their parents (Torres, 2004). *Familismo* can also provide Latinas in graduate school with a support system which can help students navigate academia. Building a reliable system of individuals can help Latinas receive cultural affirmation, which enables them to continue and succeed in higher education (Gloria & Castellanos, 2007). Thus, the cultural value of *familismo* greatly influences the academic journeys of Latina counselors-in-training due to the central role of familial values in their lives.

### ***Comunidad***

Latinas have various support systems which extend outside of the family. Their support systems might include people from the *comunidad* or community (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016). Lopez (2010) describes how the Latina/o tradition of *compadrazco* (godparentage) serves to connect and integrate people. Parents choose *madrinas* (godmothers) and *padrinos* (godfathers) to financially, emotionally, and spiritually look after their godchildren (Gloria & Castellanos,

2016). *Compadrazco* brings Latina/o families and individuals together and creates life-long relationships (Mintz & Wolf, 1950). Santiago-Rivera et al., (2002) mention that *madrinas* and *padrinos* are essential people among the Latina/o community and they are included in important family events and celebrations. Due to the influence of *comunidad* in the Latina/o culture, Latina students' value different support systems in both their personal and professional lives. Maton et al., (2011) emphasizes the need for Latinas to develop a strong and trusting relationship with peers. This sense of *confianza* (trust) is paramount to Latinas and is essential when students are building their own *comunidad* in academia. Another source of connection involves having other people who understand the shared academic experience (Maton et al., 2011). Also, given that Latina/os value interactions, Latina graduate students emphasize the need to find various support groups.

### ***Personalismo***

Latinas are also influenced by the cultural trait of *personalismo*, which is a “relational style where personal connections between people are highly valued” (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016, p. 96). The literature often defines *personalismo* as a cultural script of highly relational and collectivistic cultures (Ortiz, 2009). Communication between people are placed at the forefront and are expressed through verbal and nonverbal behavior, which includes physical contact such as shaking hands and hugging (Ortiz, 2009). Latina interactions are often centered around respect and dignity of individuals (Gloria & Castellanos, 2009).

Similarly, Latinas will seek to invest in their family and loved ones emotional well-being (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). These connections created with close relatives, extended relatives, and friends are meant to be sustained for life (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). The cultural value of developing meaningful connections with others often contrasts with the graduate school

experience. Students in graduate school may often spend the majority of their time completing coursework and/or program requirements (Torres, 2006). Further, graduate programs value specialization, fragmentation, and accuracy which contrasts Latina/o cultural values (Ibarra, 2001). Due to the importance of *personalismo* in the lives of Latina graduate students, it is critical for students to foster quality mentoring relationships. According to Maton et al. (2011), the students that had easy access to mentors and peers reported feeling the most satisfied in graduate school. Mentoring helps build connections and relationships with others, which is an invaluable asset to students (Brunsma et al., 2017). Latinas view mentoring as a source of educational as well as interpersonal support (Maton et al., 2011). Possessing a good mentor can ultimately impact the success of Latina graduate students (Brunsma et al., 2017). Thus, developing a strong mentorship relationship is fundamental to Latina graduate students who are attempting to navigate their academic programs.

### ***Simpatía and Respeto***

When interacting with others, the cultural value of *simpatía* is fundamental to Latinas (Rodriguez-Arauz et al., 2019). Traindis et al. (1984) defines *simpatía* as a type of social interaction, which leads to positive relationships among individuals. *Simpatía* fosters and maintains cordial relationships (Arbona, 2006). Latinas strive to be friendly towards others and actively avoid conflict. For example, Latinas will be polite, respectful, and kind to other individuals in any given situation (Rodriguez-Arauz et al., 2019). Latinas want to be treated with respect and politeness, which facilitates a warm interaction. In the same manner, they will give others this same level of respect. (Holloway, Waldrip, & Ickes, 2009). *Simpatía* also emphasizes placing others before individual needs and conforming to the wishes of others (Rodriguez-Arauz et al., 2019). Through *simpatía*, Latinas gain a sense of trust, which leads to intimate and

meaningful relationships (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). *Simpatía* ultimately shapes the way that Latina counselors-in-training interact with peers, faculty, and clients.

In the same manner, *respeto* is another cultural value that affects Latinas. *Respeto* involves obeying the hierarchical structure of Latina/os (Castillo & Cano, 2007). Latinas must accept their positions and uphold family duty. A function that *respeto* serves is to maintain the family structure and is often used to settle differences between family members (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Santiago-Rivera et al. (2002) also states that a golden rule among Latinas is to *no faltar al respeto* (not disrespect). Latinas must not respond to authority figures or individuals who are higher in the family structure. Thus, both *simpatía* and *respeto* greatly influences how Latina CIT engage in deference towards authority and maintain cordial relationships. However, no research to date has explored how *simpatía* and *respeto* affect Latina CIT.

### ***Marianismo***

The Latina/o culture prescribes gender-specific roles that dictate the behaviors of Latina/o men and women (Castillo & Cano, 2007). Latina gender roles are characterized by the term *marianismo*, which influences Latinas' behavioral expectations (Castillo et al., 2010). Some of the characteristics of *marianismo* include being pure, virtuous, and submissive. Women are expected to be subordinate and compliant toward men (Stevens et al., 1973). Further, Latinas must be willing to self-sacrifice and endure suffering and always place themselves second for the well-being of the family (Castillo et al., 2010). *Marianismo* also includes not having sexual needs and being virginally pure to parallel the Virgin Mary (Castillo & Cano, 2007). However, the characteristics of *marianismo* embody both positive and negative expectations for women (Castillo et al., 2010). For example, women have a proactive role in their family and are regarded as being the pillar of the family (Castillo et al., 2010). Although women can be strong, they are

limited to their home environments where the primary responsibility is to nurture and support the family (Rocha-Sanchez & Diaz-Loving, 2005). Larvin (2004) describes that Latina women are highly expected abide by the behaviors that are prescribed to *marianismo*.

