
Beyond Affirmative Action

Reframing the Context
of Higher Education

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aware of it until they are challenged about who they are and about their ethnic identity in the educational system, or they become fully conscious of it by crashing headlong into the rigid walls of the school system. That can happen at any time and at any place during their primary, secondary, or postsecondary education. Sometimes they may not even realize what is happening at the time. What they experience is often described as an uncomfortable sense of being pigeonholed, or circumscribed, by a concept of identity that has little relationship to how they actually behave or perceive themselves in society.

This concept of sociocultural identity labels and boxes groups of students in presumed categories with static behavioral characteristics. Such rigid, often ill-fitting, constructs mislead some researchers into believing that ethnicity is fiction, invented for sociopolitical purposes (see M. Burgess 1978; Hobsbawm 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1992; Sollors 1989; Steinberg 1989). Quite the opposite construct, which I will discuss again in part II, suggests that turbulence and discord between individuals as they interact and transact with each other is not only a conflict of different cultural contexts and cognition but also in part a conflict generated within students who come from identity pools yet must reckon with identity pigeonholes within an educational system.

The chapters that follow highlight the experiences of these Latinos throughout the educational system and beyond. Although they belong to a combination of groups fast becoming the largest ethnic population in the United States, we still have little information about them in higher education. We have seen data that show that, despite slight increases in recent decades, Latinos are essentially treading water in academia. I will argue this is partially the result of two conflicting cultural forces: the influence of culture and ethnicity imprinted on individuals in childhood by family and community, and a second set of cultural forces that reshapes them throughout their precollege and postsecondary educational experiences. I develop the dynamics of this concept, which I present as a new empirical model, in chapter 3. The findings come from students, academics, and nonacademics as they reflect upon their educational or career experiences and how they believe those experiences affected them. The consensus about their individual experiences seems to validate their collective perceptions and provides a starting point for discussing and reassessing graduate education in general.

Multicontextuality

A Hidden Dimension in Higher Education

It is *not* that [people] must be in sync with, or adapt to [their] CULTURE but that CULTURES grow out of sync with [people]. . . . PEOPLE must learn to transcend and adapt their CULTURE to the times. . . . To accomplish this . . . [people need] the EXPERIENCE of other CULTURES.

Adapted from Edward T. Hall, *Beyond Culture*

Common Assumptions

Something is unique about the difficulties experienced by some Latinos in graduate education. In a preliminary report of my findings for the Council of Graduate Schools, I noted that more than half the Latino participants, both students and faculty, completed their degree with relatively few educational setbacks (Ibarra 1996). Yet a little more than half said they experienced "difficulties" in graduate school in dealing with the differences in how they and the majority of their colleagues perceived the world. These issues were unrelated to health, finances, family, or other life circumstances, but they were brought on by friction with majority individuals. Many Latino students found that something about their cultural experiences contrasted sharply with the cultural experiences of their majority colleagues in graduate education. As respon-

dents became more involved with academia, the conflicts intensified. Even then, they did not consider them obstacles to their educational progress.

Latino students often expressed these conflicts as intense ethnic and gender tensions beyond the usual problems encountered by graduate students. They frequently associated the problems with the graduate faculty, which is not unusual. The apprenticeship model in graduate school rests on the skill of faculty advisers to remold their graduate students and prepare them for advanced research, teaching, and perhaps even an academic career. Among university faculty and administrators, it is common knowledge that many diverse populations have more educational difficulties than majority populations. What is not commonly understood is why these difficulties occur and how to prevent them.

The current widely held assumption is that difficulties encountered by minorities, including Latinos, are the result of barriers and obstacles that, if removed, would allow success. To help remove barriers institutions may advance multicultural initiatives that heighten cultural awareness, change the curriculum, or provide cultural centers that celebrate diversity. Based on the dominant assumptions, I originally set out to identify the barriers. But I found that, while the barriers are still pervasive (see Gloria and Pope-Davis 1997), removing them did not necessarily lead to success.

Minorities on campus often assume that chronic tension between cultures emanates from either individual or institutional discrimination. As a result, they associate prejudice with any behavior, from preference to overt hatred and even violence. Prejudice could explain individual behaviors, of course, but I propose another theory of institutional discord. Other forces—in a hidden dimension—are at work and they exhibit characteristics similar to the venerable *isms* of discrimination. Our ability to distinguish them, however, is clouded by the common belief that racism, sexism, and classism are the primary discordant forces that permeate our institutional cultures. Because we have no viable data or alternative models to explain it, by default “racial disharmony” has become locked in the academic psyche as the only explanation for the institutional disorder of chronic cultural dissonance.

Why are these problems so pervasive? Why is there still conflict when the barriers and obstacles are supposedly removed? Is institutional racism the only answer after all? For answers to these questions we must search for explanations from another perspective. What if the problems are not only “things” that are there—barriers and obstacles—but also “things” that are not there, factors that do not involve multicultural issues and that are missing from our educational systems in general? We always look at the words on a page when we read, and some of us are adept at reading between the lines, but what about examining the white spaces, the gaps

between words and letters? That approach would examine the gaps between cultures, to see what is there or whether anything is missing.

Many of us in higher education take for granted that our traditional models of reality are still valid because they appear to explain cause and effect. We may be reluctant to acknowledge that we have grown accustomed to thinking that racism is a predominant condition in higher education. This chapter begins to reexamine that model of reality by looking at research transcripts with a new perspective to try to determine what is missing from the academic systems that cause conflict for Latinos and Latinas—and, by extension, members of other minority groups.

The Complexity of Defining Racism

Nearly everyone in the study touched upon issues or personal experiences relating to some kind of cultural conflict in their lives. A little more than half the participants described targeted forms of discrimination such as racism, sexism, xenophobia, or the like. About one-third of them actually labeled their experiences as racism, although interviewees described clear examples of gender discrimination and others that may have been class discrimination.

But other subjects were simply not sure. For example, Anita, a Puerto Rican student from New York, told me, “When you talk about issues like racism, it’s so complicated and so subtle. It wasn’t really direct, but it was just all the little things that happened. I am not sure if it’s only an issue of racism because I know other students had trouble too, and they weren’t people of color, so it’s complicated” (Ibarra 1996, 47). Some were less concerned about racism than they were about conflicting values, specifically academic cultural values. Discrimination seemed to be an insufficient explanation for their experiences.

Racism is a slippery concept, especially when tied to common ideas about race. Most anthropologists discard the idea of various biological human “races” because the term is loaded with inaccurate biological connotations that conflict with social concepts of culture and ethnicity. The concept of race is a social phenomenon throughout the world (M. Cohen 1998b), but hardly anyone can agree on what sociocultural characteristics constitute a human race or how to distinguish that from the concept of ethnicity.¹ From a historical and sociological perspective, race in its current social context seems appropriate for distinguishing certain populations from others in this country, with the exception of Hispanics. But Latinos, unlike all other groups, are not defined by race and are the only officially designated ethnic group in the U.S. Census (OMB 1997; U.S.

Census Bureau 1995).² Thus *Hispanic* is simply an ethnic category that lumps together groups differentiated by their various national origins.

Building an Alternative Perspective

As I sifted through the transcripts of my interviews with Latinos in higher education and looked at them with a different perspective, trends emerged that related to discrimination between Latino students and Latino faculty. Not surprisingly, students' complaints centered around faculty, though they did not always attribute racism, sexism, or other types of discrimination as the cause for their conflicts. One reason for this was their reluctance to suggest that Latino professors are racist or discriminate against Latino students. Yet I heard stories that criticized Latino and Latina faculty for overt racism and sexism in regard to Latino students. A number of female students described how their female faculty advisers took advantage of them or their research. In each case students were perplexed and unable to explain why Latino or women professors behaved contrary to the students' expectations of socially sensitive people.

In contrast, the Latino faculty I interviewed were forthright in their claims of discrimination by members of the majority. Regardless of class or ethnicity, Latino faculty, and especially women, faced more conflict and felt more tension within academia than they did as graduate students. Faculty are faced with a different process—negotiating their way into the academic culture as colleagues. And it seems to be even more difficult than life as a graduate student. But in discussing their experiences, they were using different explanatory terms. They were talking about culture rather than racism.

Thus something other than racial tension was creating conflict and dissonance for both Latino students and faculty. Because of the existing tensions between Latino students and Latino faculty as well as between Latino faculty and their colleagues, what they were talking about appeared to be associated with academic cultural values. It centered around transformations of ethnic and gender identity. As I concluded in my preliminary report:

For Latino graduate students, the transition toward completing the degree begins by recognizing that a cultural gap exists between their specific ethnic/cultural values and the dominant values of academic subcultures: departmental, disciplinary, institutional, and so on. Whether because of ethnicity, gender or other conditions, this transition is intensified by the turbulence of acculturation into academe. For some, ethnic research bridges the cultural gap by providing a means to maintain their specific Latino ethnicity while simultaneously adopting the mantle of the academy. For others, ethnic interests can only surface after completing the degree.

