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**Bridging the Cultural Divide:
A Single Case Study to Describe the Lived Experiences of a High School Senior from a
Mexican American Working-Class Family**

Introduction

Multicultural education includes a curriculum that incorporates all students' cultural assets in the classroom. A reform movement, multicultural education, attempts to change schools and other educational organizations so students feel validated in the classroom regardless of their diverse backgrounds (J. A. Banks, 1993). The need for multicultural education makes sense, considering the shifting demographics in the United States, where underrepresented groups have grown significantly over time and continue to grow. The White student population in U.S. public schools has consistently decreased over time, while the overall student population has increased (Chen, 2019). With the rise in racial minority students, there is still a higher percentage of White teachers serving a vastly underrepresented group within the public-school systems (Howard, 2006). According to Schaeffer (2021), 79% of public school teachers self-identified as White during the 2017–2018 school year.

The underrepresentation of teachers of color is problematic and threatens underrepresented students' learning. According to Villegas et al. (2012), teachers of color relate better to underrepresented students and more easily appreciate these pupils' funds of knowledge and cultural capital. Students benefit academically and socially when schools validate, respect, and incorporate students' cultures into the curriculum and classroom. For this reason, equity, freedom, and diversity are foundational to multicultural education (Grant & Tate, 1995). Furthermore, when prioritized, multicultural educational practices benefit teachers and administrators in their daily job functions (Ladson-Billings, 1994) because students and teachers

learn from each other. Multicultural education empowers students learning, growth, and development in a macroculture ruled by hegemonic values.

This paper discusses the lived experiences of a bilingual Mexican American high school senior and future first-generation college student as she navigated school and a hegemonic society that often resists cultural and linguistic diversity. Hegemony forces Eurocentric ideologies and social norms onto underrepresented groups. Furthermore, White hegemony requires the abandonment of people of color's customs, beliefs, ways of thinking, and beings in exchange for social capital in a Eurocentric society (Canestrari & Marlowe, 2018). As a first-generation American, she explained the racial discrimination she faced based on ill-informed assumptions by some of her classmates and teachers. This paper describes this student's lived experiences and the impacts of hegemony on her and her family. Three primary questions and 30 supporting interview questions explore the student's sense of belonging as a first-generation United States Citizen.

This paper unfolds in six parts: (a) a detailed literature review, (b) a methodology section inclusive of the participant selection process and the theoretical framework, (c) the findings, (d) a discussion, (e) the study's implications, and (f) the researcher's reflection. The following literature review provides an overview of the empirical literature about multicultural education. The literature review draws on relevant concepts, theories, and terminologies while explaining the negative effect of excluding multicultural education from underserved students' curricula. All names are pseudonyms, and the participant and her family granted permission to use their story in this paper.

Literature Review

According to Ladsen-Billings (1994), teacher education, beliefs about students, curriculum content and materials, instructional approaches, and academic environment are crucial for inclusively educating multicultural students. There is a disconnect with multicultural students in the classroom when educators exclude their funds of knowledge for their learning and development (Nieto, 1998). The dominant macroculture controls and forces acculturation and enculturation of underrepresented students. This control forces students of color's adoption of hegemonic values, which often conflict with their values and threaten their sense of belonging. This threat forces students' public conformity, which conflicts with their home lives (J. A. Banks & Banks, 2016). Culturally competent teachers create welcoming and nurturing classrooms that value all students through culturally responsive teaching (J. A. Banks & Banks, 2016). Additionally, classroom teachers' acceptance of students' home languages, dialects, and other cultural traits as cultural assets and funds of knowledge reaps immeasurable benefits (Moll & Gonzalez, 2003). This acceptance fosters more profound learning and development for students of color because they feel validated.