Gender role behaviors and expectations are also influenced by Latina/o cultural values (Raffaelli & Ontai, 2004). The cultural value of *familismo* contributes to *marianismo*, where women are expected to provide support to their family and devote their lives to raise children (Castillo et al., 2010). Regarding the value of *respeto*, Latinas' behavioral expectations are to be submissive and obedient to her husband's demands and strive to be satisfied in life (Castillo et al., 2010). Women should avoid conflicts in order to have harmonious relationships (Castillo et al., 2010). In addition, Latinas should also avoid negative situations and conflicts in order to uphold the value of *simpatía*. Although the adherence to gender roles may vary in graduate students, the literature reveals that the behaviors prescribed to *marianismo* are still followed by Latinas in the United States (Rocha-Sanchez & Diaz Loving, 2005; Castillo et al., 2010). A study by Hurtado (2003) indicated that Latinas were specifically monitored and supervised by their parents, specifically their mothers. Also, Latina graduate students reported being expected to abide by the cultural and familial rules and values even when they were away at their respective graduate programs (Hurtado, 2003). Latinas often had familial responsibilities that started at a young age. However, Latinas also reported how their parents emphasized the importance of education achievement. Although research notes that Latina CIT are greatly influenced by cultural values, there is no literature examining how Latina cultural values can impact Latinas' CIT identity development.

### **Counselor Identity Development**

During their graduate school experience, counselors-in-training (CIT) additionally

encounter of the task of developing their practitioner self. Skovholt (2012) discusses the identity development of counselors as a process that is essential for students in the fields of counseling and psychotherapy. However, the student completes this work on their own, which is often time consuming when students are trying on multiple roles and determining which ones fit best. Skovholt (2012) describes this intricate and essential experience as the “work behind the work” for CIT (p. 80). Consequently, if students have not devoted enough time and energy into identity development, they may often experience identity confusion once graduation approaches. Students may not fully feel like a therapist, which may cause distress (Skovholt, 2012).

The process of identity development for CIT is not linear but may take many shapes or forms. CIT identity development may be understood as a whirlwind where different parts interact in disorganized ways (Skovholt, 2012). Graduate students are then faced with conflicting messages and data that require sorting. CIT must manage the practicing world and the academic world. They must balance the ethics of the profession as well as the politics of their internship site or placement. Furthermore, they must accommodate their idealized professional self and their personal self. All of these processes help move and transition CIT from students to practitioners in the mental health field (Skovholt, 2012).

Yalom (2002) emphasizes that the self is the most important tool to the therapist. Therefore, it is essential for CITs to understand their own cultural background and identity (Skovholt, 2012). Possessing a strong sense of cultural identity can help CIT understand their worldview and values (Goh et al., 2007; Skovholt, 2012). Through the exploration of one’s cultural background and history, a CIT can move towards cultural competence. Once students understand themselves, they can better recognize other individuals and ways of viewing the world (Skovholt, 2012). Skovholt (2012) notes that expert multicultural therapists know who

they are as well as their cultural background. Cultural identity is an essential tool in therapy and can ultimately help counselors connect better with their clients (Skovholt, 2012). It also allows CIT to be more aware of the client's verbal and nonverbal responses during therapy (Skovholt, 2012). Cultural identity impacts the work that CIT do in therapy and, thus, affects their professional identity development (Skovholt, 2012). However, there is limited research which investigates the influence of cultural identity of Latina CITs.

### **Intersectionality: A Theoretical Approach**

Intersectionality approaches are used by researchers to understand the categories of multiple societal memberships and identities of individuals (Cole, 2009). The theoretical approach to intersectionality dictates how investigators explore the categories of identities, differences, and inequalities (Cole, 2009; Grzanka, Santos, & Moradi, 2017). Specifically, researchers examine multiple societal memberships utilizing a new lens and consider the implications of various group memberships (Cole, 2009). This approach pays close attention to groups who have been excluded from the literature, such as women who belong to minority groups (Cole, 2009). Intersectionality can help researchers further understand how multiple identities function for individuals who belong to marginalized societal groups (Grzanka, Santos, & Moradi, 2017). The scant literature that explores Latina CIT neglects to investigate how gender and race interact and affect one another. This study seeks to examine the process of counselor identity development and how culture and gender impact Latina CIT. Due to the influence that Latina cultural values have on Latina graduate students, it is important to view the influences of these factors on counselor development. Using a qualitative approach allows the exploration of the unique experiences of Latinas that are not investigated in the current literature of CIT and counselor identity development.

## **The Current Study**

This study sought out to qualitatively investigate the experiences of Latina CIT by using an intersectional framework. Research conducted on women of color in graduate programs has documented the unique experiences that women face related to gender such as societal expectation and sexism (Comaz-Diaz & Greene, 1994). Latina CIT may share these challenges as well as experience the unique cultural barriers of Latina/o students (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003). In addition, Skovholt (2012) noted that CIT engage in the task of cultural exploration as part of the process of counselor identity development. A strong cultural identity serves as an essential tool for the counseling student (Skovholt, 2012). Current literature lacks the unique experiences of Latina CIT and the role of counseling identity development. As a result of the dearth of research on the aforementioned, this qualitative study explored the following questions: (1) What are the experiences of Latina CIT? (2) How are Latina CIT influenced by their gender and cultural identities? (3) How do Latina CIT view their counselor identity development?