Utilizing a successful adaptive strategy, many Latinos pursue ethnic research to ameliorate the forces of academic acculturation by becoming ethnic cultural brokers and professors too, thus attempting to create a successful blending of cultures. Shaped by the cultural grinding wheel of academia, only a few Latinos and Latinas, imbued with successful adaptive strategies for accumulating multiple ethnic identities, emerge from their graduate experience ready to pursue a commitment to both their cultural and academic communities. (1996, 57–58)

Roberta-Anne Kerlin describes similar findings in her dissertation, "Breaking the Silence: Toward a Theory of Women's Doctoral Persistence" (1997), in which she followed women through one year of their graduate education. In the process of gaining an "academic self-identity," her subjects were "reluctant to submit to a process" that would make them "the kind of person who puts a private agenda first and the needs of the larger academic community, including students, last" (13). For Kerlin this discord was symptomatic of a competitive power relationship between advisers and students.

Contributions of Anthropology—The "Hidden Dimension"

But inequitable power relationships explain only a small portion of the puzzle. It was Pedro who revealed the first set of clues for decoding the rest of it. Pedro was a Mexican American graduate student studying for his degree at a university in Texas. He was frustrated by "the system" and during his interview acknowledged that he had been trying to educate his professors about the nuances of Latino culture. He also questioned whether he should stay in the program. In his own words he interpreted "communication breakdowns" between him and his professors as cultural gaps, which I have underlined in the following passage:

I had difficulty with one assistant professor in my area about cultural things. We've had some communication breakdowns. . . . It is hard for me to try to explain this because he was saying some very rude things like "[Pedro] you ought to consider dropping out of the program. You need to write [your papers in] active voice". . . . I said, . . . "I know I need to write in active voice, but . . . I think in passive voice. . . ." I tried to explain something like "the bullet fell," rather than "I dropped the bomb . . ." and he wasn't interested in that. I remember once telling him . . . "Maybe my communication hasn't been too direct." I [explained] about how Mexicans tend to [talk] around [the subject using] indirect communication.

. . . There's [saving] face involved in all this, and he says, . . . "[Pedro] I prefer to be very direct; that way there's no backstabbing." . . . It was just a series of things, one comment after another. Then he talked to the [department] chair and said, . . . "I don't think [Pedro] is a very good candidate." . . . He's been the only

person in the whole department that I have had problems with, who I felt was actively thinking, . . . “[Pedro] is really not the person we want to have here.” I remember one time he said, . . . “You may know a lot about Mexico, but that’s not going to get you through the program,” . . . comments that weren’t even elicited, and I wondered what I had said or done that prompted him to say that. There was one time that he said, . . . “[Pedro] when I used to be [in the private sector], I would spell out the worst scenario for the people who are going to be my assistants . . . and those people who listened to the darkest things, and stuck around, found out it wasn’t really that bad and they became top performers.”

[He is] a very competitive type guy. . . . I was thinking he probably didn’t have too many Mexican Americans or women work for them [the private sector], because there’s a certain amount of relationship building. He’s very cold at times. I just haven’t been real happy with him. Crazy as it is, I have a comp [comprehensive exam] about a week from tomorrow, and he is writing the questions. . . . I know that he had problems with [international] students . . . with language abilities and I think . . . this is just open hostility. . . . I brought it up to my department chair and he said, . . . “This is not a cultural problem. What you’re talking about is a personality problem.” . . . And I said, . . . “I’d like for them to treat me the way I’d like to be treated, because I know that the people that he’s worked with are very competitive . . . there isn’t that emotional tie between people. . . .” I said, “I’d like some nurturing and this is the way I work,” and so on. . . . “Well, [Pedro], you’re not going to get that here. It just doesn’t work. . . .” That’s what my department chair told me. . . . I find insensitivity, just the lack of bringing sensitive people in. You see people [here] that are just not sensitive to Mexicans.” (Ibarra 1996, 45–46)

Pedro attempted to explain to his professors the differences between Mexican Americans and Anglos in regard to communication, competition, and relationships between people, so that they could understand the hidden dimension of the conflict that is engaging him. Implicit in his comments are profound differences in fundamental cultural values regarding human interaction, associations, and learning. Pedro clearly understood the nuances of his Mexican American ethnic culture and how they contrasted with the academic cultures associated with the faculty in his department. Pedro spoke English fluently and exhibited all the appropriate visible cultural cues for living seamlessly within the dominant academic cultural community. Yet Pedro, and many other Latinos like him, assumed the imprint of Mexican cultural values was not noticeable to the professors in his department. He was motivated to explain his behavior only when he believed his professors misinterpreted these values and when these hidden cultural elements appeared to be undermining his academic success in graduate school.³

Later in his interview, when I asked him about major issues for Latinos on his campus, Pedro responded, “Sensitivity to the culture, level of development and a sense of . . . where our community is coming from. But I don’t see it as a race issue. . . . I think it’s cultural in the way of . . .

cognitive-type things, and the way that you perceive them.” Transcripts from other students’ interviews revealed similar underlying patterns and concerns. This was no longer just reading the words, or reading between the lines; this was reading what was missing in the white spaces of graduate education. In telling his story, Pedro pointed to an alternative explanation, one that finds support in two bodies of theory. He was describing patterns of *cultural context* as first described by the anthropologist Edward T. Hall, a pioneer in the field of intercultural communication in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Pedro was also reflecting patterns of *bicognition*, a cognitive learning pattern described by the clinical psychologists Manuel Ramírez and Alfredo Castañeda that they developed about the same time Hall began his work on cognition.

Implications of Cultural Context

Hall’s construct of culture is basically descriptive and somewhat organic. He believed that patterns of cultural behavior are extensions of our basic biological processes, including the senses (vision, olfaction, touch) and cognition (perceptions of time and space). As such, culture is not a single entity but a complex set of associated and interlinked systems that mold and shape (in ways that are not unlike imprinting) individuals within groups, and this process begins at birth (1974, 1993). Thus, he says, people raised in different cultures live in different sensory worlds usually unconscious of how these worlds differ (1959). For Hall, one framework for shaping one’s perceptual world is the process of learning how people are expected to think and behave within a specific cultural or ethnic group. Another framework is a function of social transactions, relationships, activities, or emotional interactions between various people both inside and outside the group. He notes that when “people of different cultures interact, each uses different criteria to interpret the other’s behavior, and each may easily misinterpret the relationship, the activity, or the emotions involved” (1974, 2). Until they learn otherwise, such individuals assume they share a “correct” interpretation of reality from within their respective worldviews, whether or not they really know how things work.

Hall launched the multidimensional science of proxemics, which studies how people use personal and public space as a function of culture—social distance, interior and exterior design, urban planning, and so on (Hall 1966, 1984, 231; Hall and Hall 1990). Very briefly, it entails observing in context sequences of common or frequent human interactions, such as personal conversations, formal interviews, or greeting behaviors between strangers or friends. These behaviors may be embedded in activities

associated with learning situations at school or ordinary daily transactions such as purchasing items in a store. The ultimate purpose of the observation is to uncover new cultural meaning and knowledge. Hall wanted to know *how* people in the context of their different worldviews would communicate, interact, associate, and learn. He seemed particularly interested in culling new insights by focusing on the unconscious cultural behaviors embedded in nonverbal communication.⁴ His work generated new fields of study and important concepts about communication, cognition, ethnicity, and cultural context.

I used two interrelated concepts for analyzing the interviews: Hall's ten cultural systems of human activity and their interplay within his binary model of high- and low-context cultures. These are described in table 3.1 at the end of this chapter. Pedro's comments suggest the cultural systems Hall called "primary message systems," which concentrate on language and nonverbal forms of communication (1959, 45–60). Hall identified ten basic elements, or sets, of learned cultural behavior that lend themselves to observation and the communication of *overt* and *covert* meaning.⁵ Overt behaviors are the outward, visible, and mainly conscious components of culture, such as speech, dress, art, customs, and so on. These are often associated with formal, structured, and expected social behaviors, the "rules of the game," be it poker, writing, football, or driving a car. Covert behaviors are the less obvious components of culture that contain "the most important paradigms or rules governing behavior, the ones that control our lives, function below the level of conscious awareness and [are] not generally available for analysis" (Hall 1977, 43).