There is a push to change how schools incorporate students' funds of knowledge and cultural assets. This proposed change is significant because it potentially drives inclusive and equitable curriculum changes that validate the social capital of underrepresented students. Students from high-socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds, often White students, achieve tremendous success because of the higher value placed on their social capital (Jaeger & Mollegaard, 2017). This disparity is unfortunate because schools better understand students' educational experiences when they validate underrepresented students' funds of knowledge and cultural capital in the classroom (Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011). The funds of knowledge mindset for

educating students is critical as it enables a deeper understanding of students (Moll, 2019). The United States is a multicultural society where macrocultural norms ignore diverse cultural perspectives in favor of European ideals that shape hegemony. A deficit mindset hinders progress in multicultural education as it deliberately omits the varied voices of people of color (Yosso, 2005). Equitable educational opportunities persist when the curriculum reflects all cultural backgrounds.

Multicultural educational advancements necessitate cultural acceptance, social justice focus, and anti-racist education agenda to circumvent potentially negative impacts on underrepresented students learning outcomes. Each member of society strives for human and cultural validation despite the repressive hegemonic values that cheat people of this basic expectation (Freire, 2000). A reimagined multicultural education focuses on social justice and anti-racist education that respects the cultural capital of underrepresented students (Au, 2014). Some scholars have accepted cultural and social capital theories (Musoba & Baez, 2009), contending that multicultural education research potentially increases policies and practices knowledge that safeguards students' learning experiences (Grant & Tate, 1995). Overall, the literature argued that multicultural education positively impacts students learning outcomes because of the inclusion of their cultural capital (Yosso, 2005).

The literature review highlighted the empirical and theoretical literature about multicultural education and the impact of incorporating underrepresented students' funds of knowledge and cultural capital in the classroom. The literature demonstrated the need for integrating students' cultural capital in classrooms despite White hegemonic principles that devalue underrepresented students' backgrounds and experiences. Furthermore, the empirical literature highlighted teachers' detachment from multicultural students in the classroom when

they disregard underrepresented students' funds of knowledge (Nieto, 1998). The following Methodology section is a detailed account of the participant selection and profile, data collection protocols, and the theoretical framework. In addition, the researcher explains the participant's background and selection criteria, the interview process, and Segmented Assimilation theory, the guiding theoretical framework.

Methodology

Considering the literature review's findings that some educators and school systems ignore underrepresented students' funds of knowledge and cultural capital in the classroom, this study explored the lived experiences of a Mexican American student from a working-class family. Students of color bring valuable languages, backgrounds, cultures, ways of being, and customs to the classroom. These differences engender rich learning experiences that benefit students, teachers, and administrators (Ladson-Billings, 1994). The ensuing paragraphs discuss the data collection protocol, participant selection, and theoretical framework.

The researcher interviewed the participant, Alexia Rodriguez, the eldest daughter of a Mexican couple, in their home to capture her story in her home environment. Her parents and sisters also responded to questions and became very involved throughout the two-hour interview. The researcher chose Alexia's home for the interview as it was a safe space for her and a place where daily family memories and cultural experiences lived. In addition, the researcher recognized the importance of interviewing Alexia in her home, a place where she was comfortable and surrounded by her culture, parents, and two younger sisters.

The following three primary interview questions guided the discussion in hopes of learning more about how her lived experiences impacted her sense of self and belonging while at

school. In addition to the three primary interview questions, Alexia responded to an additional 30 questions.

Q1: What effect has your cultural heritage had on your identity?

Q2: How much of your culture do you take to school?

Q3: How do you think your teachers and peers view you based on your cultural identity?

The researcher interviewed Alexia and her family at their dinner table in the kitchen. A prepared list of questions and a tape recorder assisted the researcher in capturing the participant's experiences. The researcher explained the study's purpose before the recording and obtained the permission of both parents on tape before asking the interview questions. Several recurrent themes appeared as the researcher reviewed and analyzed the data obtained from the interview. These themes include love, respect, loyalty, devotion, and familial, cultural, and linguistic pride.