## METHODS

### Participants and Setting

This study included a purposeful sample of 8 Latina graduate students in counseling psychology. Since the study focused on the experiences of Latina counselors-in-training, the criteria for selecting the participants at the time of the interview included: (a) identifying as Hispanic or Latina, (b) identifying as a woman, (c) being over 18 years of age, and (d) currently enrolled in a counseling psychology graduate program. All of the participants were pursuing a graduate degree in a university located in the U.S.-Mexico border, which has a 97% population of Hispanics/Latina/os. Other demographic characteristics are included in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Sample Demographic Characteristics*

Pseudonym	Age	Preferred Language(s)	College Generational Status	Year in Counseling Psychology Master's Program
Karen	23	Both English and Spanish	First generation	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year
Edi	28	Both English and Spanish	Non-first generation	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year
Mary	24	Both English and Spanish	First generation	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year
Sophia	23	English	First generation	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year
Eva	25	Both English and Spanish	First generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year
Christina	23	Both English and Spanish	First generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> year
Emily	26	English	First generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year
Ellie	22	English	Non-first generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year

*Note:* Latina CIT in their second year of the master's program have completed the following

courses: Introduction to Counseling and Psychotherapy, Human Development through the Lifespan, Theories of Counseling and Psychotherapy, Psychopathology, Ethics, Group Counseling and Psychotherapy, Appraisal Techniques, Child and Adolescent Counseling and Psychotherapy, Practicum, Marriage and Family Therapy, Internship I, and Addictions Counseling. Latina CIT in their third year of the master's program have completed the same courses as well as the following: Internship II, Advanced Psychopathology, Multicultural Issues in Counseling, Career Counseling, and Ethics 2. In addition, Latina CIT have the option of taking electives such as: Cultural Aspects of Counseling Clients of Hispanic and Mexican Descent and Technical Aspects of Counseling Clients of Hispanic Descent.

### **Procedure**

Upon receiving approval from the university's Institutional Review Board, the author emailed an announcement about the research to full-time counseling graduate students who identified as Latinas. Recruitment email stated the purpose of the study was to explore the experiences of Latina counselors-in-training. The participants completed a paper-and-pencil demographic survey that asked their age, sexual orientation, country of origin, preferred language(s), college generational status, and year in the counseling psychology program. The author conducted face-to-face interviews with the Latina CIT. These interviews included questions guided by the research questions but were also unstructured enough to allow new themes and ideas to emerge. The interviews were conducted using an interview guide that included open-ended questions, follow-up, and probing questions (see Appendix). All of the interviews were recorded digitally with the participants permission. The audio recordings of all

of the participants were transcribed verbatim by the author. Incentives for participation were not provided.

### **Data Analysis**

The data was analyzed using conventional qualitative content analysis based on a constructivist epistemology. Constructivist epistemology posits that meanings are co-created by each individual instead of existing independently (Creswell, 2007). A constructivist approach is used to explore the experiences of marginalized groups and takes into account the intersectionality of race and gender (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Conventional qualitative content analysis is utilized when there is a dearth of research that describes a phenomenon (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Based on this approach to data analysis, the author engaged in the bracketing of all previous assumptions and knowledge about the topics which allowed the themes and categories to emerge from the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Thus, the author completed bracketing by writing a subjectivity statement articulating the beliefs and assumptions about the topic.

Additionally, the author attended consensus meetings with the thesis chair. During these consensus meetings, the author and thesis chair reviewed the transcriptions of the interviews to confirm that the themes and categories emerging from the data reflected the participant's perspectives. Preconceived notions and assumptions of Latina CIT and their graduate school experience were thoroughly discussed. This led to a discussion of the author's and thesis chair's individual understanding of the themes and categories (Creswell & Poth, 2017) as well as understanding how biases and assumptions might influence the results. Discussions and explanations of the organizations of the themes and categories also occurred during the consensus meetings (Schielke, Fishman, Ostake, & Stiles, 2009). A mutual understanding of the

results was generated in the meetings. In order to ensure that the participant's perspectives were provided, the results of the analysis included the participants' quotes (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Qualitative research studies seek to ensure trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of the study was established by ensuring dependability, credibility, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). This study sought out to establish dependability by having the thesis committee chair serve as internal auditor of the analysis that was completed by the author (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Credibility was assessed by the following: (a) the study utilized well-established data collection methods and use an interview guide developed from the literature, (b) the interview included probing questions and linked participant answers to previous answers in order to establish any incongruencies in the participant's narrative, and (c) the interview encouraged honesty in the participants' responses (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Confirmability was ensured by keeping a record of all the steps of the analysis including data reduction and analysis products. Additionally, reflexivity in qualitative research is established by paying close attention to how knowledge is constructed and understood by the researcher (Koch & Harrington, 1988; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The author engaged in reflexivity by completing a subjectivity statement in order to establish the perspectives of each member (Morrow, 2005). Throughout the process of data analysis, the author engaged in a process of self-reflection about preconceptions and personal values, thus engaging in data bracketing to avoid tainting the research process (Thomas, 2006).

It is significant to note that the author is a Latina counselor-in-training from the program where the participants were selected; the thesis chair is a faculty member. Both the author and thesis chair identity as Latinas and are bilingual. As a result of engaging in reflexivity, the thesis chair and author explored how their identities as Latinas and previous experiences as CIT

may influence their interpretations. Additionally, through reflexivity, it was noticed that the findings of this study were not congruent with the author's personal beliefs and values. For example, the author was surprised at some of the experiences that were revealed by Latina CIT. Acknowledging these preconceptions ensured reflexivity and confirmability of the research study. Furthermore, transferability was established by providing the participant's narrative in a social and cultural context (Morrow, 2005). The author ensured transferability by utilizing thick descriptions that thoroughly described the phenomenon or accounts of the participants (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Holloway, 1997). The author used the sufficient details in the participant's narrative and then drew conclusions that could be transferred to other settings, peoples, or times (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Holloway, 1997).

## RESULTS

### Themes

Three major themes emerged from the narratives which revealed the experiences of Latina CIT: (a) overcoming multiple demands as a Latina CIT, (b) the influence of Latina/o cultural values, and (c) forming a unique identity as a Latina CIT (see Table 2).