These hidden dimensions of cultural elements and meaning, no less structured than overt behaviors, are usually informal ways of doing things. They are generated by unspoken rules or expected codes of behavior within societies. They may even consist of informal customs that allow individuals to bend the rules or go around the official way of doing things in society. These unwritten rules communicate what, when, why, and how to do things or signal relationships between individuals. For example, overt greeting behavior, in private or public places, may include a handshake, a bow, a hug, or a combination of these among different cultures. But how they are executed, by whom or to whom, contains cultural codes that reveal status, intent, or other relationships that are understood by those who can read the signals.

Sometimes even obvious social rules conflict with those of other cultures. For Pedro and others in the study the tension between Latinos and academics is a conflict of the rules within their respective cultural systems. The events, as Pedro recalled them, were multidimensional. He described his "communication breakdown" with one particular professor as a series of interactions in which Pedro felt forced to defend himself against rude,

insensitive, and even hostile remarks. Despite the overt suggestion that he drop out of the academic graduate program, Pedro denied that the behaviors were anything but cultural "insensitivities," even after his department chair called them a "personality problem." Pedro's attempts to explain himself in the context of Mexican culture reveal his overt and covert levels of communication. On the surface Pedro is frustrated by the professor's lack of understanding and his disinterest in the origins of Pedro's writing style. When Pedro explains that his third-person style is generated in part by his Mexican heritage, he relates the professor's preference: "to be very direct; that way there's no backstabbing." If this response is accurate, the cultural implications are very serious at a deeper level. The professor not only discounted Pedro's communication style but considered it a deadly form of social game playing.

Pedro was further challenged by the professor in two ways. First, the professor discounted Pedro's acknowledged understanding of Mexico with a warning that relying on community-based knowledge does not lead to academic success. Then the professor told the story of his own management style, which included sharing with others his views about potential problems at work. The implied moral of the story is that being direct in communicating to colleagues, even in "the worst [case] scenario," is considered being open and honest and leads to success for those who are committed and loyal. Indirect communication, by implication, is considered dishonest and "backstabbing." Although these events are told only from Pedro's perspective, they are similar to stories told by other Latinos in the study.

At a deeper level of understanding, other less obvious messages emerge from the white spaces in the passage. Pedro's dialogue is interlaced with direct or implied comments about competition and nurturing and judgments about how professors fail to establish an "emotional tie between people." These seemingly unrelated comments are all directly related to the conflicting primary message systems associated with gender roles in Latino and non-Latino cultures. Hall found that significant differences in core values may exist within cultural systems (context) between populations of different national origins and that these differences are often reflected (overtly and covertly) in transactions between various cultures and groups (see Hall 1959, 1977, 1993).

For example, Hall found that the context of many Mediterranean-based cultures, such as those of Latin Americans, North American Latinos, and even some Middle Eastern populations, tends to be oriented more toward people and community than are some populations from northern Europe (e.g., Germans, Scandinavians, Norwegians, etc.). Among Mediterranean-based cultures, it is not out of character for males to be openly expressive, communicate emotionally with words and gestures, and even value a "nur-

turing" role, as evidenced in the emotional ties they display toward other members of the family and community.

Most academics in North America tend to avoid at all cost "emotional ties between people," especially with students. For example, the unwritten rule among many graduate faculty is that graduate students must prove themselves to be at least academic junior colleagues before advisers invest in social or emotional relationships with them. Despite changing values about gender roles in the United States today, many individuals in the mainstream of our society may harbor stereotyped beliefs that "nurturing" and "emotional ties" are primarily female characteristics. Thus the covert rationale for maintaining social distance between faculty advisers and students, combined with unconscious and misapplied gender stereotypes, permeates the attitudes toward many ethnic students who are attending graduate schools in the United States.

Many Latinos in academia also are characterized as being less competitive than members of other ethnic populations, such as African Americans (E. Seymour and Hewitt 1997). Latinos place a high value on maintaining strong family and community ties. To achieve this, in academia they tend to avoid certain types of confrontation or competition. The tension between majority academics and Latino academics is subtle, almost invisible, and can build to a breaking point. Hall tells us that, if possible, Latinos avoid face-to-face unpleasantness and confrontation with colleagues at work or with whom they have a relationship (1977, 158). As a result, outsiders misperceive Latinos as being passive and unassuming in their work.

The truth is that Latinos, both males and females, are quite assertive, competitive, even protective when the situation involves important cultural values such as those related to the family, the community, society, and the like. The differences lie in the context—the when or where such behavior is deemed necessary or appropriate. For example, Latinos and Latinas soon discover that graduate student training encourages them to think very critically about other scholars and to analyze scientific ideas in culturally unfamiliar ways. Consequently, for the first time in their lives many Latinos and Latinas find themselves in competitive graduate research programs that adopt academic cultural behaviors that are often diametrically opposed to their own. Thus graduate school customs may be difficult for Latinos to learn and, for some, even harder to endure through completion (see Ibarra 1996).⁶

"Context," according to Edward Hall and Mildred Hall, "is the information that surrounds an event and is inextricably bound up with the meaning of that event. The elements that combine to produce a given meaning—events and context—are in different proportions depending on the culture" (1990, 7). Hall could identify and sort populations throughout

the world based on how groups and individuals perceive and communicate with one another within their concepts of time and space, interaction, and association or how they establish modes of learning about the world. He could scale cultures on a continuum from "high" to "low," signifying the importance or intensity of these cultural patterns within groups. Individuals from a "high-context" culture tend to use the multiple streams of information that surround an event, situation, or interaction (e.g., words, tones, gestures, body language, status, or relationship of speakers) to determine meaning from the context in which it occurs. Communication is within the context itself, whereas very little is in the actual message transmitted.

For individuals in a "low-context" culture the pattern is just the opposite. They tend to filter out conditions surrounding an event, situation, or interaction to focus as much as possible on words and objective facts. They put great care into explicitly stating the message and review the details in linear step-by-step fashion as necessary. Failure to state information explicitly can distort the message. "Contexting," either high or low in a culture,

refers to the fact that when people communicate they take for granted how much the listener knows about the subject under discussion. In low-context communications, the listener knows very little and so must be told practically everything. In high-context communication, the listener is already "contexted," and so does not need to be told very much. (Hall and Hall 1990, 158)

At one end of the continuum of cultural context Hall found that high-context populations are likely to be Asian and Asian Americans (especially Japanese and Japanese Americans), Arab or Middle Eastern groups, Mediterranean-based peoples, Africans and African Americans, Latin Americans and Latinos in North America, native North American Indian groups, and North American women in general. In contrast, northern European populations, such as the Germans, Swiss, and Scandinavians, are usually low-context cultures. Hall placed at the low-context end of the continuum most North American populations with national origins derived from northern Europe, as well as Anglo males. The primary cultural difference between men and women is that men have greater association with more formal levels of culture (i.e., business formality), whereas women have greater association with informal levels of culture (i.e., family and community). The epitome of high-context cultures in the United States are the Native Americans living in the Southwest; German Americans are the best representation of low-context culture. Hall never assigned positive or negative values to these binary groups, for they were simply labels that differentiate cultural and cognitive characteristics of various domestic ethnic populations and international cultures.

The essential distinctions between these contexts trigger the cultural

dynamics. Compared to low-context cultures, high-context cultures place a much higher value on developing and maintaining "extensive information networks among family, friends, colleagues, and clients, and they are involved in close personal relationships" (Hall 1984, 8). Following a logical progression, high-context cultures are more likely than low-context groups to develop social systems and organizations that are people oriented. Thus family, kin, community, and even close collegial relationships become extremely important in the core of their lives.

Hall further characterized low-context populations as tending to have a fixation on time—spending it, losing it, making it up, carving it out, and so on. He labeled these populations "monochronic" because they tend to be driven by schedules and prefer to complete one task at a time in sequential order. High-context populations are the opposite. Time flows for these individuals; events happen when they are ready and take their own course. Among most tribal populations, according to Hall, time is a very different concept than it is for nontribal cultures. Many U.S. tribal languages, for example, communicate primarily with verbs only in the present tense. Hall labeled high-context populations "polychronic," characterized by a facility for juggling many activities simultaneously and involving a great number of people in the process. Low-context cultures tend to organize thinking in linear fashion and make plans, theories, and designs for action in calculated ways by using primarily the logic of written words and mathematics to communicate. High-context cultures focus less on schedules and tend to think comprehensively, expecting others to understand implicit social needs. Written contracts are less important than bonds of personal trust between people (1984, 97–98).