Theoretical Framework

The Segmented Assimilation theory guides the research design. Segmented Assimilation refers to two realities, one leading to a path of upward mobility and another leading to a downward spiral that results in poverty for second-generation immigrants (Rumbaut, 2005). This theoretical framework contends that second-generation poor non-White immigrants who practice selective acculturation succeed more than the prior generation (Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2008). Furthermore, these immigrant children maintain cultural differences with the macroculture throughout their childhood, seeking to integrate socially and economically upon becoming adults (Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2008). Segmented Assimilation also argues that immigrant children from nuclear families with solid support systems fare better.

This framework appropriately suits this study because the participant and her family shared a strong desire for the second generation to achieve tremendous success over the first

generation through hard work, maintaining strong cultural connections, and appreciation for the macroculture. Additionally, this framework is appropriate because of its' focus on a strong connection and support as a catalyst for upward mobility. Having both parents in the household keeps the second generation away from the enticement of illicit activities and bad choices (Fernández-Kelly & Konczal, 2005).

The Segmented Assimilation Theory discusses the low human capital of immigrants and the negative impacts on the second generation. Although the participant came from a two-parent home, her family's low human capital, based on education, employment, and income level, presented upward mobility challenges (Portes & Fernández-Kelly, 2008). This framework fits this study because, despite the participant's family's poor education, low social status, and inability to transfer social status to their children, there is hope that the second generation can achieve success. In addition, this study describes the participant's and her parent's desires to escape the cycle of poverty in exchange for upward social and financial mobility.

Participant Selection

The researcher chose to interview Alexia Rodriguez, the daughter of the owners of a well-known cleaning company. Alexia's parents, the Rodríguezes, were a hardworking immigrant family and the owners of a busy cleaning business raising three United States-born children. Ramona, Alexia's mom, was excited that her eldest daughter would be attending college in the following year as the first on both sides of the family to attend college. The researcher was reluctant to interview Alexia for fear of invading the family's privacy and was relieved when Alexia and her parents agreed to the interview.

Alexia, a 17-year-old high school senior, had already accepted an offer to her college of choice, Kansas State University. Alexia was also earning her Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)

credentials through her school district and was on track to earn her license upon graduating high school to become a nurse anesthetist one day. She was bright, mature, grounded, outgoing, and exhibited natural leadership skills. She balanced school, a part-time job at a restaurant, extracurricular activities, and looking after her sisters while her parents worked long hours in their cleaning business. Alexia's family included her dad Enrique, mom Ramona, and sisters Blanca and Liliana.

In his late 30s, Enrique was born and raised in Veracruz, Mexico. However, he had lived in the United States for 21 years. Enrique and his family lived in Overland Park, Kansas, a suburb of Kansas City, Missouri. Enrique, at first, seemed guarded and a little distant and presented as a proud man who was committed to providing for his family.

Ramona, in her mid-30s, was also born and raised in Veracruz, Mexico, though she and Enrique met in the United States. She had lived in the United States for 19 years. Ramona was quiet, shy, and focused on doing a great job at her job. She made time for her girls by scheduling work around their busy and changing schedules, mainly while Alexia applied to numerous colleges that required college visits.

Blanca, age 15, was a high school sophomore at the same school as Alexia. She had the goal of becoming a veterinarian. The middle child Blanca was pleasant, reserved, shy, and a little guarded at first. She balanced school, a part-time job at the same restaurant as Alexia, extracurricular activities, and looked after Liliana, her youngest sister.

Liliana, age 13, was an eighth-grader in middle school. She was a voracious reader who dreamt of becoming a writer. She was engaging, gregarious, and expressive. Liliana appeared to be the most out-going child and was not shy to share her thoughts and opinions.

The conversation with the family revealed a deep commitment to education as the ticket to a better life. The family consistently talked about their values and work ethic that drove their pursuit of academic success for achieving the American dream. In addition, the researcher witnessed immense love, support, pride, and gratitude within the family.