Table 2

#### *Thematic Analysis Results*

Theme	Categories
Overcoming multiple demands as a Latina CIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experiencing pressures from the Latina/o culture</li> <li>▪ Feelings of guilt when prioritizing expectations in graduate school</li> <li>▪ Reconciling cultural and academic pressures</li> </ul>
The influence of Latina/o cultural values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Being a Latina carries responsibility to fulfill values</li> <li>▪ The importance of speaking Spanish as a Latina</li> </ul>
Forming a unique identity as a Latina CIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Education is highly valued and a source of pride</li> <li>▪ Latina and counseling identity go hand-in-hand</li> </ul>

**Overcoming multiple demands as a Latina CIT.** This theme illustrates how Latina CIT struggled to manage expectations and pressures from various sources in their lives. Categories found within this theme include: (a) experiencing pressures from the Latina/o cultures, (b) feelings of guilt when prioritizing expectations in graduate school, and (c) reconciling cultural and academic pressures.

*Experiencing pressures from the Latina/o culture.* This category focuses on how Latina CIT experienced tensions due to Latina/o cultural values. For example, Edi (female, age 28, bilingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> Year) described her difficulty with the cultural value of *familismo* and how it affected her journey in graduate school:

So, I think that in itself and being a Latina in the master's program is really hard. It's really hard balancing familismo. You still have responsibilities with your family but you have to put all of that aside because the expectations [are] much higher when you are in a master's program.

Additionally, Ellie (female, 22 years old, monolingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) expressed her struggle with balancing family and graduate school:

For my dad's family, they're not going to understand that I have homework (laughs) and it's not that they don't [understand]. Like... they do [...] like when I go and I'm like, 'oh sorry I have to leave' they're like, 'oh that's fine, thanks for being here.' It's just like [...] the initiative or like the, the making the effort for them like that they value [...] I guess for me now I value it too because I care for them and I don't want them to be hurt. So, it's like, like a tug of war, of my priorities.

For some Latina CIT, adhering to *familismo* also included friction related to conflicting parent values. For example, Christina (female, age 23, bilingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) recounted,

I feel like I'm half American and half Latina. I don't know, it feels like I should be thinking how my parents raised me, but I'm my own person. So I'm like, I think however I want, and I feel like this is the right way to do things and I'm very clear, on what I want, but that also feels bad in some ways. Because I feel like my parents know and I feel like I act how I act with maybe my friends, maybe not to the full extent, (laughs) but I'm my own person with them. I don't become another person just so [my parents] can like me and so I feel like that's where we have several [...] uh, disagreements because maybe they don't agree with those, some of the ways act, or some of the ways I think, and I always tell them, you know, I'm a good person. I'm a good girl. I don't do drugs. I don't do anything bad. Yet, sometimes I still, um, I still find myself being scolded by them.

In general, the participants revealed that they experienced conflicts related to their Latina/o culture including expectations as a student and a daughter. This finding is consistent with Torres

(2006), who emphasized that Latinas in graduate school find challenges and tensions related to their culture. These difficulties might be attributed to the strong presence of *familismo* in Latina CIT's lives. Consequently, Latina students have the task of negotiating the conflict in values with their parents and/or family members (Torres, 2004). Latina CIT are concurrently affected by how they balance familial and academic expectations as Latinas and counselors.

*Feelings of guilt when prioritizing expectations in graduate school.* Participants expressed that the expectations of graduate school created feelings of guilt. Latinas are not able to rely on their family for academic or career advice due to their first-generation status (Gonzalez et al., 2001). This creates conflict for Latinas because their family members are considered their biggest source of support (Gonzalez et al., 2001). Although Latina CIT have a sense of *comunidad* with their professors who share their academic experience, they felt sad when they are not able to rely on family members for this support. This is illustrated by Edi's (female, age 28, bilingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> year) comment,

When you are in the master's program, it is very different because you don't have [your family]. Your mentors are your, like I said, your professors, or people who are or have that higher education and [you are not] able to ask your family for like well 'how would I do this?' [Feeling] that kind of guilt because you know that you are always studying, and you don't have time to be with your family and all that.

Latina CIT emphasized the negative feelings that occur as a result of dealing with academic demands. Emily (female, age 26, monolingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) shared her experience of quitting her job to enroll in graduate school,

I felt guilty, if I decided to quit my job [to be in the graduate program] because then who would help and I was the oldest [...] family is first, and, and you can't do it. And it's weird because it's not like they voiced it. It's not like they said, you have to [keep working].

Latina CIT mentioned that the requirements of graduate school were not congruent with their expected familial duties. Latinas are socialized to assume caregiving roles of their family and loved ones (Marin & Traindis, 1985; Gloria & Castellanos, 2016). In contrast, graduate counseling programs may emphasize individualistic traits such as being autonomous, self-reliant, and independent (Torres, 2006). Latina CIT may feel conflicted when attempting to meet the demands of their families as well as their graduate programs (Gonzalez et al., 2001). Although family members were understanding of the requirements of graduate school, Latina CIT still felt guilty and also felt pressured to place family first. Overall, Latina CIT are influenced by cultural norms and gender roles which include *marianismo*, *familismo*, and *comunidad* (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016) while they are completing their graduate programs.

*Reconciling cultural and academic pressures.* As a result of the multiple demands and expectations experienced by Latina CIT, there was an attempt to balance the expectations from family and graduate school programs. Participants mentioned sacrificing their time and resources for the sake of family or school. For example, Ellie (female, 22 years old, monolingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) recounted,

What usually happens is I give up sleep. That's usually my sacrifice. I think that also comes from me trying to keep everyone happy. More often than [I] like. I would rather choose that than letting my family down.

Research suggests that Latinas often make choices in order to successfully balance the demands coming from both their family and graduate programs (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Torres, 2006). As result, students may feel an inclination to embrace their academic identity (Torres, 2006). This is illustrated by Edi (female, age 28, bilingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> year) who states how she attempted to separate her cultural expectations from the academic world.

I think because[...] when it comes to expectations like family expectations or like um I guess roles [...] I think that is really hard because like I said

you have to put all of [your cultural values] to the side and still try to like finish your master degree, right? But when it comes to the *orgullo* and the pride [in yourself] that's awesome. I mean it's very rewarding.