While reviewing Hall's publications, my understanding of his ideas grew more complex and extended beyond the original bounds of communication. Hall included criteria that not only differentiate people and cultures by how they deal with time, space, interactions, and other cultural systems but also how these systems further generate culturally distinct preferences about how societies deal with such things as authority and control, decision making, information and strategies, image, personal relationships, propaganda and advertising, the media, and so on (Hall 1984, 117–23). His ideas about nonverbal interactions began with constructs about the various meanings behind gestures and body language (Hall 1959) and grew into far more complex interrelations associated with "interpersonal synchronicity." In *The Dance of Life* Hall described certain populations of high-context people as needing to stay in physical synchronicity with each other on a regular basis or suffer from dissonance in their lives, becoming accident prone or even increasing their susceptibility to disease (1984, 163). Interpersonal synchronicity is important for high-context individuals. It is often evidenced by the intense need of Latinos and other

ethnic student populations to push for multicultural centers or special ethnic student housing on campus (see Parker 1997) in order to associate with each other and recharge the cultural batteries. This need for physical synchronicity is both conscious and unconscious and goes largely unrecognized by the majority of administrators on our campuses today.

In summary, Hall's work detailed the binary oppositions between high-context cultures, which are usually associated here with underrepresented ethnic and gender populations in higher education, and low-context cultures, represented by the predominantly Euro-North American populations that shaped higher education and academic cultures in the United States. To help readers focus on these primary cultural dynamics, the end of this chapter contains a selection of high- and low-context characteristics of culture culled from thirty years of Hall's research. I will be making reference to these comparisons throughout the book.

The Contribution of Cognitive Studies

Hall's model establishes important benchmarks for explaining the conflicts for Latinos in academia. Yet his model did not resolve inconsistencies in the research puzzle I encountered. Among the Latinos I interviewed, many did not exhibit all the high-context characteristics I expected. Some Latinos were more, or even less, high context in certain respects than others. No single ethnic group or individual in the study fit perfectly into one end or the other of the spectrum of cultural context.

Shortly after Hall's first book, *The Silent Language* (1959), became popular in the 1960s, the psychologist Herman Witkin, working with colleagues on spatial orientation in humans (Oltman, Goodenough, and Witkin 1973; Witkin and Oltman 1967; Witkin, Goodenough, and Oltman 1979; Witkin, Moore, et al. 1977), discovered interesting cognitive differences in people with clearly opposite visual orientation patterns. Witkin constructed specially designed environments and visual tests to distract and disorient subjects. Then he directed experiments that revealed that certain individuals, primarily men, can accurately resume an upright position, even in the absence of external visual cues for guidance. Others, usually women, cannot do this without some external visual cues to assist them. Initially, researchers assumed that some individuals rely on internal cues to orient properly and thus labeled them "field independent," whereas they labeled "field dependent" those people who need external cues for proper orientation.

Further research in object-oriented testing (i.e., block designs, picture completions, and object assembly) revealed that the overall organization

of the testing environment dominates field-dependent subjects and that they are highly influenced by the human or social elements involved (R. Cohen 1969). In addition, field-dependent people tend to perform better on "verbal tasks and intelligence tests; learn materials more easily which have human, social content, and which are characterized by fantasy and humor; are sensitive to the opinions of others; perform better when authority figures express confidence in their ability; and, conversely, perform less well when authority figures doubt their ability" (M. Ramirez and Castañeda 1974, 65). Field-independent individuals tend to do well in impersonal environments and learn easily from inanimate objects or testing materials and are adept at segmenting parts of the environment or separating parts from whole objects, and their performance is not affected by the opinion of others. Field-independent subjects favor analytical testing because the nature of these experiments is abstract and impersonal. In fact, the defining characteristics of these two distinct cognitive styles relate to preferences in how one integrates, classifies, and organizes the environment.

By the mid-1960s researchers had concluded that women tend to be more field dependent and males more field independent. Rosalie Cohen's work with public school children revealed many other cognitive and intellectual differences that she believed contribute directly to cultural conflict for women and other low-income populations in public schools, including unspecified ethnic groups (1969).⁷ Areas of significant conflict or incompatibility, including perceptions of time, social space, and causality, are directly associated with analytical abstractions within school testing and evaluations. In fact, Cohen observed the method of information transfer in field-independent analytical thinking. She noted that schools embody an analytical (field-independent) style not only in test criteria but also in their overall institutional ideology. Schools, as she noted, reward development of the analytical (field-independent) style of processing information in the learning environment, so much so that children with relational (field-dependent or high-context) styles are likely to be considered confused, anxious, deviant, and disruptive in this environment (1969, 830). However, because the student population included unknown numbers and types of ethnic groups, it is nearly impossible to determine how these cultural differences contribute to her findings.

The Parallel Evolution of "Bicognition"

The theories on cultural context and cognition came together when in the early 1970s cognitive studies focused on specific cultural groups. The most important development emerged when psychologists developed a branch of cognitive studies that focuses specifically on

their findings that Mexican Americans in general are more field dependent than Anglo-Americans (Díaz-Guererro 1977; Holtzman 1977; Kegan and Zahn 1975). The preeminent researchers in this field are the clinical psychologists Manuel Ramírez and Alfredo Castañeda, who first established in 1974 the interrelationship between the conflicting cognitive styles of Mexican American cultural values and socialization systems, and public school learning styles and environmental systems. Building on the work of Witkin and others, Ramírez and Castañeda revised previous findings and developed new ideas about ethnic culture and cognition.

These parallel developments in anthropology and psychology seemed to complement each other by validating basic concepts while providing unique insights. The cognitive research of Ramírez and Castañeda, like Hall's work with context, generated important breakthroughs in understanding the cultural dynamics of Latinos in academia. One major development, for instance, was the attempt by Ramírez and Castañeda to discredit the notion that one cognitive style is better than the other, a significant misconception that continues today in education. Witkin first postulated that everyone is undifferentiated, or field dependent, from birth and that as individuals mature they move from that rudimentary stage toward a more developed stage of field independence (1974, 73-74).

Ramírez and Castañeda demonstrated that different cognitive styles are reflections of group cultural values shaped by the socializing forces of family and community. Individuals are taught with certain cultural learning, incentive-motivational, human-relational, and communication styles. These are not a rudimentary stage in maturation, nor are they genetically predetermined. The socialization or acculturation process, Ramírez and Castañeda claimed, encourages preferences for one or the other cognitive style but does not preclude the development of either style concurrently. This, in fact, explains why successful bicultural individuals continue to develop appropriate cognitive styles to accommodate and coexist in bicultural environments (1974; see also R. Cohen 1969). These are learned ways of behaving bicognitively.

The early tests designed by Witkin and others measured only field independence, not dependence. Thus they had no way to determine whether children were becoming less field dependent as they were developing more field independence. Ramírez and Castañeda recognized the negative sense of the term *field dependence* and replaced it in their work with the term *field sensitive*. The new term more accurately describes the tendency for these individuals to register their greater sensitivity to the social and physical environment. Describing women or Mexican Americans as field sensitive, for example, is certainly an improvement over the older terminology. But from the perspective of real-world applications, the term *sensitive* still has potential for contributing another stereotype and becoming oversim-

plified, overgeneralized, and even misunderstood (T. Carter and Segura 1979, 114, 118).

Bicognition in K-12 Education

In their book, *Cultural Democracy, Bicognitive Development, and Education* (1974), Manuel Ramírez and Alfredo Castañeda proposed that bicultural individuals, and especially field-sensitive children, do learn to become field independent. But they also learn cognitive switching, or *flex*—an ability to draw upon both cognitive styles at any given time to adjust or adapt to a variety of activities, tasks, or social environments. This *bicognitive* (somewhat neurological, or bicameral) versatility allows individuals to interact selectively, and their “behavior can reflect either cooperation or competition; they can solve problems which require inductive or deductive thought; they can respond to or effectively ignore the social environment” (M. Ramírez and Castañeda 1974, 130).

Manuel Ramírez also found that Mexican Americans, for example, exhibit tendencies to combine both cognitive styles to produce new coping behaviors and adaptive strategies to resolve life's problems (1998, 155). His study of adolescents and young adults found that

active involvement in two or more cultures (biculturalism/multiculturalism) does not result in severe value conflicts or in identity crises; rather, such involvement tends to foster flexibility of personality functioning and development of skills as cultural facilitators and leaders in mixed ethnic group situations. Thus, active involvement in different cultures seems to make the person more adaptable by virtue of introducing him/her to different coping techniques, different problem-solving strategies, and different ways of perceiving life problems and challenges. (63)

Multiple socialization processes of school, family, and community, and dual cultural participation, then, produce not deficit but a complex set of behaviors for adapting to the need to function effectively in at least two cultural worlds. Ramírez and Castañeda called this *bicognitive versatility* (1974, 29). Although most people have personalities that exhibit a definite preference for one style or the other, many individuals are a unique combination of cognitive styles, choosing to be sensitive in communication style, for example, but using a more independent style regarding their motivations. Over time, Manuel Ramírez recognized the similar dynamics of flex within personalities and cultures as well as cognition, and this development eventually formed the basis of his work on multicultural personality development (1991, 21-26; 1998).