Findings

The family displayed signs of love and affection towards each other as they talked about their family's journey. They even cried at times as they shared experiences about their struggles to achieve more out of life. Alexia was very passionate when she described how much she admired her parents' hard work and sacrifices to provide a better life. As she puts it, "Mom and dad moved away from a poorer neighborhood to our current home so we could live in a nicer area with better schools and opportunities. I know it is why they work all the time, and I am very thankful to them. I love them." Alexia's appreciation for her parent's hard work and sacrifices fueled her success and social acceptance aspirations.

Alexia's love and adoration for her family resonated throughout the interview. She made it clear when she stated, "My parents and sisters are my world. They mean everything to me. We are very close, and I like it that way. It makes me feel safe knowing that I can always count on them to be there for me." She also stated that she works hard because she hopes to be successful enough to take care of her parents when they get older. In addition, Alexia felt responsible for her younger sisters, whom Alexia said she had looked after from a young age when her parents worked long hours. In her words, "Mom and dad sacrifice a lot for us to have this life, so the least I can do is help them with my younger sisters when they both work long hours to make extra money." Alexia felt a sense of duty for modeling good behaviors for her sisters, just as her parents had done for her.

Alexia and her family spoke with pride of their Mexican heritage. She shared experiences about the traditional Mexican meals they often share with friends and family, their love of Spanish-language television shows, traditional and contemporary Mexican music, and most importantly, their annual Christmastime celebration of Tres Reyes (Three Kings). Alexia and her family talked about the pride they take in being bilingual. Alexia even stated, “I love being bilingual, especially going into the medical field where I will be more marketable because I can serve clients who speak English and Spanish.” Alexia views herself as the girl next door who happens to be a proud Mexican. Her parents, Ramona and Enrique, expressed desires for their children to feel as American as possible. They ensured their home life reflected their Mexican culture through traditions and language while providing an American home aesthetics to ensure the girls’ comfort in bringing friends home. Enrique and Ramona thought it essential to make sure the girls had an easy transition from home to school and vice versa. This hardworking and driven family displayed gratitude and respect for their Mexican and United States cultures. This family’s story highlighted how well they nurtured their cultural wealth through the six forms of capital: (a) aspirational, (b) navigational, (c) social, (d) linguistic, (e) familial, and (f) resistant capital to fight and survive macro and micro-forms of oppression (Yosso, 2005).

Though Alexia explained a strong attachment and identification with her Mexican heritage, she quickly pointed out that she was a typical suburban student with little in common with Mexicans from poorer neighborhoods. She further shared that though she maintained a solid connection to her Mexican culture, she felt very different from the Mexican stereotype based on her and her family’s lifestyle. This comment surprised the researcher, considering how firmly she stated this distinction. The Segmented Assimilation theory supports this notion of maintaining strong cultural ties to the home and host cultures. Alexia shared the following when

probed further: “My parents taught us the importance of working hard. Growing up, they always told us that life was unfair and that, as brown children, we would always have to prove ourselves. It did not always make sense, but it does now.” When asked to expand on what she meant by that, she explained,

“My White friends and classmates get the benefit of the doubt, but I have to prove my worth constantly. My parents wanted to raise us around White kids so we could experience the real world from an early age. Therefore, they did not want to shelter us in a Mexican neighborhood.”

Her parents felt that a predominantly Mexican neighborhood potentially shielded their children from the harsh realities of White hegemony, thus creating a false sense of safety from discrimination.

Ramona shared that they moved to their current neighborhood at the beginning of Alexia’s first-grade year and have lived there for 11 years. They moved from the less affluent Shawnee Mission School District to the more affluent Blue Valley School District. The Blue Valley School District is known for its lack of cultural and racial diversity while offering an excellent education. Enrique and Ramona wanted the best education for their children. Despite a lack of college degrees, these hardworking parents thought it necessary to move to a more affluent neighborhood with better schools to give their children better opportunities than they had experienced. This desire for a better life for their children is not so unusual, as

Today we see a more complex phenomenon, wherein families from all racial and ethnic backgrounds, once they achieve a level of success, follow the money to the suburbs or private schools, thus creating a kind of a green flight that continues to drain valuable

human and economic resources from core cities and most challenged environments.