Similarly, Emily (female, age 26, monolingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) revealed her attempts in reconciling two distinct cultures and stated, “the first word that I thought of was pressure because I have to be like a certain way, a different kind of way for both cultures.” This is consistent with Gonzalez et al. (2001) who explored how the cultural identity of Latina students might feel divided and compartmentalized when meeting academic demands. Latina CIT chose how their time and effort was going to be devoted during graduate school. This is illustrated by Eva (female, age 25, bilingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year),

Now that I am with my parents more it's very like 'why are you doing that? *Porque estas haciendo trabajo? Acabas de estar todo el dia en la escuela* (Why are you doing work? You've been all day at school) like you've been there since eight in the morning and it's 10:00 p.m. and you're going to come home and be on your laptop?' And I'm like, 'no I have to do this.' But now [living] with my parents and they're very traditional – it was like 'no when you are home you don't do anything. You spend time with family' and I can't do that. So I've had to balance it because for me even though grad school [is] one of the most important things in my life right now [...] I think that part of me, the Hispanic part of me makes me want to find a sort of balance if I can.

Latinas found it difficult to simultaneously fulfill their academic requirements and adhere to fundamental cultural values. Research notes that Latina students may choose to focus on schoolwork instead of attending family get-togethers, parties, and/or spending time with family members (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). However, not being able to *compartir tiempo* with loved ones might pose a struggle for some Latina CIT (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). It is important for Latinas to maintain meaningful relationships and invest in family members (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). Moreover, completing coursework often meant sacrificing moments and valuable connections with family. Latinas CIT strived to achieve a balance of what is important to them while taking into account cultural values in graduate school.

**The influence of Latina/o cultural values.** Latina CIT revealed the saliency of Latina/o cultural values in their lives, especially as they are working to build their identities as future professional counselors. Two categories emerged from this theme: (a) being a Latina carries responsibility to fulfill and (b) the importance of speaking Spanish as a Latina.

*Being a Latina carries responsibility to fulfill values.* This category revealed the influence of being a Latina woman. Participants emphasized the impact of cultural values on their Latina identity. This is illustrated by Edi (female, age 28, bilingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> year), who recounted the influence of her cultural identity as a master student:

I think that the way the Latina identity plays a role is because [of] the familismo, I guess. Like having that um relationship with other people and like I said just that creating our own little family [...] Also as women and Latinas [...] So maybe like, the Latina I am; [being] maternal [and] caring, and like *marianismo*. But not the extent of having to be the Virgin Mary, right? But, being selfless and helping each other

Latina CIT acknowledged the influence of cultural behavioral expectations as Latinas. Even as graduate students, Latina CIT are still affected by Latina cultural values. Latinas adhere to the behaviors that are prescribed by the gender role of *marianismo* and values such as *personalismo*, *simpatía*, and *respeto* (Rocha-Sanchez & Diaz Loving, 2005; Castillo et al., 2010; Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). These aspects of the Latina/o culture influenced how Latina CIT interacted with other people and the ways in which they navigated their graduate school experience. For example, Eva (female, 25 years old, bilingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) shared,

As a Latina I think that I've caught myself doing some things that are traced back to my values. I have been nurturing. In our culture we are [...] supposed to say 'hi' and have a little *platica* (talk) with someone. And how we are always supposed to be the peacekeepers. We're never supposed to start things, you know. We are supposed to be the pillar of the family. And how women don't argue, and they're supposed to be, you know, nice.

Latina CIT also expressed how being a Latina woman brings about additional expectations and roles. This is consistent with Santiago-Rivera et al. (2002) who described how shared cultural practices and values are fundamental to Latina/os. Latina cultural core values bring about expectations of how Latinas should act and relate to others. Moreover, these cultural values and practices transcended beyond Latina CIT's personal lives. For example, Latina CIT mentioned how these values affected some of their choices and decision making. This is illustrated by Emily (female, age 26, monolingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) who shared how she decided to live at home instead of attending a university located away from family,

I mean I still live at home because my mom doesn't want me to go [away]. I was going to go to San Antonio to study and so my family was the one influenced [me to stay]. That they rather me be at home because they didn't want me to be on my own so, that's how I see it.

Eva (female, age 25, bilingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) also echoed this idea and added,

My parents and I were on the same page about [enrolling in] college. But to me, it was like I want to leave Laredo. Like I want to study somewhere else [...] but to my parents it was like 'you're selfish.' To them, they saw it like I was abandoned the family and I didn't love them. And I tried explaining that to them and they just didn't understand. So, in that time I made this decision to stay [...] here [...] because at that time those values were more important to me than chasing my own dream and leaving out of town.

Collectivistic values governed the lives of Latina CIT which is consistent with Gloria and Castellanos (2016), who suggested that cultural values greatly influence Latina graduate students. Latinas feel a strong sense of family obligation and will often find themselves making sacrifices for the well-being of the family (Santiago-Rivera et al., 2002). They also value and respect structure of the family and parental figures. In addition, for some Latina CIT, fulfilling cultural values also included expectations regarding marriage and children. Sophia (female, age 22, monolingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> year) shared,

So, I guess now that I am older, and I have been with my boyfriend for like five years already. My mom she is [asking] ‘when are you guys going to get married?’ And you know ‘you need to do this. You need to get married before you move in with him, before you leave the house, you have to be married.’

Similarly, Edi (female, age 28, bilingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> year) mentioned feeling pressured by certain family members to start a family of her own.

It’s mostly the women that ask me, like my aunts will say, ‘when are you getting married?’ and like ‘oh, are you dating anyone? Well, your clock is ticking,’ or like ‘well your graduating so come on get on it.’ I think because when it comes to expectations, [when you are] almost thirty years old is like the whole pressure of having kids, and having a family and starting your own.