Only since the mid-1980s have other models emerged and focused on gender and ethnic minorities using similar fundamental concepts of bicog-

nition (Anzaldúa 1987; de Anda 1984; Stanton-Salazar 1997). The groundbreaking work of Ramírez and Castañeda among successful Mexican American and non-Mexican American schoolchildren and college students revealed that regardless of ethnicity, “they tended to be more flexible in their styles as compared to their less successful peers. It was also discovered that the more successful students were flexible in both cultural and cognitive domains. That is, these children, adolescents, and young adults could shuttle between the different cognitive and cultural styles” (M. Ramírez 1991, 20). Intensive “studies of these children and their families in both the Anglo and the Latino groups revealed that most of them could shift between field independent and field-[sensitive] behaviors” (M. Ramírez 1998, 99). The most important observation was that

the most flexible children tended to have been socialized in bilingual/bicultural families. That is, both Anglo and Mexican American children who had been socialized in mainstream American middle-class and Mexican American or Mexican culture, and who had learned both English and Spanish demonstrated that they were the most bicognitive. They could function in both the Field Sensitive and Field Independent cognitive styles, and they could use elements of both styles to arrive at new problem solving and coping styles. (1998, 99-100)

Implications for Higher Education

The implications at the K-12 level are also important for understanding variations in student performance at the college/university level. Preliminary results from pilot studies of the cognition, cultural flexibility, and academic performance of almost two hundred students at the University of Texas at Austin show that “students who match their preferred cognitive style with their major tend to have higher G.P.A.'s” and “expressed more life satisfaction than those students whose cognitive styles and majors were mismatched” (Kim 1997, 7). Other researchers say they have found “a significant relationship between biculturalism and a number of measures that serve as indicators of positive mental health and adjustment” (A. Ramírez 1988, 147). Even bicultural Cuban Americans show better psychological adjustment than other Cuban Americans who participate primarily with Cuban or Anglo culture (Szapocznik et al. 1978; see also A. Ramírez 1988).

Cognitive styles, and by association high-context/low-context cultural situations, must be viewed as multidimensional and not unidimensional variables. In the 1999 edition of his book Manuel Ramírez clearly defined the characteristics of cognitive styles found specifically among children and college students and in the personalities of people in general. Table 3.2 at the end of this chapter describes field-sensitive and field-independent charac-

teristics associated with communications, interpersonal relationships, and motivation and with teaching, parenting, supervisory, and counseling relationships among adults. Among children, Manuel Ramírez compared characteristics associated with relationship to peers, personal relationship to teachers, instructional relationship to teachers, and thinking style.

Manuel Ramírez and Castañeda advocate adopting a philosophy they call *cultural democracy*, which is intended to legitimize field-sensitive and field-independent cognitive differences as valid products of cultural and community value systems. As such, the authors encourage our sociocultural institutions to incorporate both cognitive styles. According to Ramírez and Castañeda and other researchers (including R. Cohen 1969 and Hall 1977, 1984, 1993), educational systems in the United States are biased toward field-independent learners (i.e., analytical, or low context). "American public education has tended to develop one hemisphere of the brain at the expense of the other" (M. Ramírez and Castañeda 1974, 156).⁸ Consequently, "the interpretation of cultural democracy appears to assume an *unresolvable conflict or incompatibility* between the 'dominant' sociocultural system and other sociocultural systems" (M. Ramírez and Castañeda 1974, 28). In other words, Manuel Ramírez and others believe that both K-12 education and higher education are imbalanced to the advantage of field-independent learners and to the detriment of field-sensitive individuals.

A New Synthesis toward Cognition in Multiple Contexts

Thus the discovery of culturally different cognitive styles and the adaptability and versatility of bicognition suggest that, in the words of Manuel Ramírez and Castañeda, the education establishment is using only half its brain. The issue here is not that certain populations defined as "Anglos" perform better academically than others because they possess a certain "innate" ability or educational advantage, or that Latinos and other ethnic minorities perform poorly because they lack certain "inherent" abilities or are educationally unprepared. The real issue is educational achievement. Ramírez and Castañeda imply that our educational system, and not necessarily the people within it, may contribute to the problems associated with student academic performance. What it boils down to is that our educational system (K-18 and beyond) is literally teaching only half the knowledge base—the information that tends to be readily absorbed by roughly half the population—and it continues to do so with only half the information about learning methodology and pedagogy currently available to it. Consequently, all students, including low-context field-independent learners, are missing out on the benefits.

Educators are fully aware that other cognitive learning styles exist.⁹ The problem is that they have not validated anything other than the predominant educational format. Low-context field-independent knowledge and learning may be so ingrained and so prevalent in education that any alternative is unimaginable. If so, our educational system has not just an "unresolvable conflict" but is quite simply out of balance.

Meanwhile, Latinos and others from high-context cultures enter our educational systems with various cognitive learning styles. Many are prepared to learn in groups, think comprehensively, and cherish the commitment to family and community above all. To succeed, Latinos must then learn to think and do things in both high and low contexts, must become field independent as well as field sensitive, and must maintain these learning styles throughout their educational experience. As a result, too many drop out in high school and few continue into higher education. But until now U.S. education has never been faced with the urgency, or the crisis conditions, to push it to revise and reform our learning systems.

The majority of schoolage children and college-bound individuals came from, or were socialized among, populations favoring and advocating predominantly low-context cultures with preferences toward field-independent learning. Furthermore, until the midtwentieth century almost all southern European immigrant cultures, and other populations with tendencies toward high-context characteristics or field-sensitive styles, preferred to adapt quickly and become part of the "American" cultural fabric. Achieving the "American dream" meant learning to acculturate, fit in, and learn the ways of the majority culture quickly. Learning to become low context and perceive field independently was part of the challenge and a major ticket to success.

That is all changing today with the influx of new kinds of students in higher education; more than half of those now enrolled are women. The increase in the number of women getting degrees is clearly market driven and a reflection of the changing composition of the labor force. Labor and employment projections for 2008 show that the number of occupations requiring an associate degree or higher will increase from 14 percent to 31 percent of all jobs by 2008, while women in all age groups, and especially baby boomers aged forty-five to sixty-four, will be entering the labor force in greater numbers. The enrollment trends for men in higher education are projected to remain steady or decrease slightly (Fullerton 1999, 25).

Many ethnic groups now entering higher education in greater numbers bring with them a different set of social and cultural aspirations than their predecessors; they have no intention of adapting, acculturating, or fitting in quickly. On the contrary, Latinos, among others, are not accepting the dictum to learn in only one way, nor are they willing to give up their own cultural contexts and cognitive styles as did earlier immigrant groups in

this country. The national media are watching the unique characteristics of *Generation Ñ* (pronounced EN-yay), the term used by *Newsweek* to define this rapidly growing and influential population of young Latinos in their twenties and thirties (Leland and Chambers 1999). Although they are “changing the way this country looks, feels and thinks, eats, dances and votes, . . . they are not ‘crossing over’ into mainstream America” (Larmer 1999, 48, 51).

For earlier generations, being Latino was a negative, and most tried to acculturate. But those attitudes are changing, Jaime Cortez, the son of a migrant farm worker, told *Newsweek*. Cortez believes that “America has this weird optimism that dictates that we have to leave the past behind” (Leland and Chambers 1999, 54). Today, being Latino means celebrating a rich blend of ethnic identities and interests and expecting the rest of the country to adapt or eventually accept Latinos on their terms. Being bilingual is a plus, and this younger generation enjoys switching identities from American to Latino and back. And it seems to be working, for the nation is recognizing Latino accomplishments in sports and entertainment, and politicians across the country are increasingly aware of the power wielded by Latino voters in Texas, California, Florida, Nevada, and even the Midwest (1999).

Nor does this generation leave its aspirations and social characteristics back home. The members of this cohort prefer to learn in multiple ways without compromising their cultural preferences in their academic communities too. Cultural context and bicultural models help explain why Latinos and other minorities are running into conflict in higher education. Thus academic underperformance among various populations is merely a symptom of a deeper problem (see Bowen and Bok 1998). The real issue is how to deal with the deficiencies in our educational system, in our organizational structures, and in the cultural values of higher education itself. Correcting these problems requires more than installing a form of “cultural democracy”; it requires reframing the current cultural context of academia altogether.

Reframing Academic Cultures

The anthropologist Michael Agar offers interesting suggestions for how to frame cultures (1994a, 1994b). To understand a new culture he suggests “making sense out of human differences in terms of human similarities” (1994b, 231). These similarities become benchmarks and act as backdrops against which we see the differences in the way individuals actually do things in different cultures. Most of these

differences surface in the languages (both verbal and nonverbal) used in transactions and communication between people (1994b).