(Howard, 2006, p. 121)

When asked to expand on their neighborhood and school district choices, Enrique explained that he and Ramona wanted their children to live everyday American life, get college degrees, and become professionals. They both did not want their children to work in their line of employment. Instead, they wanted and expected more of their girls.

As a first-generation prospective college student, Alexia felt alienated and pressured by the societal expectations and norms that differed from her home environment. She explained, “I am tired of people thinking that I am taking something away from them because I want to do better than my parents did.” Alexia further asserted, “I will be the first in my family to attend college. I am going against the role society created for me. I am not taking anyone’s place, but the one that rightfully belongs to me.” The thought of history repeating itself frightened her because she desired more success than her parents had achieved. “We don’t realize that our past intertwines with our future, and not knowing we end up following someone else’s history, not our own” (Ortega, 2014, p. 113). This account was Alexia’s story of challenging hegemony while expecting respect and recognition for her funds of knowledge based on her cultural and linguistic background.

Alexia identified as a proud Mexican even though she was born in the U.S. She stated, “My mom and dad, who gave life to me and provided a great life for me, are Mexicans. They raised me as a Mexican with a strong sense of my culture and all that comes with it.” Alexia’s Mexican culture’s beliefs, values, and meaning impacted her life profoundly (J. A. Banks & Banks, 2016). When asked how she presents at school, she responded, “I am fluent in Spanish and English, but only speak English at school, even when speaking with other bilingual Mexican

students.” She explained, “The first language I learned to speak was Spanish, as I grew up speaking Spanish at home. The schools forced my participation in ESOL because I had a Mexican accent, even though I spoke English just as well as other students.” This experience left an indelible mark on Alexia, who felt her funds of knowledge and cultural capital meant nothing to school administrators who viewed her Spanish-speaking skills as a deficit, not an asset. As a result, Alexia stated, “I felt discriminated against, and my parents hated that I was in ESOL. For that reason, I only speak English at school to avoid unfair treatment.” Alexia’s ESOL experience is an example that schools devalue the rich cultures and assets that students bring to the classroom.

Alexia described herself as a good student, not an A-student, who worked hard to balance academics with her part-time job. She indicated that her parents earned high school diplomas and wanted her to do better than they did. Alexia planned to become a nurse anesthetist. She also hoped that her two younger sisters eventually earn advanced degrees toward a career path. Although Alexia was the primary participant, I also spoke with her parents and younger siblings.

The Rodríguezes displayed pride in their valuable cultural assets that they felt benefited the classroom and society. Ramona and Enrique leveraged their substantial aspirational capital in engendering hope for their daughters so their daughters enjoy a promising future. Enrique expressed pride in his daughters’ linguistic capital and the possibilities of a brighter future because of their bilingual skills. Ramona and her daughters further asserted how their familial, social, and navigational capitals were valuable assets that safeguarded a hopeful future. Liliana, the youngest daughter, shared views that most closely aligned with resistance capital, as she was the most vocal about advocating for multicultural teaching in the classroom. Liliana expressed strong opinions about hegemony and how it shaped her friendships with mostly Hispanic

American and Black American friends. She passionately confronted the status quo and empowered herself to challenge hegemony in defining her place in the larger society (Yosso, 2005).