For these Latinas, expectations of marriage and children were greatly present. Latinas CIT were usually asked questions by other family members about their personal lives and were reminded of the cultural expectations of getting married and having children at a young age. This is consistent with Castillo et al. (2010) who emphasized how Latinas have a duty to devote their lives to have a family and raise children. Ultimately, the cultural pressure of *marianismo*, which emphasizes the expectations of having a family and children, is felt by Latina CIT in their academic journeys.

*The importance of speaking Spanish as a Latina.* This category demonstrated the saliency of the Spanish language for these Latina CIT. Most participants were bilingual and proficient in both English and Spanish; however, some Latinas who were not fluent in Spanish also mentioned the importance of speaking Spanish. For instance, Ellie (female, age 22, monolingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) mentioned,

I feel I should know Spanish. I feel like that’s part of what makes you Latino or Hispanic or of Mexican heritage, and I don’t, so I was like embarrassed, and I felt like a little bit ashamed that I had to say no [I don’t speak Spanish].

On the other hand, the Latina CIT who were bilingual stated how essential it was to know both languages and be able to switch from English to Spanish and vice versa. Edi (female, age 28,

bilingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> year) revealed her thoughts of using both languages when facilitating a psychoeducational group:

As a Latina, I think it really helps being bilingual because living here [...] you know that most of us are bilinguals or at least Hispanic. And so when we were doing psychoeducational groups, I noticed that um most of the students or participants [...] code switched during group so I think it was really important to kind of [share] that with them.

Moreover, Latina CIT viewed their bilingualism as a strength in the mental health field.

For example, Sophia (female, age 22, monolingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> year) mentioned that her graduate program provided opportunities for giving therapy in Spanish and how this would help her once she graduates. She said,

I think that this program will um open a lot of opportunities for me in the future. If I decide to move either upstate or move down south of Texas, I think that this program [...] the way that they tailor counseling [...] specifically for Latino/Latinas [will help me]. I think it will just open up more opportunities for me in the future as for when I am applying for jobs. I know that being bilingual is [...] an advantage.

Latina CIT emphasized that the Spanish language was central to their lives and being bilingual carried weight and value. If Latina CIT did not know Spanish, they felt self-conscious of only speaking English. Bilingualism is part of Latina CIT's identity, which contributed to the sense of connectedness and *comunidad* with others. This is consistent with Maton et al. (2011) who noted that Latina students value the sense of *comunidad* in both their professional and personal lives. Furthermore, Latina CIT who have a strong sense of cultural identity and explore their own values are more well equipped to help their clients (Goh et al., 2007; Skovholt, 2012).

**Forming a unique identity as a Latina CIT.** Latina CIT revealed their views about their identities as a CIT and a Latina woman. Two categories were subsumed under this theme: (a) education is highly valued and a source of pride and (b) Latina and counseling identity go hand-in-hand

*Education is highly valued and a source of pride.* Many Latinas felt proud of being able to pursue a graduate degree when others did not have the same opportunities. For example,

Emily (female, age 26, monolingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) recounted:

There is more to being a Latina than what people have in mind. And it's awesome that I have the opportunity to prove that [Latinas] could do more. Because I know for sure the women in my family could've done more, but their opportunities were kind of taken away from them.

Latina/os are often first-generation students (Brown, Santiago, & Lopez, 2003), which increased the value of being a graduate student for Latina CIT. Also, Latina CIT viewed obtaining a master's degree as an opportunity to do more as a Latina. Edi (female, age 28, bilingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> year) stated,

Being in the program as a Latina [...] I mean here [...] I don't see it as a huge difference because we're mostly populated [by] Hispanics or Latinos, but personally I guess it's something very rewarding because most of my family doesn't have higher education.

For Latina CIT, doing more also meant working harder in order to make their parents feel proud of their accomplishments. For example, Ellie (female, 22 years old, monolingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) shared,

On my dad's side, it's like 'we've never done it, you have to [complete a graduate degree]'. So, I think it makes me work harder to make them proud. [School] just made me feel more proud [of] myself and made me appreciate the background that I have and [my ethnicity as a] Latina.

Latinas were aware of the privilege that comes with receiving an advanced degree. According to Williams (1990), Latinas who seek educational advancement often endure challenges in order to obtain their professional goals. Latina CIT were aware of these challenges and sought out to overcome obstacles for themselves and family members. Based on their gender and culture, Latina CIT are aware of the importance of having the status of a first-generation Latina woman completing a graduate degree. This is consistent with Gloria & Castellanos (2006) who indicated

how Latina students have a strong desire to pursue a higher education while maintaining loyalties with family members.

*Latina and counseling identity go hand-in-hand.* This category focused on how Latinas merged their identities as Latinas and CIT. Specifically, Mary (female, age 24, bilingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> year) mentioned,

As counselors, I think people can relate [more] to females than they do to males, and just the fact that I have that background, that Latina background, really allowed me to build those relationships with other people because I feel that is something really emphasized for Latina women. Like the relationship aspect, being really about the family and about [...] thinking of others. So I think that contributed a lot to my ability to build those relationships with other students and I think with my professors and my clients as well.

Latinas CIT revealed how they used their identities as a resource and created their own understanding of being a counselor-in-training. Developing a practitioner self is an essential task for CIT (Skovholt, 2012). In addition, Latina CIT also emphasized the role of cultural values in their training experiences. Christina (female, age 23, bilingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) recounted,

As a Latina... I feel like our culture kind of teaches us to [...] be very close. I don't know, there's little things that I feel as a Latina woman, that we do [...] that [builds] that trust and the relationship.

Latina CIT explored and sought out to understand their cultural identity and how this affected them as counselors. This is illustrated by Mary (female, 24 years old, bilingual, 3<sup>rd</sup> year) who shared her experience as a counselor,

So, I think maybe my experience was distinct but I think that emphasizes that you still have certain roles, you know, in the household and so I know for a fact that for a helping profession is very typical of females and especially as a Latina, you know, focusing helping on others.