My earlier analysis of Pedro’s dilemma is based on similar concepts. Pedro associated his frustrations directly with faculty who misunderstood the differences between Mexican American culture and their own academic cultural values. The hidden dimension in his comments revealed that the misunderstandings formed a complex web of associations and connotations that highlighted the cultural differences. To grasp the subtle meanings, Agar suggests creating new “frames,” or boundaries, “around the details [which] highlights how those details are related to each other” (1994a, 130). Hall called them “situational frames,” the common settings and behavioral situations found in all cultures (e.g., greeting behavior, eating, working, classroom behavior, and the like) in which cultural activity can be analyzed (1977, 129). Multitudes of situational frames are possible, as are ways to reframe the new knowledge about others that we gain. “Themes” then tie these frames together with concepts and ideas.

However, my examination of graduate education and academic cultures involves more than just language or communication. The patterns of cultural context, ethnic identity, and academic culture are in themselves “situational frames” and are found within the organizational structures of our colleges and universities. We must learn how to see and understand how these different situational frames relate to cultural dissonance for Latino students and faculty—as well as students and faculty from other ethnic groups—within academic culture. One means for doing this is to reconfigure the cognitive and contextual models to view the current world of academe through a new cultural frame of reference.

The question is how to begin the process. The first task is to reconfigure a complex set of cultural and behavioral models, pulling together their inherent strengths for explaining phenomena. Hall’s model, for example, functions best at a macro level of human behavior and is not often clear about the origins of conscious and unconscious differences in cultural context. Manuel Ramírez’s bicultural model supplies the micro perspective of human behavior, explaining individual personality styles and their variations as observed at the macro level of society. Biculturalism fills in some of the picture between the two ends of the continuum of cultural context. The bicultural model explains *why* some Latinos and Latinas exhibit variable patterns of high- and low-context behaviors and preferences: Hall recognized that in different domains individuals will exhibit both high- and low-context behaviors, depending on the circumstances.

The best illustration of how this new theoretical combination works is through Pedro’s story. Pedro, for example, was fully aware of both Mexican American and Anglo culture and contexts. But he apparently had been

socialized first in the values of Mexican American culture, which dominated his perspective on the world. He was to some extent bicognitive, but this was not easy to tell from outward appearances. The real stumbling block for Pedro, and in fact for all the Latino students and faculty I interviewed, was the embedded low-context culture and the field-independent or analytical style that dominates nearly all educational systems, especially higher education. Graduate school is an intense socialization process into the professoriate—an intensely low-context world. Combining bicognition and constructs of cultural context could offer a better model for explaining why certain students encounter turbulence in our educational systems.

A Theory of Multicontextuality

As a micro model of the human condition, bicognition represents a variable in individual personality and cultural styles generated by two distinct cognitive (field-sensitive and field-independent) conditions within individuals. As such, it takes the psychological characteristics of individuals and turns them into labels that characterize larger cultural groups and populations within which society validates individual identity. Cultural context is a macro model of human culture. It represents a range of cultural characteristics that identify and reflect differences in various cultural groupings. As such, it takes the characteristics of larger groups and populations and turns them into labels that characterize individuals who consider themselves members of those groups. Indeed, these characteristics of cultural context may be what shape part of one's ethnic identity.

It seems logical, therefore, that these highly compatible and complementary constructions be conjoined for a greater purpose. With that in mind, it would be appropriate to identify this amalgamation as *multicontextuality*, representing the admixture of multiple human conditions and sociocultural contexts. Throughout the remainder of this book I will use the dynamic models by Hall and Manuel Ramírez to help develop this construct. I will also apply these tools for micro or macro analysis, or both, as appropriate. This new construct represents only the beginning of scientific inquiry. Consequently, I have generated no statistical design for analysis, and I will use numerical data to illustrate what appear to be patterns of multicontextuality rather than patterns that show statistical significance. As I identify the characteristics and conditions of Latinos and Latinas in higher education, it will become apparent why the recombination of these qualitative models is more appropriate here than quantitative data for developing a theory of multicontextuality.

Multicontext individuals reflect the characteristics of a growing number of people in our education systems today. They are bicognitive individuals, able to demonstrate flex by interacting selectively across cultural contexts and cognitive styles. They are equipped with a versatility that enables them to adjust or adapt at any time to a variety of activities, tasks, or social environments. Latinos and Latinas who have learned this successful adaptive strategy maneuver through the predominantly low-context environment of higher education. They know when to signal who they are culturally, and they know what to do to perform well as students and faculty, depending on the circumstances and the people around them. Adapting is not always easy and requires additional concentration and academic work. Furthermore, multicontextual individuals are not only ethnic minorities or women; some Anglo males demonstrate this ability as well, but only additional research will provide the evidence that this is so.

What this suggests is that multicontextuality is not a process of acculturation. It is not like a one-way street that directs the flow of cultural adjustment and demands that a less-dominant culture or ethnic group adopt the ways of a dominant culture. In fact, a multicontextual individual is likely to have a pluralistic ethnic identity and be sensitive to both gender perspectives. Moreover, their behavioral patterns are not necessarily fixed or associated entirely with any one particular ethnic group. Multicontextuality sometimes cuts imperceptibly across culture and gender lines. Some Anglo males clearly are multicontextual, and some recognize that their repertoire allows them to be high and low context and field sensitive and independent. They are not simply adopting a set of ethnic or gender characteristics but are exhibiting an adaptive strategy that reflects their ability to learn several sets of cultural, gender, and cognitive styles, regardless of the dominant culture and cognitive style imprinted in their early childhood.

In fact, many high-context Anglo males do just as poorly on standardized tests as their minority peers and for similar reasons—those associated with context and cognition. We simply ignore them in the quest to find out why a greater proportion of minorities does so poorly in comparison to the majority. As a result, what we observe is that the extremes of high and low context and field sensitive and independent are more prevalent among certain ethnic groups and among women and that these tendencies have more negative consequences for these groups. Chapter 4 further explores this ethnic relationship.

As the multicultural and bicognitive models both suggest, measuring all the characteristics of individuals and groups would show cultural patterns that tend toward either high- or low-context cultural preferences. If an evaluation tool were devised to determine individual cultural context and cognition, it might not immediately reveal an individual's contextual patterns. However, if Hall and Manuel Ramírez are correct, compiling

those individual sets of choices from larger sets of self-identified ethnic populations probably would reveal a pattern of preferences. Given changing conditions over time, such as the constant infusion of cultural values from in-migration, group characteristics among Mexican Americans may not change as quickly as they might for individual Mexican Americans, for example. Furthermore, I will show that institutional and organizational cultures also exhibit high- and low-context cultural characteristics with which individuals both inside and outside the organizations can identify.

Although the characteristics that identify the various models may show a preference or predominance among various individuals or groups, none of the models I used would generate rigid stereotypes or permanently assign individuals to either end of the spectrum of possibilities. In fact, within the models of cultural context, biculturalism, and multicontextuality, individual characteristics and group dynamics change over time. Thus neither culture nor context should be perceived as static. I will clarify or redefine each of these concepts as needed throughout the book.

For example, academics may wish to redefine the basic meaning of *context*, as anthropologists have done, to accommodate a fluid model of culture and cognition. Lave, Murtaugh, and de la Rocha describe it as a "relationship rather than a single entity. For on the one hand, context connotes an identifiable, durable framework for [an] activity, with properties that transcend the experience of individuals, exist prior to them, and are entirely beyond their control. On the other hand, context is experienced differently by different individuals" (1984, 71-72). This view of context requires an understanding of both the stable aspects and features of cultural context and how individuals define it. As a result, many individuals probably would self-identify as having or exhibit a combination of high- and low-context cultural characteristics, or field-sensitive and -independent styles. Depending on the immediate sociocultural conditions or long-term life-changing circumstances, such as mobility, generation, life partnerships, and education, many individuals may be multicontextual. Chapter 4 further explores this ethnic relationship.

The second factor operating here relates to the difficulty of cultural adjustment for field-sensitive individuals, either women or people from high-context ethnic backgrounds. Hall found that "in a schedule-dominated monochronic culture like ours, [some] ethnic groups which focus their energies on the primary group and primary relationships such as family, and human relationships, find it almost impossible to adjust to rigid schedules and tight time compartments" (1984, 204). Moreover, for Pedro and other Latinos in graduate school, other hidden conditions within institutions of higher learning and their academic cultures cause difficult adjustments to the community of scholars. This is the essence of the problem and the

central reason ethnic minorities find it difficult to adjust to higher education as easily or as quickly as others.