Though the girls achieved success in school, they admitted facing many challenges. Most of their schoolmates were White, most of their neighbors were White, and sometimes people did not comprehend how hard their parents worked to provide a great life for their family. Alexia shared that she worked much harder as a Mexican to prove herself. She said she had no one to help her with homework as her parents did not have the subject matter knowledge to help her. As a child of Hispanic working-class immigrant parents, Alexia felt she lacked the extra support provided to her American counterparts at home. Alexia stated, “I had to figure things out independently.” She felt her life was significantly different from her peers, even though she lived in the same neighborhood. She stated, “Many neighborhood moms are stay-at-home moms with husbands with high-paying jobs. Many of my peers worked for extra money, not because they needed the income.” Alexia shared that her parents sacrificed financially, so their working-class family enjoyed the privileges of living in a better neighborhood with access to better opportunities.

Alexia shared that though her experience in her high school had been positive, she experienced microaggressions from fellow students who held biases against minorities and immigrants. She described herself as being mentally tough with the ability to ignore and rise above ignorance. This sentiment was concerning because society cannot overlook marginalization’s psychological and physical impacts (J. A. Banks & Banks, 2016).

Enrique firmly stated his desire for his children to experience all the benefits afforded to White children. According to Enrique, “My kids work three times as hard to measure up to an

average White child. For this reason, Ramona and I sacrifice so much to raise them as equals to White children.” Over the years, Ramona often imagined a better life for her daughters and hoped that her girls could be themselves in school as American children of Mexican heritage. She was concerned about society and the schools treating her children because of their brown skin. Ramona and Enrique worried about the negative impacts of white privilege on their children and the unfair advantages granted to dominant group members, a right not given to her daughters. In addition, they feared that acculturation and enculturation threatened their cultural norms.

The United States is a multicultural society where all cultural perspectives and customs enrich the macroculture, not just the European ideals that shape hegemony. However, Alexia felt marginalized when forced into ESOL classes because she spoke Spanish. She entered school as a bilingual student yet was relegated to ESOL because Spanish was her primary language. The school’s disregard for Alexia’s bilingual skills hindered progress in multicultural education, as it deliberately omitted the varied voices of people of color (Yosso, 2005).

Discussion

White teachers must understand that a change in their mindsets and approaches to children of color is a crucial piece of the puzzle in leveraging their white privilege to impact how America educates its children. “Of course, the macro-social structures, such as institutional racism in education and the legal system, as well as economic disparities, are harder to change” (J. A. Banks & Banks, 2016, p. 171). Ramona and Enrique desired validation in the classroom for their children, a confirmation that honored their Mexican heritage, cultural capital, and funds of knowledge. The researcher observed the family’s interactions and acknowledged how

American Alexia and her sisters seemed. In talking with Ramona and Enrique, it was evident that they raised their children well, with a healthy balance of their Mexican and American cultures.

Segmented Assimilation, this study's guiding theoretical framework, appropriately supported this study through a lens that magnified the efforts of Alexia's parents' desires for a better life for their children. Likewise, Enrique and Ramona desired better opportunities for their children and saw the hope of attaining social status and capital through their children. This desire for success is not unusual for immigrant families who come to the United States seeking opportunities and upward mobility.

Although the girls expressed no direct experiences with blatant racism and discrimination, they shared that some teachers and peers made stereotypical and insensitive comments. The girls shared that they grew up with these experiences and developed a thick skin. However, they also felt that their parents equipped them with the love, support, and self-confidence to ignore negativity while focusing on their goals. Alexia shared an experience she endured while presenting to her civics class on the US-Mexico border crisis. She based her presentation not only on the reporting of network news broadcasts but also on her parents' accounts and experiences with the situation. According to Alexia, "I thought I was doing a good thing by talking about a different side to the story." However, instead of applauding her efforts to bridge both sides, she felt chastised by her teacher and classmates, whom she said "made me feel like what my parents told me was wrong. They were only interested in what they saw on the news, not what I could offer to show a different side." In hearing Alexia's account, Critical Race Theory (CRT) came to mind. CRT is a theoretical and analytical framework that challenges race and racism's impact on educational structures, practices, and discourses (Yosso, 2005). According to Yosso (2005). White privilege prevailed when the teachers and classmates

disregarded Alexia's perspective as a Mexican student because of perceived misalignment with the dominant ideology.