Similarly, Latina CIT seemed to view their cultural identity as being interconnected with their professional identity. Latina CIT recognized how their career path was congruent to their

gendered and cultural traits. This is consistent to Skovholt (2012) who noted how CIT are faced with the task of developing their identities as practitioners. Ellie (female, age 22, monolingual, 2<sup>nd</sup> year) shared how she understands her identity and her experience as a CIT, “As a master student in counseling psychology [...] I don’t know, I’m trying to think, of like specific events.... (laughs) but I feel I feel like I’m just always Latina and always a counselor.” Latina CIT recognized characteristics and aspects of their cultural identity, which could be positively used in therapy. Engaging in an exploration of one’s self could move counselors towards cultural competence (Skovholt, 2012). Latina CIT sought to understand their gender and cultural identities by revealing how these roles influenced their work as CIT. This exploration can help Latinas develop a strong sense of cultural identity as CIT. These results are consistent with Skovholt (2012) who emphasized how cultural identity is considered an essential tool in therapy. Thus, cultural identity could ultimately be used to help counselors connect better with clients (Skovholt, 2012). Overall, Latina CIT saw their cultural identity paralleling and strengthening their roles as mental health professionals.

## DISCUSSION

This study utilized an intersectional framework to investigate the following: (1) the experiences of Latina CIT, (2) the influence gender and cultural identities on Latina CIT, and (3) the counselor identity development of Latina CIT. According to Skovholt (2012), an important aspect of the process of counselor identity development involves having a strong sense of cultural identity. Past research has emphasized that an intersectional framework can lead to a better understanding of how multiple identities interact and influence each other for marginalized or oppressed groups (Grzanka, Santos, & Moradi, 2017). This study expands on the prior research and utilizes intersectionality to explore the influence of culture and gender on Latina CIT. Results from this study illuminate how CIT may be affected by their gender and cultural identities, which can also influence their counselor identity development.

The first theme reveals how Latinas overcame multiple expectations in their academic journey. The results indicate that Latina CIT struggle balancing the pressures coming from their Latina/o culture. These expectations may be due to the cultural value of *familismo*, which may create a conflict in values (Torres, 2004). In addition, the study demonstrates that Latinas tend to feel negative emotions such as guilt when prioritizing tasks in graduate school. This is speculated due to Latinas being socialized to place family first, which contrasts from the individualistic nature of graduate school (Gloria & Castellanos, 2015; Marin & Triandis, 1985; Torres, 2006). As a result, the study's findings suggest that Latina CIT seek ways to balance cultural and academic pressures and demands. Latina CIT mention how they seek to balance their expectations by sacrificing for the sake of family or for graduate school requirements. Gloria and Castellanos (2006) discussed that Latina students often struggle to balance the time spent with family and fulfilling program requirements. This theme contributes to understanding the sources

of pressure for Latina CIT attending graduate school. In addition to completing academic demands as regular students, results reveal how Latina CIT also have the additional task of balancing pressures and expectations from family members.

The second theme focuses on the saliency of Latina/o cultural values. The results of this study indicate that Latina CIT explored their identities as Latinas and how these identities could bring about additional expectations. Moreover, Latina CIT emphasize how cultural values such as *familismo*, *comunidad*, and *marianismo* played a significant role in their lives. As a result, Latina CIT experience the influence of expectations from family members regarding marriage and starting a family. Previous research notes how the experiences of Latinas may be shaped by Latina/o cultural values which include collectivism and the importance of family (Gloria & Castellanos, 2016). *Familismo* is an important aspect of Latinas where family comes first and decision-making is a familial endeavor (Marin, 1993; Marin & Triandis 1985; Santiago Rivera et al., 2002). Similarly, research suggests that gender roles dictate the behaviors that are to be followed by Latinas (Castillo & Cano, 2007). The gender role of *marianismo* characterizes women as being pure, non-sexual, and virtuous (Castillo et al., 2010). The results of this study coincide with previous literature regarding *familismo* and *marianismo* (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006; Castillo & Cano, 2007; Castillo et al., 2010). Latinas in this study emphasize the importance of these cultural values and how these values influenced and interacted with their identity as a Latina woman. In addition, Latina CIT emphasize the importance of being bilingual and speaking both English and Spanish as a strength.

It is significant to note that master's students have course and clinical requirements to complete for their graduate programs. In addition to the concerns that come with being a counseling student, Latina students also have to adjust to the influence of cultural values. Latina

students are aware of the expectations that come from their culture and the people in their lives. Thus, Latina CIT seek to balance these expectations while attending to academic demands. In comparison to a non-Latina graduate student, Latina CIT carry around multiple demands in their academic journey. While these findings coincide with research that investigates the role of *familismo, comunidad, and marianismo* (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006; Castillo & Cano, 2007; Castillo et al., 2010), the results of this theme contribute to a better understanding of how cultural values may influence the developing professional identities of Latina CIT. In addition, this study reveals how Latina CIT may seek to fulfil gendered expectations such as starting a family and also adhere to behavioral expectations of Latinas while in graduate school.

The third theme illustrates how Latinas viewed their role as CIT. The findings show that Latinas are able to formulate their identity by merging their personal and professional selves. Latina CIT emphasize the role of education in their lives and also express that completing a graduate degree is an accomplishment due to most Latinas being first-generation college students. This theme demonstrates that Latina CIT are proud of their status as graduate students and seek to make their family proud. Our findings are supported by Williams (1990) who notes that Latina students value an education and professional advancement. Previous literature has suggested that parental support and affirmation is important to Latina students (Torres, 2004). Latinas may often involve family members in academic decisions. Our results indicate how the influence of family can affect the lives of Latina CIT. This study extends the literature by exploring the development of the counselor identity of Latina students. This theme also reveals how Latina CIT see their cultural identity and may seek to use it as a resource. As students are developing into counselors, Latina students must also take into consideration multiple intersecting identities. Latina CIT must be attuned to how culture and gender might influence

their personal as well as their professional lives. In their journey of developing a counselor identity, Latina CIT might benefit from reflecting on the interplay of their values and the influence of different members of their families. This could lead to a greater understanding of their cultural identity, which can be helpful while CIT are developing and understanding multicultural cultural competence. These findings are consistent with Skovholt (2012) who emphasized how acquiring a strong cultural identity is essential to the development of therapists.