By using a multicontextual model, new perspectives emerge for analysis. First, this model yields a new relationship between racism and cultural conflict. It may provide a better vehicle for at least diminishing, if not eliminating, racism, as the columnist William Raspberry suggests (1998). If "race" is synonymous with other social phenomena, what develops here could well have an indirect, even direct, benefit in eliminating some of the problems ascribed to racism. Shifting the battle to maintain diversity and equality in higher education from the current discord over race to a debate about ethnicity will shift the argument from racism to ethnocentrism. If one of our goals is to eliminate discrimination, it is far easier to revise socially developed misconceptions about culturally learned behavior and group values than it is to reverse socially presumed misconceptions about genetically predetermined group behavior and cultural values. Within the models of cultural context and cognition are implicit concepts of imbalance and inequality, central issues for reframing the current paradigm.

Finally, Hall's high- and low-context criteria and the work on biculturalism by Manuel Ramírez and Castañeda are useful descriptive models for a first approximation of cultural differences. I will expand them to incorporate new models of cultural change and to accommodate the changing dynamics of ethnicity. Hall focused on *how* people with different worldviews could communicate, interact, associate, and learn, but he did not delve into *why* people behave the way they do. Manuel Ramírez and Castañeda offered new insights into that same question.

But gaps in the research remain. For instance, Hall was not involved in the study of institutions and their cultures per se, although he assumed they were involved in culture on a higher organizational level (1959; Hall and Hall 1990). A major objective here is to develop a new perspective that assumes that the organizational cultures of institutions, like most human social systems and groups, contain patterns of high- and low-context culture imprinted by the individuals who first created and then sustained them. Although Hall was not prepared to proceed down this path at the time, we must if we are to reframe the cultural context of higher education.

To summarize the main ideas in part I, my study of Latinos in graduate education led me to look at their experiences through the fresh lenses of cultural context and biculturalism, which in turn led me to an examination of the role of the culture of academia in the problems Latino graduate students encounter. The resulting multicontextual perspective includes new frameworks for observing the interactions of ethnicity and academic organizational cultures. Because the current paradigm for cultural diver-

Part I. Reframing the Context of Higher Education

sity in higher education may actually impede our understanding, I search beyond these predominant assumptions to query and analyze what happens to individuals before they enter and proceed through graduate school to take up new careers beyond.

In parts II and III, I begin to examine academia from three interrelated perspectives: as a complex society; as a society made up of organizational cultures, subcultures, genders, and ethnic groups; and as a society involved in transformations and transactions leading to graduate degrees and sometimes the professoriate. Part II focuses on the dynamics of ethnic transformations using the experiences of Latinos and Latinas, and on the process of becoming multicontextual in graduate education (see chapter 4), and as faculty (chapters 5 and 6). The questions examined are not just *how* they do this but also *why* and with *what* consequences for achieving success.

Table 3.1. Selected characteristics of high and low context

Low context (LC)	High context (HC)
1. Interaction	1. Interaction
Low use of nonverbal signals. Their messages rely more on words than nonverbal cues. Body language is less highly developed, with little attempt to synchronize with words.	High use of nonverbal signals. Voice tone, facial expression, gesture, and eye expression all carry significant parts of a conversation. Body language is highly developed and synchronized with words.
Communication is direct. They appear to be blunt, even rude, in their directness. LC people spell things out exactly and value being specific. Getting to the main point quickly is highly valued.	Communication is indirect. They avoid getting to the main point of discussions quickly and talk around them to avoid being pushy. They embellish discussions and expect others to gather the main ideas from the context provided.
Messages are explicit and elaborate. Their verbal message is highly articulated with accurate distinctions; context is less important. The information is in explicit code (words, directions, publications, lectures).	Messages are implicit and restricted. Their verbal message is implicit, associated with informal intimate language, and context is important (situations, people, nonverbals). Words are collapsed and shortened to create simple messages with deep meaning that flow freely.
Messages are literal. Communication is a way of exchanging information, ideas, and opinions but is not intended to unify (identify or associate) culturally with others. Conversations reflect the occasion, but only one linguistic code is used.	Messages are an art form. They see communication as a form of engaging another person, a unifying cultural activity that may include bilingual code switching (beginning or ending sentences or conversations in two languages).
Long-term interpersonal feedback. They avoid interfering with or intervening in others' lives. They take colleagues' mood shifts for granted, attributing them to personal problems that should be ignored.	Short-term interpersonal feedback. Constant checking on emotional status of others is important for group morale. Though this characteristic is attributed to women, HC people in general are especially attuned to slight mood changes among friends and colleagues.

Continued on next page

Table 3.1.—Continued

Low context (LC)	High context (HC)
1. Interaction (cont.)	1. Interaction (cont.)
Disagreement is depersonalized. They withdraw from conflict and get on with the task. They depersonalize disagreement with a “tough it out” rather than “talk it out” approach. They defuse confrontation by quiet separation. (Force means communication breakdown.)	Disagreement is personalized. They are sensitive to conflict and criticism expressed by another’s verbal and nonverbal communication. They must resolve conflict before work can progress. They use a “talk it out” approach to defuse confrontation and unpleasantness, especially at work. (Force means communication.)
2. Association	2. Association
Personal commitment to people is low. Relationships start and end quickly. Many people can be inside one’s circle, but boundaries are blurred. They are accustomed to short-term relationships and are often highly committed to their job or career. Written contracts are important.	Personal commitment to people is high. Relationships depend on trust, build up slowly, and are stable. They are careful to distinguish who is in their circle. People are deeply involved with each other. They have a strong tendency to build lifetime relationships. Written contracts are less important than bonds of personal trust.
Task orientation. Things get done when everyone follows policies and procedures and pays attention to a goal. Being nice to people is not necessary nor is it as important as completing the job.	Process orientation. Getting things done depends on one’s relationship with people and attention to the group process. Being nice, courteous, and kind to people is more important than completing a job.
Success means being recognized. They seek publicity and to stand out among their peers to “get ahead” in society. They value individualism and may ask for more information about someone’s accomplishments.	Success means being unobtrusive. They seek less attention for their accomplishments. Talking about one’s achievements is considered brash and boastful. They value humility, and such passive behavior may be misinterpreted by LC people as being unassertive.

Table 3.1.—Continued

Low context (LC)	High context (HC)
3. Temporality	3. Temporality
Time is monochronic (M-Time). They emphasize schedules, compartmentalization, and promptness. They do one thing at a time and may equate time with money and status. Change happens fast.	Time is polychronic (P-Time). They emphasize people and completion of transactions. They do many things at once (multiple tasking) and do not equate time with money or status. Change happens slowly, for things are rooted in the past.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They do work on a schedule and do one thing at a time. Their intent is to do things quickly and see immediate results. • They value speed and efficiency in work. The objective for learning and training is “getting up to speed.” • They concentrate on the job at hand. • They take deadlines and schedules seriously. • They adhere religiously to plans. • They emphasize promptness. Being late sends a message about status or importance. • They see people who juggle several tasks at once (P-Time) as being totally disorganized. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because life has its own flow, they are reluctant to schedule time, cognizant that the needs of people may interfere with keeping to a schedule. • They value accuracy and completion of a job. How well something is learned is more important than how soon or how fast. • They are highly distractable and subject to interruptions at work. • They regard deadlines and schedules as goals to be achieved if possible. • They change plans often and easily. • They value promptness if they know it is important to the relationship. Being late does not send a message. • They perceive people who work in sequence as obsessive. Working collegially is more important than achieving work goals.

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Table 3.1.—Continued

Low context (LC)	High context (HC)
3. Temporality (cont.)	3. Temporality (cont.)
Time is a commodity. Time can be spent, saved, or wasted. One's time is one's own.	Time is a process. Time is part of nature; it belongs to everyone.
Synchrony is not important and tempo of life is faster. They are less likely to consciously or unconsciously synchronize body movements while interacting with others (kinesics). The pace of life is hurried and individualized; synchronizing with others is not valued.	Synchrony is important and tempo of life is slower. Body movement while interacting with others is consciously and unconsciously synchronized. The absence of synchrony at work or performing with others may cause stress and tension. The pace of life is slower and synchronizing with others is highly valued.
Culture relative to time is superficial. They perceive culture as something that one can change, put on, or take off. Change means discarding (excluding) old ways for new ones. Because they regard culture as a superficial difference, they have trouble accepting difference in others. They tend to expect others to be as willing to reshape their culture as they are.	Culture relative to time is ingrained. They perceive culture as an integral part of everyone and everything. Change means incorporating or adopting (including) new ways with old ones. Because they regard culture as ingrained, they are receptive to what is different in others, and they seldom expect others to reshape their culture.
4. Gender and LC culture	4. Gender and HC culture
M-Time cultures are formal (male oriented). Formal culture is technical, highly scheduled, task oriented, concentrated, and imposing. The official worlds of business, government, entertainment, and sports are shaped by men. Formal wisdom in professions like business and the law give minimal importance to informal culture.	P-Time cultures are informal (female oriented). Informal culture evolves over time from shared personal experiences that tie individuals to the group and its identity. It exists in all cultures. Communication is an informal process with no specific senders, receivers, or identifiable messages. Wisdom is group oriented.