Implications

The study's findings possibly inform school administrators, curriculum designers, teachers, boards of education, and other K-12 decision-makers of the need to implement multicultural education. Underrepresented students' learning enhances when the curriculum includes their funds of knowledge and cultural capital (Yosso, 2005). Multicultural education is essential for the learning, growth, and development of students of color. White hegemonic values cheat society of the treasured cultural values and funds of knowledge students of color bring to the classroom (J. A. Banks & Banks, 2016). For this reason, the inclusion of all students' cultural capital must embed within the school curriculum so White and underrepresented students learn about and appreciate each other's cultural capital (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Furthermore, the research findings provoke utilitarian considerations within school systems to drive systemic curriculum changes that prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the curriculum design process. Teachers' backgrounds and ideologies impact how they teach and interact with students of color (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Educators can no longer disengage students' cultural capital and funds of knowledge in the classroom (Nieto, 1998). This detachment from students' fund of knowledge and cultural capital has negative implications for students of color's learning and development.

The macroculture's forced acculturation and enculturation of underrepresented students impede their learning outcomes (Yosso, 2005). This White dominance causes students of color to accept hegemonic values even when conflict arises with their cultural values and ideals (J. A. Banks & Banks, 2016). Culturally competent teachers who teach culturally responsive curricula

engender friendly and nurturing classrooms that value all students' cultural capital (J. A. Banks & Banks, 2016). This acceptance produces positive learning outcomes for students of color because they feel validated and appreciated.

Personal Reflection

Alexia's lived experiences resonated with me on multiple levels. I am an immigrant born to immigrant parents. My family consists of Naturalized Americans and U.S.-born citizens. Like Ramona's parents, my grandparents worked in the cleaning industry upon arrival to the U.S. to support themselves and their family. They struggled to survive and provide for their children and grandchildren. My undergraduate studies and degree in Anthropology continually awakens my curiosity about the human condition and lived experiences. For this reason, the anthropologist in me came alive as I embarked on a journey to put theory into practice with this research.

I connected with the subject and the family I interviewed. As an immigrant, I relate well with this story, mainly to Alexia's perspective as the eldest child figuring out how to navigate the American culture while paving the way for younger siblings. Though my mother was college-educated, she struggled in a new country with new customs while figuring out how to help her children. Like Alexia, I studied hard in school and made every effort to help my younger siblings learn from my experiences and enjoy a more effortless experience. Though English was my first language, I soon realized that the Queen's English was frowned upon in inner-city Washington DC, where I attended high school as a new immigrant. I learned quickly, as did Alexia, to fit in and navigate through my cultural worlds at home and school in a beneficial way. As Blanca stated, "We are not that different from others. We have the same dreams and goals as everyone. Our parents want the same for us—to be successful and responsible human beings." I see myself

in Alexia at that age and my mom in Ramona, two sets of immigrant families with hopes and dreams for a better and brighter future.

My experience as an immigrant with intersectionality with race and gender uniquely positions me as a passionate advocate for marginalized groups, personally and professionally. As an HR practitioner, I advocate for bridging the gap for all employees, no matter their backgrounds. My passionate work in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) draws from my cumulative experiences as a marginalized society member. I view companies as microcultures of our larger society. Consequently, I consult and educate companies on strategies and best practices for creating diverse, equitable, and inclusive cultures that value all employees while engendering a sense of belonging for all workers, regardless of their backgrounds. Hence, my inspiration as a DEI advocate, consultant, thought leader, and change agent drives a desire to give voice to the voiceless in corporate America.

I was thrilled when Enrique and Ramona told me they saw their daughter's future in me and that it comforted them. At that moment, I realized that I had become an immigrant family's hope for their children—one of my proudest moments to date. Navigating the world as an immigrant is challenging, especially when dealing with linguistic and cultural barriers, but the hope that life in America promises is well worth it.

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