Overall, this study demonstrates how Latina CIT are faced with the challenge of balancing multiple demands and expectations while they are constructing their identity as counselors. Prior research suggests that although a Latina's goal is to earn a graduate degree, they feel pressured by familial obligation (Gloria & Castellanos, 2006). The Latina CIT in this study emphasize how cultural values influenced their lives, which is consistent with Castellanos and Gloria (2016) who noted the direct influence of *familismo* in Latina graduate students. Ultimately, this study found that Latina CIT are able to recognize their gender and cultural identities, which led to a clearer understanding of their development as CIT. Given that very few studies explore the experiences of Latina CIT, this study contributes to the literature by exploring the roles of gender and cultural identity on Latina CIT and the counselor identity process. Although a few studies have explored the experiences of Latina/o doctoral students (Gonzalez, 2006; Gonzalez et al. 2001) and Latina/o psychology doctoral students (Celaya, 2012), this study provides an intersectional approach to understanding the experiences of Latina CIT. Moreover, this is the first study to explore how cultural identities may influence the counselor identity development of Latina CIT.

## CONCLUSION

This study sought out to answer the following questions: (1) What are the experiences of Latina CIT, (2) How are Latina CIT influenced by their gender and cultural identities, and (3) How do Latina CIT view their counselor identity development. The results of the study indicate that the experiences of Latina CIT are centered around the influence of family. Latina CIT may often find themselves balancing pressures coming from both their graduate programs and family members. Also, Latina CIT demonstrate the ways in which they navigate their graduate school experience by sacrificing for the sake of school or family. This study reveals the significant influence of cultural values in the lives of Latina CIT. The results also indicate that both gender and cultural identities can interact with each other and affect Latina CIT in several ways. Latina CIT experience a great pressure to adhere to cultural or familial values. As a result, they may feel guilty when there is dissonance in their lives. In addition, Latina CIT emphasize how being a Latina means having a responsibility to fulfill cultural values. Adhering to cultural values include maintaining and using the Spanish language as well as expectations regarding marriage and having children. Overall, Latina CIT reveal that their development as a CIT is a very unique and distinct experience. Latinas feel proud of their education and of receiving a master's degree and may simultaneously search for parental approval for their accomplishments. Furthermore, Latina CIT emphasize how their gender and cultural identities interact and influence each other. Latina CIT note how they may use these identities to positively affect the therapeutic relationship in order to better help their clients. Ultimately, through this process, Latina CIT gain a greater understanding of how their cultural identity can influence their development as counselors.

## LIMITATIONS

Although this study contributes to the gap in the literature regarding the experiences of Latina CITs, some limitations should be noted. The study included a small sample size of Latina CIT. Although the purposeful sample was used to reach data saturation, only one interview was conducted for each participant. The study may be unsuccessful in providing information about the participants over the course of time. The study also focused on the experiences of mostly heterosexual Latina graduate students who ranged in age from 22-28. The experiences of the participants may not transfer to Latinas who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning (LGBTQ), non-binary, gender non-conforming, and/or gender fluid. Additionally, the participants attend a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) located in the U.S.-Mexico border which has a population of 97% Latina/os/Hispanics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015). The results may not transfer to Latina CIT who live in different social locations or attend an ethnically diverse or a predominantly white institution (PWI). For example, students at PWI may have different experiences in their graduate programs because of the lack of Latina peers, faculty, and supervisors. Including participants who were CIT in various locations and universities would be an important next step. Also, having a greater diversity of participant experiences from Latina CIT (e.g. married women, women with children, and older women) would be beneficial to include in a future study. Lastly, more research is needed with Latinas who identify as LGBTQ, non-binary, gender non-conforming, and/or gender fluid.

## IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study have several implications for the training of counseling psychology students. First, it is imperative that programs consider the influence of cultural values on the process of building a counselor identity. Counseling programs can seek to enhance the training experiences of CIT by providing ample opportunities for the exploration of cultural values and the intersection of multiple identities. These findings are significant for counseling psychology programs within Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs). Thus, supervisors can focus on strengthening the existing cultural identities of CIT as a way of developing multicultural competence (Skovholt, 2012). In addition, supervisors can help Latina CIT see the influence of cultural identity in the context of therapy and supervision. Graduate school mentors and supervisors can also consider the complexities of the experiences of Latina CIT as they are attempting to balance multiple demands while meeting academic expectations. Supervisors and mentors may need to be aware of these additional cultural and familial pressures that Latina students bear. Based on these results, Latina CIT would best benefit from supervision that takes into account the complexities of multiple identities and the influence of cultural values. Furthermore, these findings have implications for clinical practice. It is important to consider the influence of cultural identity of mental health professionals and how this may influence their work as therapists. Additionally, it may be beneficial to explore how cultural identity can be used as an essential tool in therapy (Skovholt, 2012). More research is needed on the process of counselor identity development of minority groups, specifically Latina CIT. Exploring the complexities of these issues might contribute to a better understanding of how Latinas view themselves as mental health professionals.

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## APPENDIX A

### *Interview Questions*

1. Describe as clearly and concretely as you can, events or experiences that illustrate your experience as a Latina master's student in counseling psychology
2. Describe how your Latina identity plays a role in your graduate education experience.
3. Can you describe how your Latina (e.g., a woman of Latino origin) identity plays a role in your experience as a therapist?
  - a. Are there any benefits to being a Latina (e.g. woman of Latino origin) and studying counseling?
  - b. Are there any challenges to being a Latina (e.g. woman of Latino origin) and studying counseling?
4. Can you describe the role clinical supervision has played in acquiring awareness of how your Latina identity may influence your experience as a therapist?

**VITA**

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