Table 3.1.—Continued

Low context (LC)	High context (HC)
4. Gender and LC culture (cont.)	4. Gender and HC culture (cont.)
Formal culture is team oriented. Teams consist of individuals with specific skills who are brought together to work on projects or tasks. Their work may be linked, but it is sequential and compartmentalized (handed off to others).	Informal culture is group oriented. Individuals with general and/or specific skills come together to work as a group to complete projects. Work is interactive, and individuals are not territorial about specific tasks.
5. Territoriality	5. Territoriality
Space has more boundaries. LC people need more social distance for interaction, with little if any touching or contact during conversation. Personal space is compartmentalized, more individualized, and private.	Space is more communal. HC people are comfortable interacting within close social distances, and constant nonintimate touching during conversation is normal. Personal space is shared, and involvement with others is encouraged.
Privacy is more important. They are concerned about not disturbing others and following social rules of privacy and consideration.	Privacy is less important. HC people are involved with those who are closely related (family, friends, close business associates) and have few concerns about privacy.
Personal property is shared less. LC people tend to show great respect for private property. They seldom or reluctantly borrow or lend things.	Personal property is shared more. They respect private property but tend to borrow and lend things often and easily. My home is your home.
6. Learning	6. Learning
Knowledge is obtained by logical reasoning. A rational step-by-step model of scientific analysis yields information. Reality is elemental, fragmented, compartmentalized and thus easier to isolate for analysis.	Knowledge is obtained by a gestalt model. Facts are perceived as complete units (gestalts) embedded in the context of situations or experiences; they can be recalled as wholes, and they are not easily separated for analysis. Things are interconnected, synthesized, and global.

Continued on next page

Table 3.1.—Continued

Low context (LC)	High context (HC)
6. Learning (cont.)	6. Learning (cont.)
Analytical thinking is important. They prefer an inductive reasoning process, to go from the specific to the general. They focus on compiling details. They have difficulty translating their thinking process into symbols so that comprehensive thinkers can easily understand it.	Comprehensive thinking is important. They prefer deductive reasoning, to go from general to specific. They use expanded thinking ("big picture" actions, ideas, and/or complex forms). They have few problems translating their thinking processes symbolically (nonverbally) for others to understand.
They learn best by following directions. They assemble or combine facts according to rules they memorize. Things are spelled out with explicit explanations, even in an apprenticeship model. Theoretical and philosophical problems are treated as real.	They learn best by demonstration. They learn by hands-on methods: observing and mimicking others, practicing it mentally and physically, demonstrating it to others, and by apprenticeship. Real-life problems are as important as theoretical and philosophical ones.
Learning is oriented toward the individual. They prefer to approach tasks and learning individually. They tend to work and learn apart from others. Teamwork means individuals are assigned specific tasks to accomplish.	Learning is group oriented. They prefer to work in groups to learn and solve problems. Some groups prefer constant talking (interacting) in proximity when working or learning.
Creative learning process is externalized. They prefer to learn or create complex knowledge like mathematics externally—with the aid of pens, paper, books, computers, and so on. The learning process is highly visible and accessible for others to evaluate and correct. Externalized creative processes help to speed up change, but they are slower and less productive than internalized processes.	Creative learning process is internalized. They may be capable of learning or creating complex knowledge like mathematics or music in their heads rather than by using learning extensions like pen and paper. The creative learning process is comprehensive, and integrating complex ideas can happen all at once. Internalized creative processes are less visible for others to evaluate and correct, but they are much faster and more productive than externalized processes.

Table 3.1.—Continued

Low context (LC)	High context (HC)
7. Information	7. Information
Information does not flow freely. Data are highly focused and compartmentalized. They make relatively low use of personal information networks.	Information spreads rapidly. It moves as if it has a life of its own. They make relatively significant use of multiple personal information networks.
Information can be separated from context. They can separate the two, an artifact primarily of Western analytical science.	Information without context is meaningless. They prefer information in context; otherwise, it is unreliable.
8. LC academic systems	8. HC academic systems
LC disciplines. They may favor traditional scientific fields that tend to conduct analysis with methods that often eliminate context (separate information from context). Research analysis usually deals with large numbers of quantitative and easily measured variables; results are more deterministic and context is less important. New research projects are directed toward strongly projected predetermined outcomes.	HC disciplines. They may favor disciplines that are more directly involved with contextual thinking and research about living systems and people. Research analysis is more qualitative and probabilistic and requires attention to variables in which cultural context is important. New research projects are clear about the direction and methods of analysis, but projected outcomes are less predetermined and more open ended and flexible.
Scientific thinking is emphasized. They value examining ideas rather than broad comprehension of real-world applications. Linear thinking is ultra-specific and inhibits a broad mutual understanding of multilayered events. Scientific thinking uses words and math to communicate.	Practical thinking is valued. They value application of knowledge in real-world events (social skills). Interconnected thinking fosters creativity and broad comprehension of multilayered events.

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Table 3.1.—Continued

Low context (LC)	High context (HC)
8. LC academic systems (cont.)	8. HC academic systems (cont.)
Academic/teaching style is technical. Their style is individual, less interactive, and teacher oriented. Research interests include people or communities, but they focus on theoretical and philosophical problems. Writing style uses fewer pronouns.	Academic/teaching style is personal. Their style is more open, interactive, and student oriented. Research interests are directed to real-life problems with people and the community. Writing style tends toward more use of personal pronouns.
Science relies on Linnean-style taxonomies. Scientific taxonomies favor linear analysis that classifies living things mainly for information retrieval. Taxonomic systems emphasize the processes of collecting specific information more than its integration into usable, intelligible patterns.	Science includes folkstyle taxonomies. Taxonomies function beyond information retrieval to communicate <i>about</i> the living things being classified. The communication is among those who already understand the cultural significance of the things being discussed. The intent is to integrate the information and contextual thinking to open new areas for research.

Source: Adapted from the work of Edward T. Hall (1959–1993) and Edward T. Hall and Mildred R. Hall (1990).

Table 3.2. Characteristics of field-sensitive and field-independent children and adults

Field-independent (FI) children	Field-sensitive (FS) children
1. Relationship to peers	1. Relationship to peers
Prefer to work independently	Like to work with others to achieve common goals
Like to compete and gain individual recognition	Like to assist others
Are task oriented; are inattentive to social environment when working	Are sensitive to feelings and opinions of others
2. Social relationship to teacher	2. Social relationship to teacher
Avoid physical contact with teacher	Openly express positive feelings for teacher
Interact formally with teacher; restrict interactions to tasks at hand	Ask questions about teacher's taste and personal experiences; seek to become like teacher
3. Instructional relationship to teacher	3. Instructional relationship to teacher
Like to try new tasks without teacher's help	Seek guidance and demonstration from teacher
Are impatient to begin tasks; like to finish first	Seek rewards that strengthen relationship with teacher
Seek nonsocial rewards	Are highly motivated by working individually with teacher
4. Thinking style	4. Thinking style
Focus on details and parts of things	Function well when objectives are carefully explained or modeled
Deal well with math and science concepts	Deal well with concepts in humanized or story format
Like discovery or trial-and-error learning	Function well when curriculum content is relevant to personal interests and experiences

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Table 3.2.—Continued

Field-independent (FI) children	Field-sensitive (FS) children
5. Communications	5. Communications
Tend to be impersonal and to the point	Tend to personalize communications by referring to own life experiences, interests, and feelings
Tend to focus more on verbal than nonverbal communications	Tend to focus more on nonverbal than verbal communications
6. Interpersonal relationships	6. Interpersonal relationships
Are reserved and cautious in social settings	Are open and outgoing in social settings
Present as distant and formal	Present as warm and informal
7. Motivation	7. Motivation
Seek nonsocial rewards	Value social rewards that strengthen relationships with important others
Are motivated in relation to self-advancement	Are motivated in relation to achievement for others (family, team, ethnic/racial group, etc.)
8. Teaching, parenting, supervisory, and counseling relationships	8. Teaching, parenting, supervisory, and counseling relationships
Focus on task or goal	Focus on relations with student, child, supervisor, or client
Are formal and private	Are informal and self-disclosing

Source: Manuel Ramírez III (1999), *Multicultural Psychotherapy: An Approach to Individual and Cultural Differences*, 2d ed. (formerly titled, *Psychotherapy and Counseling with Minorities: A Cognitive Approach to Individual and Cultural Differences*) (Needham Heights, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon), table 3.2, p. 25.

Part II

Latinas and Latinos in Graduate Education and Beyond
